

Public theology and the global economy. Ecumenical social thinking between fundamental criticism and reform

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to contribute to the development of an adequate public theology of globalisation that takes its point of departure in the option for the poor. This contribution is made in four steps: First, some of the complex problems that globalisation implies are mapped out. Second, different approaches within the churches, in particular the prophetic and the more reformist approaches, are illustrated by discussing three church documents on globalisation. In the third part of the article a theological framework for finding common ground within the churches, is offered. Finally, five guidelines for an adequate public theology of globalisation are formulated.

1. INTRODUCTION

If you were looking for the one theme of ethical relevance in the last decade, which was most subject of public debate worldwide, probably globalisation would win the prize. The rapidly growing pace of international financial and economic exchange, based on the new possibilities of information technology and the tendency towards liberalisation of markets have affected almost every part of the world. At the same time the assessment of the effects or possible effects of this economic globalisation are extremely controversial. While defenders of the global liberalisation of markets see it - sometimes with almost religious overtones - as the key concept for creating worldwide prosperity for everyone, the fundamental critics of globalisation see it as the very cause of growing poverty and an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor. For them, globalisation merely strengthens the power of the economically strong nations and implies a growing political influence of transnational corporations which control policies and economic behaviour.

In the wine shelf of my supermarket at home, South African wine stands in a row with our own Franconian wine. And both of them are not only quite good wines but also astonishingly inexpensive. This example shows something that applies to many other phenomena of globalisation: ambivalence. The presence of goods from countries far away from Germany in our supermarket shelves means jobs in other regions of the world for those who produce these goods for us there and maybe the loss of jobs in our own country if our own products become less popular. But it also means the possibility of enjoying goods for a price for which goods of a comparable quality have never been available before. To only deplore the loss of jobs in our

1 The author is professor in Systematic Theology in the Theological Faculty of the University of Bamberg, Germany and research associate of prof. D. E. de Villiers in the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria.

country as a consequence of globalisation is therefore only half of the truth. If the critique of globalisation wants to be taken seriously it must carefully sort out chances and risks and then soberly assess both.

The churches are no exception when it comes to the controversial assessment of globalisation. They are united in the quest for ways to alleviate worldwide poverty. But they do not agree on the evaluation of whether economic globalisation can play a role in it, and especially, what this role would look like. This is not the kind of disagreement that the Reformation would have called *adiaphora*.² The way the world economic system works is a matter of life and death for a large number of people.² This is true no matter whether one identifies a specific solution in the economic debate with the solution faith demands or whether one sees a legitimate plurality of solutions from a faith point of view. In any case there are high stakes in the position one takes in the debate on globalisation.

Therefore there is an urgent need for a debate within and between the churches on this question. If the churches are called to be salt of the earth and light of the world, they can never be satisfied with a situation in which they, in their own theological and political views, mirror the split between North and South that is so prominent in the global political and economic debate. Churches need to develop a public theology of globalisation contributing the rich resources of their religious traditions to public debate in order to help the world find unity.

The churches' potential in this respect should not be underestimated. Wolfram Stierle, a German economist and theologian, now one of the ghost-writers of the German minister of development has given an optimistic assessment of the effect which continuous civil societal work of the churches has made on the reshaping of politics. He sees a change of development policies in the North in the line of the "Post-Washington-Consensus" orienting such policies towards an improvement of the situation of the poor. For him, the United Nations' millennium goals mirror the churches' "option for the poor" and therefore indicate, "that this central theme of the ecumenical tradition has finally been affirmed."³ No matter whether one shares Stierle's optimistic assessment or not, it seems clear that there is still a lot of work to be done on the way to a powerful public voice of the church. The first and most important step is clarity in terms of what this voice says.

My purpose is to contribute to this task in four steps: Firstly, I will map out some of the complex problems that globalisation implies. Then I will indicate different approaches within the churches. The third part of my article will offer a theological framework for finding common ground within the churches. Finally I will describe five guidelines for a public theology of globalisation.

2. WHAT IS GLOBALISATION?

There are two basic dimensions, which underlie all forms of globalisation. The *first* one is the *perception of reality* in a global context rather than in a local or regional context. The world is

2 The WCC's "AGAPE"-document states: "In 2003, 7.7 million persons owned wealth worth US\$ one million or more. The sum of their wealth reached US\$ 28.9 trillion, or almost three times the United States national product that same year. In the meantime, 840 million people worldwide are undernourished and 1.5 billion - the majority of whom are women, children, and Indigenous Peoples - live on less than one dollar a day. The world's richest 20 percent account for 86 percent of global consumption of goods and services. The annual income of the richest 1% is equal to that of the poorest 57%, and at least 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition" (3).

