

**27-30 November 2014, Bad Boll, Germany**

**PORVOO CONSULTATION ON ECONOMICS AND ETHICS  
BEHAVIOUR UNDER SCRUTINY**

**My Neighbour Near and Far  
A Contemporary Framework for Christ Centred Witness  
for the Porvoo Communion of Churches**

**Scriptural Theological Introduction**

The Bible is clear that the abundant and generous creation which we take for granted is God's free gift to all living things, both human and in nature. God has ensured that these resources of creation are enough and continue to be enough for all to live abundant lives. There is more than enough for all if only each takes what is necessary. This happens best when God's providential economy is shared with mutual care and dignity, when just and equal relationships flourish and goodwill and harmony prevail in our habitat. It is the will of God that injustice of any kind is overcome and that all creation share in God's bounty.

When on the other hand we humans plunder the earth's resources and exploit each other out of greed, and when certain economic systems promote the idolisation of money and human oppression, we violate God's economy and threaten to destroy all life. In such circumstances the task ahead of us becomes extremely complex and difficult.

Our world continues to need movements and instruments of liberation, care and hope for all who are abused and afflicted, including our environment. We need to move towards building new societies in which injustice, discrimination, corruption and violence have no place, and in which voices are raised in solidarity with alongside all victims of violence, especially the poor and the homeless, the stranger-migrant, abused children and women, victims of war, refugees and those who suffer discrimination because of ethnicity, religion, class or sexuality.

The Gospel offers hope to God's wholecreated world. The engagement with scripture from a local and global perspective that focuses on economical and ethical issues will provide fresh insights and grounding to our thinking. Jesus invites us to discern the Reign of God and do justice by our neighbour and nature. We are to follow Him to reconciled and integrated and return to a joyful sharing of life, values and resources with all living things.

**Economical Theological Introduction**

What the Torah in the Old Testament calls for in the name of God, the liberator of slaves, is "no exploitation of human labour" and "no accumulation of wealth for greed". This is evident from the weight of the framing of the Decalogue. "I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods (legitimizing asymmetric power relationships) into my face" (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). "Neither shall you greedily desire your neighbour's house or field . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbour" (Deuteronomy 5:21).

In a situation of an economy based on money and property accumulation, the call of the prophets is for justice. The prophet Amos expresses this in the powerful call: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream" (5:24). What Jesus called

for in the first climax of that economy in the Roman Empire is: “make a decision between God and mammon!” What does this call mean for Christian Churches in the current situation of financial capitalism where the financial markets rule not only the economy but also politics and the hearts and minds of people?

The call points us to follow Jesus, first of all saying a clear no to a system that splits people into rich and poor, producing hunger and death and increasingly destroying the conditions for future life on this earth given to us by God. The necessity that capital must grow without limits produces compulsory economical growth, along with power in the hands of a few, and this in turn produces enormous challenges to the environment, and consequentially financial crises.

Churches at all levels can participate in nurturing an economy and culture of life in the following ways:

- By Cooperating in local/regional alternative economies like, for example, *Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS)*; cooperative banking; self-reliant production and consumption of alternative energy at community level; local production, marketing and consumption of ecologically grown food.
- By building alliances to intervene in the political and economic macro-structures, for example, by struggling against the privatisation of basic goods and services, such as, water, energy, transport, education, health etc.
- Through advocacy measures with an intent to transform.
- To develop initiatives to overcome modern slavery.

The documents of the 10<sup>th</sup> assembly of the WCC in Busan suggesting a seven years Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace for a new Economy of Life and Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter *Evangelii Gaudium* appropriately put together with suggestions for congregations on how to participate meaningfully in these aspects of God's mission towards life, could also be a useful resource in addressing issues of exploitation and accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few.

## **Section 1**

### ***Engaging with Human rights***

#### ***Churches and Human rights***

Human rights reflect an extraordinary vision of human flourishing which churches can celebrate. Churches have a significant contribution to make to the on-going conversation in our society about what human dignity requires built on our understanding that every human being is created in the image of God. Our acknowledgement of God as the centre of human life and our affirmation of the liberating presence of the God in our midst empowers us to also proclaim the public meaning of the Gospel. In doing so our theology has to be one of refreshed participation and speaking out to shape change.

This transcendent dignity is threatened by economic systems that devalue human beings as a means to the end. The economy of God provides enough for all but our world is one where injustice undermines human dignity. The UDHR and legislative structures derived from it provide a way to address injustice and restore dignity to all. However, this will only happen when individual states have robust legislation to protect human rights, when companies act with social responsibility and when civil society is able to seek redress.

We have freedom but also responsibilities to act towards our creation as individuals and as a community. Standing for the universality of human rights at all times is a crucial call for all of us. A vision of a Europe which embraces human rights is to remain a permanent agenda if we dare to hope for a just, democratic and plural society.