3 Wolfram Stierle, "Globalisierung gestalten!" Wie funktioniert denn das? Zum Verhältnis von Entwicklungspolitik und Ökumene am Anfang des neuen Millenniums, in M. Eberle/S. Asmus (Hg.), *Quo vadis ökumenische Sozialethik? Weltgestaltung im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, Frankfurt 2005, 204-219 (218).

visible in our living rooms. Contrary to popular belief this is not something completely new. There are many examples for the vivid exchange of views and perception on a global level long before we started to use the term “globalisation”. If we look at the development of theological and philosophical thought in the 19th and early 20th century, we repeatedly run into a strong influence of global exchange in the biographies of leading thinkers. Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber, e.g. both travelled to the USA in August 1904 to be speakers at a global conference during the world exposition in St. Louis. Dietrich Bonhoeffer had some of the most formative experiences of his thought in the U.S. He worked in Spain and England for a considerable part of his short biography. And he had a written personal invitation from Mahatma Gandhi to visit India, even though this visit never happened, due to the events in Europe. If one looks at the biographies of leading thinkers of the times in which there were neither planes nor e-mails, it is astonishing how vivid their written or physical exchange with other regions of the world was already then.

It becomes clear that the perception of reality in a global context is not a *specific* characteristic of what we call globalisation today even though it is a central dimension.

The *second* dimension of globalisation I want to name is global activity. We do not only *perceive* reality in a global context, but we also have the means to *shape* reality on a global scale. However, as with the first dimension, this is nothing new. Even as far back as during the time of the Reformation economic activity took place on a global scale. Geoffrey C. Gunn has spoken of the period of history beginning with the Reformation century as “first globalisation”.⁴ Martin Luther's writings on economics are a rich source for giving flesh to this assumption. They make us aware of familiar ethical problems already urgent then. Luther describes the economic practices of the transnational corporations of his time as something Christians have to be aware of and react to. He sees the fact that transnational corporations can act on a global level without any concern for the poor in their own countries as a violation of faith.⁵

Luther's critique shows: even global economic activity is nothing new. As soon as the means of transportation were there, even though these were slow ships rather than fast planes, people were able to act globally, whether they sailed as conquerors, whether they were persecuted at home and fled to find safe havens for living their faith, or whether they wanted to increase their wealth through global trade.

Then, what is new in what we call globalisation today? There is no consensus about what we mean by this term as we use it in our present discussions. But there is good reason to emphasise two features which characterise the specifics of the development of the last 25 years that we have come to call globalisation: *new information technologies and the liberalisation of trade*. Both the speed and the quality of global exchange have radically changed by the possibility of exchanging almost every desired amount of information from one part of the world to the other within seconds. The revolution of the financial market would not have been possible without these new tools.⁶

4 Geoffrey C. Gunn, *First globalization. The Eurasian exchange, 1500 - 1800*, Lanham 2003. Gunn offers a culturalist reading of this first Eurasian globalisation to show “the other side of the coin of economism reaching back to Adam Smith” (Gunn, 284).

5 See his 1524 treatise “Von Kaufshandlung und Wucher”, in English to be found in: Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. By W. Brandt, Vol. 45: *The Christian in Society II*, Philadelphia 1962.

6 See the definition of globalisation in a study of the Swiss Church Federation, written by Christoph Stückelberger and Hella Hoppe: “globalisation is defined as an intensification of exchange and linkages between people and their values, cultures, capital, goods, services as well as institutions, states, organisations, sciences and religious groups.” An English summary of this excellent study is available at http://www.sekfeps.ch/media/pdf/themen/globalance/globalance_web_en.pdf.

In addition to the *existence* of these new technological possibilities, the extensive use of it was made possible by removing most of the traditional barriers of exchange that were man made. The almost unimaginable speed and extent of daily global capital exchange is due not only to the explosion of virtual money in the virtual world but also to the intentional removal of legal measures protecting national or regional financial markets. Modern logistics together with the removal of tariffs have also contributed to an unprecedented increase of the exchange of goods between the regions of the world. Both the existence of new technologies and the removal of legal barriers have also led to an increasingly global use of work force. The software developer in Bombay works in a team with the engineer in Frankfurt and the market analyst in Johannesburg just as if their offices were in the same building.

In the following I will use the term “globalisation” in an open way. Some see this term as intrinsically linked with an imperial worldview that swallows the particular economic and cultural identities spread around the world into a monostructure shaped by the neo-liberal world view. It has therefore been proposed to give up the term “globalisation” in favour of other terms like “internationalism”.⁷

Others have argued for an open use of the term “globalisation”. In the opening essay to his three volume joint work on “God and Globalisation”, Princeton ethicist Max Stackhouse emphasises the possibility “that globalisation reflects a more pervasive process than some of the protests comprehend, that the moral dynamics behind it are at least more ambiguous, and sometimes better, than the critics allow, and that only a more complex frame of reference than the ones in use among those opposing globalisation can deal with the many related developments.”⁸

I will continue using the term “globalisation” because I do not think that it necessarily implies a specific ideological content and because I see enough plurality in the use of this term as it is applied in the ongoing political and ethical discourse. If I speak about globalisation as a neoliberal ideological concept, I will explicitly call it “neo-liberal globalisation”. The term “internationalism” itself is so shaped by a certain worldview that it would be no alternative.

3. THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCHES TO GLOBALISATION

At least from the second half of the 20th century on, the churches have always dealt with economic questions. Thus, a detailed overview on the content of all the documents, which have come from the discussion process of the churches on the theme of globalisation, would be an impossibly extensive task for this lecture. Rather, I will try to show some main lines and explore only a few recent documents more thoroughly.

In the case of Roman Catholicism there is a rich explicit tradition of Catholic Social Teaching since Pope Leo XIII's Encyclica “*Rerum Novarum*” in 1891. The World Council of Churches, since its birth in Amsterdam 1948, has equally directed attention to economic issues and their implications for social justice.⁹ Besides contributions of the WCC and its member churches and regional bodies, recent discussions on globalisation have been considerably influenced by the

7 H. Scheer, *Globalisierung: Zur ideologischen Transformation eines Schlüsselbegriffs*, Le Monde Diplomatique. Atlas der Globalisierung, Bonn o.J., 6-8 (8).

8 Max Stackhouse, General Introduction, in: M. Stackhouse/P. Paris (eds.), *God and Globalization, Vol. I: Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, Harrisburg 2000, 1-52 (21).

9 See Wolfram Stierle, *Chancen einer ökumenischen Wirtschaftsethik. Kirche und Ökonomie vor den Herausforderungen der Globalisierung, Frankfurt 2001; Martin Robra, Ökumenische Sozialethik, Gütersloh 1994; Ars van der Bent, Commitment to God's World. A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought, Geneva 1995; W. Stierle/D. Werner/M. Heider, Ethik für das Leben. 100 Jahre Ökumenische Wirtschafts- und Sozialethik, Rothenburg o.d.T. 1999*

global bodies of specific denominational traditions such as the Lutheran World Federation or the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Among the most vividly discussed contributions to an ongoing debate are the document of the 24th general Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Accra/Ghana from August 2004, the WCC document “Alternative Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth” (“AGAPE-document”) launched in 2005 in preparation for the 9th Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre in February 2006, the document of the Conference of European Churches “European Churches Living Their Faith in the Context of Globalisation” (2005), and the document of the German evangelical churches (EKD) synod “Organizing the Global Economy Responsibly” already issued in 2001. I add an excellent document of the Swiss churches “Globalance. Christian Perspectives on Globalisation with a Human Face” from 2005 to this list, even though it has not gotten the attention it deserves.¹⁰

In my assessment of the content of this debate within the ecumenical movement, I will concentrate on three documents: the Accra document with its call for a *processus confessionis*, the AGAPE document with its fundamental critique of neo-liberal globalisation and finally the German document with its rejection of fundamentalist critiques and its call for a reformist perspective.

3.1 The Accra document

In response to the urgent call of the Southern African reformed churches, which met in Kitwe in 1995 and in recognition of the increasing urgency of global economic injustice and ecological destruction, the 23rd General Council (Debrecen, Hungary, 1997) invited the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into a process of “recognition, education, and confession (*processus confessionis*)”.¹¹

This process culminated in the prominent place economic globalisation took in the 24th general council in Accra/Ghana in 2004. The assembly chose harsh words describing the present face of economic globalisation:

“The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death. The policy of unlimited growth among industrialised countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment ...” (6).¹²

The document gives various examples of what it calls “the beliefs” of “neo-liberal economic globalisation”:

unrestrained competition, consumerism, and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth are the best for the whole world;

- The ownership of private property has no social obligation;
- Capital speculation, liberalisation and deregulation of the market, privatisation of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes, and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;

10 Swiss Church Federation, *Globalance. Christian Perspectives on Globalisation with a Human Face*, Bern 2005. See also Section IX of the final document of the 10th Assembly of the Lutheran World federation in 2003 in Winnipeg with the title “Transforming Economic Globalization”.