The current financial crisis which started in 2008 and current conflicts in different regions in our world, have led to a massive movement and migration of people, seeking security and protection. Our Churches are to find pragmatic solutions for the everyday life of such uprooted people regardless of colour, race, gender, religion, belief or age. It is also necessary that churches should offer legal advice and assist such persons to seek redress through human rights commissions, ombudspersons, equality bodies and so on. In all this the voice of Churches needs to be heard more emphatically. Churches are also called to take a stand for the promotion and protection of human dignity of persons with disabilities, prisoners, abused women and those in need of shelter.

Job losses are on the rise. Women and migrants are primarily affected and enjoy less protection. Seasonal workers do not have proper contracts. There is also an urgent need to address the issue of human trafficking and statelessness that affects around ten million persons across the world.

Therefore we wish to remind all European Christians and citizens that they have rights and voices in society. Article 1 of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union refers to human dignity as the first of the "indivisible, universal values! - human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity -," that the Union is founded on.

We wish to encourage churches to bring political pressure on their communities to strengthen human rights locally and globally by urging the state to provide clear legal frameworks and appropriate principles.

The current economic and financial crisis has had an impact on the promotion and protection of human rights. European states need to deliver on the protection and promotion of human rights with greater purpose in their engagement with International and regional organisations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) and the European Union.

### ***Engaging with the Economic System***

- The economic systems are created by human beings; it is possible to transform them.
- Biblical perspectives help in addressing current economic and ethical challenges
- Human beings are suffering under the present conditions created by human beings
- The church needs to rediscover a voice for the present context; churches together have a stronger voice but we cannot collaborate/collude with injustice. In the tradition of the incarnation, we need to stoop together from where we are to enter and understand the harsh realities of the world so that we may rise together. This is an unconditional ethic for all our churches. Churches that stoop with Christ will rise with Christ to a world that pleases God. But without stooping there is no rising. This is a genuine interpretation of Kenosis as a paradigm of discipleship and imitation of Christ.
- There is a sense of crisis in our Christian discipleship and a lack of Christian confidence in addressing issues from a biblical perspective.

- Europe is still under the illusion that it does have a social market economy. Theoretically this may be true, but the reality is different. The Lisbon treaty is not a social market economy in the original sense, since the European treaties established the principle of an open market economy with free competition. But even the classical social market economy was built on maximum growth because capital and, only therefore, the economy must grow without limits. This is the reason why, on a planet with limits, the capitalist system in all its forms cannot be an enduring one for survival reasons.

### ***Some Action Points***

The Porvoo Consultation invites its constituency, but also the EU member states to implement the following:

- To devote time for a completely fresh look into the systemic difficulties in the current economic and ecological order.
- To promote the right to housing, access to health care, right to employment for all.
- To resource Christians to raise questions of economics and the common good and advocate for Human Rights
- To promote interfaith collaboration on issues of economic justice and human rights.
- To engage with governments in a sort of proofing exercise/audit on ethical and humanitarian criteria.

## **Section 2**

### ***Our Faith***

We trust in God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer and we believe in working with God towards God's purposes in God's world.

### ***Our Hope***

Our hope is in Christ and the reign of God, which brings justice, reconciliation and peace to all. The presence of ecumenical groups and movements, that work to liberate both humans and nature are a sign of this hope. We humbly trust that the Porvoo Communion will have a share in this vision and this work and that our unity will improve the quality of human life and relationships and offer protection and care for the environment.

### ***Our Love***

The Gospel of love is both the chief characteristic and dynamic in the reign of God. We are to love our neighbour who is known to us as well as the unknown stranger and migrant at our doorstep and beyond. Love must also convert relationships of suspicion, fear and hostility into mutually trusting and beneficial friendships and partnerships. Since we love because He loved us first, our love for others must be an intrinsic part of the energy generated by God through the Porvoo Communion.

### ***Our World***

The reality today is that many areas of our day to day life are locally and internationally interconnected. For example, the markets of local farmers are connected with the Global South through fair trade and the dependence of many northern countries on vegetables and fruit from elsewhere. The question to be addressed is how one should respond to the reality of both the local and the global.

- In prayer relating to action in and for the world, the need to be contemplative in action is key; hasty put together solutions do tend to go wrong. An important aspect of the Eucharist is that it liturgically expresses what we want done in the world and is an intrinsically Christian understanding of life.
- There is need for a deeper understanding and care for creation. This understanding is intrinsically linked to our understanding of the world.
- The need for a deeper Christian understanding of global economy.

### ***Our Jubilee***

Our economic principles should be ethically based. The Jubilee imperative points us to this. It is easy to note what ethical behaviour is, since in many ways such behaviour is a common sense approach. Waiting for the next crisis to change course, is not the answer today. Constantly learning from Crises is a key for bringing about change and transformation.

To some extent we have replaced the sense of regular common sense accountability in the life of the churches, by more technical, business and management reviews. It is important to consider how the Jubilee periodic review can be more effectively integrated in our liturgies, our ecumenical partnerships and our planning and budgeting.