11. For an interpretation of this *processus confessionis* and its meaning for a reformed response to the challenge of globalisation see Dirkie Smit, Protestantism and Ecumenism in a Time of Global Transformations: A Reformed Perspective, in: *Reformed World* 52 (2002), 107-117.

12. World Alliance of Reformed Churches, *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*, Accra 2004. The numbers in parentheses in the following are the numbers of the paragraphs in the document.

- Social obligations, protection of the poor and weak, trade unions, and relationships between people, are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation (9).

It is important to note that this assessment does not describe globalisation as such but a certain ideological programme of dealing with it. Neo-liberal globalisation - and this point is crucial to understand the response of faith envisioned - is not only seen as a set technical means to achieve certain economic goals, but as a belief system which can be called an “ideology”:

“This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry” (10).

The document moves on to emphasise the awareness of the complexity of the issues. Nevertheless it uses a specific word to name the defender of what it calls “an extremely complex and immoral economic system”: the term is “empire” and has been a well-known term in political theory since the book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.¹³ It is explained as follows:

“In using the term “empire” we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.” The statement becomes more specific in who these nations are: “The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organisation) use political, economic, or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners.” (13).

It is clear for the document that this system is irreconcilable with the perspective of faith: “... in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16:13)” (14). Struggling against this system is a matter of confession: “We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalisation and therefore we confess before God and one another ...”

The Accra document was the result of intense negotiations and already a compromise between the churches of the North and many in the South who wanted to declare a *status confessionis*. Such declaration would have meant that considerable parts of the churches of the leading industrial powers strongly intertwined with society in their countries would have seen themselves fundamentally questioned in their self-understanding as being church. In the end it could have meant breaking apart as a reformed church body. In order to avoid this consequence, the churches of the wealthy countries accepted the document of which one of the commentators from Germany said that in its one-sided attributions of guilt for almost every evil in the world to neo-liberal capitalism, to the existing global economic system and to the empire USA, it couldn't be made plausible to anybody in Europe except to the anti-globalisation movement Attac.¹⁴

Such voices fail to understand the specific meaning of confessional language in the Reformed tradition. Dirkie Smit has explained the meaning of a *processus confessionis* well as a process of

13 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge/London 2000.

14 E. Hitzler, Der ökumenische Diskussionsprozess um Globalisierung. Überblick über den Stand der Diskussion, in: F.E. Anhelm (Hg.), *Rekonfiguration. Ökumene im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, Loccum 2004, 195-211 (197).

covenanting and of encouraging involvement, which can be understood as intentionally inclusive rather than exclusive.¹⁵

3.2 The AGAPE document of the WCC

The AGAPE document, which was the background for the “AGAPE call” issued by the World Council of Churches at its 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre in February 2006, converges with many of the central assumptions of the Accra document. It focuses less on the *status confessionis* question, but equally presents the way the churches deal with globalisation as a matter of faith against ideology. Neo-liberal globalisation - says the document - is an “economy of death”:

“Centred on capital, neoliberalism transforms everything and everyone into a commodity for sale at a price. Having made competition the dominant ethos, it throws individual against individual, enterprise against enterprise, race against race, and country against country. Its concern with material wealth above human dignity de-humanises the human being and sacrifices life for greed. It is an economy of death.”¹⁶

As opposed to this “economy of death” the AGAPE document describes an “economy of life” as a consequence of Christian faith:

“An economy of life reminds us of the main characteristics of God's household of life:

- The bounty of the gracious economy of God (oikonomia tou theou) offers and sustains abundance for all;
- God's gracious economy requires that we manage the abundance of life in a just, participatory and sustainable manner;
- The economy of God is an economy of life that promotes sharing, globalised solidarity, the dignity of persons, and love and care for the integrity of creation;
- God's economy is an economy for the whole oikoumene - the whole earth community;
- God's justice and preferential option for the poor are the marks of God's economy.”

The document makes very clear - and this is a crucial aspect - that the experience of globalisation voiced by the churches especially in the South, sharply differs from the promises the dominant economic paradigm makes. Let me give some examples:

Neo-liberalism - says the document - assumes “that economic growth through 'free' markets is paramount; neoliberalism claims that only through this economic model can poverty be eliminated, sustainable development ensured, gender equality achieved and the millennium development goals finally met.”

And it then holds against this view: “Yet people's concrete experience shows that market-driven economic growth is inequitable, unsustainable and irreconcilable with economic justice and a caring economy”.¹⁷

Neo-liberalism assumes “that economic growth requires a dynamic process of 'creative destruction’”. And it then holds against this view: “Yet there is an obvious pattern of continuous restructuring that is designed to maintain and enhance the profits of global corporations by sacrificing people and the earth.” “Creative destruction” - for the document - is in deep

15 Dirkie Smit, *Theologische Ansätze für kirchliches Engagement in Fragen der Globalisierung. Reformierte Perspektiven aus dem südlichen Afrika*, in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 53 (2004), 160-175, especially 172-174.

16 World Council of Churches, *Alternative Globalization: Addressing Peoples and Earth*, Geneva 2005, 3f.

17 *Ibid.* 4.

contradiction to the biblical vision of care and love for the poor and vulnerable, since it promotes the survival of the fittest and the non-survival of the weak.

For neo-liberalism - says the document - "the economic, social and personal trauma that is caused by 'structural adjustment' programmes are justified as short-term pain necessary for long-term gain. The assumption is that newly created wealth will trickle down to the poor." And it then holds against this view the experience around the world that these programmes redistribute wealth and power from the poor to the rich and deepen structural inequality. The defence of these programmes is interpreted as a false theology: Since it justifies an unbearable reality, it amounts to an "economic theology of human sacrifice" (11).

Similarly, another view of liberal economists is seen as false theology: the belief that free markets, free trade, self-regulation and competition will liberate the "invisible hand" of the market for the benefit of everyone. The Agape document holds against this view: "Yet there is no divine force that guides markets. To suggest that markets have such saving powers amounts to idolatry." And it adds a far-reaching general moral condemnation of liberalisation: "Liberalization 'frees' capital and markets from social obligation, and is therefore immoral and irresponsible by definition..." (12).

Similarly to the Accra document's notion of "Empire" the AGAPE document sees a "dramatic convergence of economic globalization with political and military hegemony in one imperial power network" (12).

Since both the Accra and the AGAPE document fundamentally criticise the major economic actors in the wealthy countries in the North, it is crucial to look at the position of the churches in these Northern countries to understand whether or how the church in such a divided world can be "the one holy, catholic and apostolic church". Is there any common understanding of globalisation - an area which is so basic to daily reality of human kind, a common understanding especially of those in the world who call themselves "Christians" and do not feel ashamed to regularly claim that they "are one in Christ"?

In the following I will look at the document "Organizing the Global Economy Responsibly" which was the final document of the German Evangelical Churches (EKD) general synod in 2001 devoted to the theme of globalisation. It is to this day the most often quoted statement whenever the German churches' position on globalisation is discussed. And it stands for a reformist perspective, which - at least at first sight - seems to be in tension with the basic line of the Accra and the AGAPE documents which is a fundamental critique of neo-liberal globalisation. This statement sees not only risks but also chances of the present process of economic globalisation.

3.3 The EKD Document¹⁸

The document begins by describing the two faces of globalisation. On one hand there are worrying phenomena connected with the acceleration of global economic processes: among them are an increasing anarchy on the international financial markets in which psychology plays a bigger role than economic facts, an increasing separation of economic developments from processes which are oriented toward the goal of social justice, and a disappointment of hopes for a global ecological reorientation connected with globalisation. On the other hand the document sees the chance for a new global responsibility connected with globalisation, the possibility of producing more goods for better prices, the principal possibility for poorer countries to participate in liberalised markets and thereby reduce poverty (42).

18 Globale Wirtschaft verantwortlich gestalten. Kundgebung der Synode der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, in: epd-Dokumentation 49/2001, 42-46. I will use my own translation.

The document sees worldwide economic injustice as a “scandal” and intends to judge globalisation according to its ability to bring wealth also to the weakest members of the global community. The “preferential option for the poor” is quoted as the basic criterion for the social ethical assessment of globalisation (43).

The central vision of the document is a global socially responsible market economy, which protects weak markets not fit for international competition, but advocates a liberalisation of trade especially where it protects the interest of the economically less powerful. Consequently the European Community is challenged to open its market for agricultural products of the developing countries and stop a subsidy policy, which favours European agricultural products in the international market (44). The synod advocates an approach that establishes an internationally functioning set of rules for a social and ecological reorientation of global economy. International institutions - says the document - have to be strengthened to responsibly frame market activities.