The Jubilee is also practical. It is important to consider the role of the Sabbath in the context of the periodic review. Churches are encouraged to commit themselves to a regular pattern of sabbaticals for church workers, clergy and others who model sabbatical practice for the church.

A regular and thoughtful practice of fasting, as a time for reflection on our reliance on God, also links us to the Sabbath. Furthermore, the spirituality of grace before meals is a reminder of the Hand as well as the hands that provide us with the blessing of food.

### ***Our Neighbour - Part of our Lives***

Who is our neighbour? Our neighbour is part of our life. This realisation will help provide a new way of thinking and an articulation of a theological imperative.

In each person we are called to recognise the image of God. Love for our neighbour has no limits - There is wideness in God's mercy.

Our limited understanding does not give us the full knowledge of everything. We therefore need to also understand the experiences of our neighbour for a wider vision of God. Through such encounters we not only learn more of the distinctiveness of our own Christian faith but can be further strengthened to be confident Christians in a pluralistic world.

It is liberating to reflect that the 'Other' has been maintained by God in a grace which one may have lost but which is life-giving to us. The Porvoo understanding of the blessing given by the stranger enables the Churches to be united in responding to issues, such as, the diaspora, interfaith and migration and healing relationships (above from Porvoo Consultation on Churches Responding to Conflict).

### ***Our Relationships***

The Porvoo Churches listen to God's invitation to be fashioned by God into a new ecumenical reality. They recognise that they do not live in a vacuum. Relationships are God's gift, so that

there is life. Trusting relationships can transform thinking, work for the right of a right livelihood, the right of good conduct and the right of mindfulness for the common good.

We are part of a global common humanity. We share life with its happiness and worries, joys and struggles with people of different faiths, and no religion. We are sent by God to share and serve in a common society, as fellow citizens. We need to co-exist and speak and co-contribute to global problems locally (from Porvoo Keys for Interfaith Engagement).

It continues to be of importance for churches to understand each other's histories, experiences, pastoral contexts and contacts. Mutual recognition of the sincerity and good faith of the other is an important factor in responding to situations of conflict in relationships.

### ***Our Money***

Money should be seen in the light of the Gospel. It is an instrument of public good and not an individual commodity. As an instrument of the public good, money can work appropriately in a diversity of areas, such as, medical research, cooperative cultural achievements, but this does not mean exploitation of each other out of greed and for economic systems to promote the idolisation of money, since this violates God's economy and does not enhance the whole.

### ***Some Action Points for the Local Context***

- Pray together
- Encourage Christians to devote some of their time (about 10%) to visit each other and share in taking care of each other's needs.
- Share good practice
- Re-connect with local communities; strengthen fair trade; buy as far as possible what is locally produced; speak out and re-claim ones voice.
- There is recognition that food banks are useful, but at the same time this cannot become the norm, since those in need could be left out, unable to contribute with their potential to society and without human dignity. Furthermore, with the rapid spread of food banks those governing may not give the issue of overcoming poverty, unemployment and homelessness the needed priority.
- Finland has developed a model of joining in an exchange of gifts – *time banks* in exchange of favours or caritative skills. It is an exchange of profit without money (local exchange and trading system LETS = time banks). Careful not to abuse the system.
- Explore how church land can be used for community development and the common good and critically analyse any inappropriate accumulation of money.
- Christians are challenged as consumers, since they are aware of the kind of consumer being a Christian brings with it. Christians in the world of business and commerce are called to be agents of transformation.
- Develop Advocacy Groups at different levels and also work for the freedom of people from debt.

***The Porvoo Communion of Churches*** consists of Anglican Churches (Church of England, Church of Ireland, Scottish Episcopal Church, Church in Wales, Lusitanian Church in Portugal, Spanish Episcopal Reformed Church), five Nordic Lutheran Churches (Church of Sweden, Church of Norway, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark) and two of the Baltic Lutheran churches (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania).

*The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad reunited in November 2010. This reunification has brought in Diaspora congregations into the Porvoo Communion of Churches.*

*The Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad and the Lutheran Church in Great Britain signed the Porvoo Declaration in September 2014 and are now full members of the Porvoo Communion of Churches*

*Currently the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia is the only church with observer status on the Porvoo Contact Group.*

*The Churches in the Porvoo Communion share some common historical associations since the Reformation. They also share the history of having been national Churches and are constantly responding to new situations.*

*The Common Statement of these participating churches has been hailed as 'the single most important ecumenical proposal' to be discussed in many years.*

*These churches also understand themselves as having a special responsibility for all people regardless of religion and are together in 'mission and service'.*

*(Report as signed off by the co-chairs of the Porvoo Communion of Churches, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and the Rt Revd Peter Skov-Jakobsen, Bishop of Copenhagen, on 29 Jan 2015)*