The most controversial sentences relate to the role of international corporations.¹⁹ The document advocates efforts to go beyond an approach oriented towards confrontation:

“Internationally, the Churches should participate in a rethinking process, that sees in foreign portfolio investments, provided there are appropriate framework conditions, not the cause of poverty but a means to overcoming it. The Churches must make clear that they view the transnational corporations, the World Monetary Fund and the World Bank not as adversaries but as partners, that require a critical dialogue.”

However, as the word “critical” already indicates, this is no general endorsement of the role of TNCs: “Where companies fall short of minimum social and ecological standards, the Churches should support the formation of a counter public to remind the companies of their responsibilities. If individuals or initiative groups are harassed because of their involvement, the Churches must speak out for them.”

The statement ends with a plea for a strong role of the churches in international civil society: “The Churches must exercise the authority, that they still have in many societies, to tip the scales, to use their influence on political decisions here and in other parts of the world for the preferential option for the poor” (46).

3.4 Differences and common ground

If we compare the documents, there are clear areas of common ground:

- The affirmation that economy is not a value free space, but needs a theological ethical assessment.
- The preferential option for the poor as a fundamental principle for judging economic policy.
- The rejection of the assumption that a free market automatically results in the common good for all
- The plea for a set of rules which serve as a framework for a socially responsible economy.
- The affirmation that international governmental institutions have a clear role in the design of global economy.

19 Duchrow/Bianchi/Krüger/Petracca interpret this passage as a “bow before the powerful” and a sign of distancing from the WCC and the social movements that fundamentally criticise those institutions for their socially irresponsible, unecological and undemocratic structures and actions (U. Duchrow/R. Bianchi/R. Krüger/V. Petracca, *Solidarisch Mensch werden: Psychische und soziale Destruktion im Neoliberalismus - Wege zu ihrer Überwindung*, Hamburg/Oberursel 2006, 445).

Besides this large area of common ground there are differences, which extent is yet to be judged. They include the questions

- whether the liberalisation of markets is to be condemned as such or whether it can have a limited role
- whether the present form of globalisation is fundamentally wrong or whether it can be reformed in a way that serves the poor
- whether transnational corporations should be seen as agents principally in conflict with the interests of the poor or whether there can be common interests
- whether confessional anti-capitalist language is the only way for the church of clearly standing on the side of the poor or whether it is counterproductive because it marginalises the church to a point where nobody in power takes it seriously anymore.

Before I outline five guidelines for a public theology of globalisation, which respond to this assessment of the ecumenical debate, I want to develop the basis for these guidelines by laying a theological ground.

I will base my theological reflections by deepening two aspects of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which I have already touched in my first lecture. I do this not because we can expect an answer to a question from him which was far beyond his reach at his own time.²⁰ But I do think Bonhoeffer is highly relevant for our discussion on globalisation today in two ways.

4. THEOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS - INSIGHTS FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

The *first aspect* concerns the realm to which Christian ethics apply. One of the reasons why the dramatic moral questions that international injustice poses are played down, is that private morality is still often preferred when we look at our moral responsibility. Bonhoeffer's life and theology was a continuous protest against such priority of the private. In a passage in his *Ethics*, which is also part of his famous treatise *After Ten Years* in the *Letter and Papers from Prison*, he writes:

“Some who seek to escape from taking a stand publicly find a place of refuge in a *private virtuousness*. Such persons do not steal. They do not commit murder. They do not commit adultery. Within the limits of their powers they do well. But in their voluntary renunciation of publicity they know how to remain punctiliously within the permitted bounds which preserve them from involvement in conflict. They must be blind and deaf to the wrongs which surround them. It is only at the price of an act of self-deception that they can safeguard their private blamelessness against contamination through responsible action in the world.”²¹

There couldn't be any more urgent plea for giving the problems of international justice a central place in our reflections on the good Christian life. Both because of the seemingly remote character of these problems and the impression that they are irresolvable, there is an especially vivid temptation to keep them out of our lives and pursue private virtuousness. Bonhoeffer encourages us to direct a significant part of our available time to what is happening around us nationally and internationally. He encourages us to read the Bible *and* the newspaper, as Karl Barth has put it. Then only will questions of international justice become part of our lives and of our faith.

The fact that Bonhoeffer insists so strongly on the public and political sphere as a theme for Christian ethics leads me to my *second aspect*. This insistence is grounded in a very definite

20 For a brief overview of Bonhoeffer on Economics see U. Duchrow, *Global Economy. A Confessional Issue for the Churches?*, Geneva 1987, 50-53.

21 D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Touchstone: New York et al. 1995, 69 (translation changed into inclusive language). German Original: *Ethik* (hg.v. Ilse Tödt et al.), München 1992, 66.

theological understanding of reality. Bonhoeffer's thoughts on this subject²² are so fascinating because they show how relevant theological dogmatics can be for very concrete questions of life. Bonhoeffer understands the reality of the world strictly in the light of the reality of God. Talking about the incarnation of Christ, for him, means talking about the reality of the world. And the reality of the world is reconciliation: every single bit of this broken world is reconciled with God, which means: every single bit of this world is to be seen in the light of the kingdom of God, in the light of God's love for the entire world. There is no realm that is outside of this reality. Anyone who tries to divide reality up into a Christian reality with Christian laws and a worldly reality with worldly laws is mistaken. Bonhoeffer, referring to certain understandings of the Lutheran two-kingdoms-doctrine, criticises explicitly any approach that assumes a normative autonomy of certain sections of societal life such as the economy.²³

For questions of international justice this means that dealing with these questions can never be separated from Christian faith. And it means a change of perception: when we look at North-South relations, we do not simply look at various lucky or less lucky players in the global market, but we look primarily at a human community of brothers and sisters in different cultural and political contexts who all have an equal right to live a decent life. "Realism" is insisting on this reality and making it shows empirically. From this perspective, the fact that some live in affluence and others live in poverty is an abnormality. It is an "impossible possibility" (which was K. Barth's word for sin). Thus, the way reality is defined, makes a big difference for the way to deal with very concrete problems.

Bonhoeffer's specific Christological understanding of reality cannot be separated from his often-quoted reflection on the "view from below". This reflection is a direct consequence of his own personal experience in the resistance against Hitler. But he interprets this experience in the light of his Christological understanding of reality. Looking at history "from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer" combines both aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology that I have mentioned: it is a dimension of his critique of private virtuousness as the primary focus of Christian ethics, and it is an implication of his Christological understanding of reality.²⁴ This theological view is the key for his remarkable affirmation that there are indeed issues for which it is worth struggling for without compromise, then adding: "it seems to me that peace and social justice, or actually Christ, are among it."²⁵

In my view, the call to live our faith with all its commitments beyond the limits of our private lives, as well as a Christological understanding of reality, provide a reliable theological ground for a renewed discussion on globalisation between the churches worldwide. Such a discussion could lead to a public theology of globalisation as a basis of an ecumenical witness of the churches to the world.²⁶ Let me conclude by outlining five dimensions of such a public theology of globalisation to be developed.

22 Cf. especially Ethics, 186-204.

23 Cf. W. Huber: Bonhoeffer and Modernity, USQR 46 (1992), 5-19 (11-13); U. Duchrow, *Global Economy*, 44-46.

24 Cf. W. Huber: Bonhoeffer and Modernity, USQR 46 (1992), 5-19 (12f): "So an incarnational christology leads to a perception of the conflicting character of history with the 'view from below', as described in Bonhoeffer's famous text 'After Ten Years'.

25 „Es gibt doch nun einmal Dinge, für die es sich lohnt kompromisslos einzustehen. Und mir scheint, der Friede und soziale Gerechtigkeit, oder eigentlich Christus, sei so etwas.“ (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, London 1933-1935*, hg. V. H. Goedecking et al., DBW 13, Gütersloh 1994, 273).

26 Ulrich Duchrow and Martin Gück have recently given a contribution to the debate after the General Assemblies, which continues to affirm a fundamental critical approach against a reformist approach as

4.1. A public theology of globalisation is based on the preferential option for the poor

A wide consensus about the option for the poor as a fundamental principle of Christian Ethics has emerged in the last three decades. Its rootedness in so many of the different traditions both of the Old and of the New Testament is too obvious to reject the importance of this principle for Christian Ethics. Although it was especially emphasised by Latin American Liberation Theology, it has found at least verbal support even from strong advocates of capitalism. The American sociologist Peter Berger, in his book *The Capitalist Revolution*, discusses the question of the best economic strategy to improve the material well being of people, especially the poor. “This, of course”, he adds, “is the principle of the 'preferential option for the poor' which recent Catholic social thought has introduced into the discussion of development.” And he continues to say, as a conclusion of his comparative economic effort, that “there can be no question that capitalism, as against any empirical alternatives, is the indicated choice ...”²⁷ Similarly, Martin Wolf, in his defence of Globalism states: “The market is the most powerful institution for raising living standards ever invented: indeed there are no rivals ... The problem today is not that there is too much globalization, but there is far too little.”²⁸

The conclusion Berger and others draw from their assessment of empirical facts shows: the invocation of the option for the poor does not replace the debate on the interpretation of empirical economic data. But nevertheless, it is an important basis for such interpretation. In this interpretation, however, it is important to understand more precisely what is meant by the option for the poor. I cannot explore this question in detail here. But I want to briefly summarise what I have dealt elsewhere with at more length.²⁹

First: The situation that the option for the poor addresses is a lack of participation. Therefore, this option is a participatory option, opposed to any paternalism. For the globalisation debate, this means that any development aid from the North to the South must converge with a reorientation of global economic structures towards a fair share of the fruits of globalisation for all people. Development, keeps the poor dependant on such aid, contradicts the option for the poor.

Second: The exclusive preference of the poor is a logical consequence of an inclusive universality. The option for the poor does not set the poor against the rich, but demands dignity for everyone.

represented by the churches of the North: Ulrich Duchrow/Martin Gück, *Wirtschaft(en) im Dienst des Lebens. Kirche im ökumenischen Prozess für gerechte Globalisierung. Wie geht es weiter nach den ökumenischen Vollversammlungen?*, Heidelberg 2006.

27 P. Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty*, New York 1986, 218.

28 Martin Wolf, *Why Globalization Works*, New Haven/London 2004, XVII. The first of his concluding “Ten commandments of globalization” goes as follows: “...the market economy is the only arrangement capable of generating sustained increases in prosperity, providing the underpinnings of stable liberal democracies and giving individual human beings the opportunity to seek what they desire in life” (ibid. 319). See also Jagdish Bhagwati’s rebuttal of the critics of globalisation in: Jagdish Bhagwati, *In Defense of Globalization*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2004. The advantages for countries integrated in the globalised markets in reducing poverty are also emphasised by: Dieter Duwendag, *Globalisierung im Kreuzfeuer der Kritik. Gewinner und Verlierer - Globale Finanzmärkte - Supranationale Organisationen - Job-Exporte*, Baden-Baden 2006, 38-44.

29 H. Bedford-Strohm, *Vorrang für die Armen. Auf dem Weg zu einer theologischen Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*, Gütersloh 1993.

Preference for the poor is needed as long as their dignity is not fully acknowledged. As the Brazilian bishop Dom Helder Camara put it: “We also go to the rich. But when we go to the rich, we come from the poor.” The preferential option for the poor implies an enlightened self-interest of the rich.

Third: It is as plausible on a philosophical basis as it is on a biblical basis. The work of the American philosopher John Rawls has shown that the improvement of the situation of the least advantaged members of society (“difference principle”)³⁰ as a fundamental principle of society is based on good philosophical arguments. In a footnote in one of his later works, Rawls explicitly confirms and acknowledges the parallel between his difference principle and the Catholic option for the poor.³¹

Fourth: It is only appropriately understood as a core part of Christian ethics, if it is used as a critical criterion. The option for the poor is a *critical standard* for reviewing the present situation in the national or international context. Any use of this criterion simply to legitimise an independently won bias for a certain economic order whatever it may be, is against its biblical intentions. Biblically based Christian ethics is always critical ethics. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God was the eschatological call to a *new* life. It was the call to be salt of the earth and light of the world. It was the call to not look at the speck in our neighbour's eye but at the log in our own eye. The option for the poor calls us in the powerful countries of the Western world not to point toward others and their responsibilities, but first of all to look at ourselves and our own ways of presently contributing to worldwide injustice. In the globalisation debate this means that the option for the poor challenges the leading elites in the North to look at their own responsibility for global injustice, instead of primarily pointing toward the homemade reasons for poverty in the South and calling for “good governance” there. Vice versa, for those in the South it could mean to look at what changes have to be made in their own countries to overcome poverty instead of attributing the reasons for poverty exclusively to colonialism and Western capitalism.

This brief summary of a closer look at the biblical concept of the “preferential option for the poor” shows that even though it is not inseparably linked with a specific theory of economic policy its more precise interpretation narrows down the realm of possible economic approaches reconcilable with Christian ethics. The task has been well-named by Wolfgang Huber in his speech at the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre: “The key issue is how the biblical option for the poor can be related in a more meaningful way to economic thought.”³² Efforts to gain empirical evidence, which shows the effects of globalisation on worldwide poverty, have to be intensified. Existing evidence shows a complex picture: while trade openness seems to be associated with lower poverty levels, financial openness tends to be linked with more poverty.³³

This leads me to a second dimension of a public theology of globalisation.

4.2. A public theology of globalisation includes the critique of ideologies

If the orientation toward free markets is not purely an instrument to realise certain goals such as the alleviation of poverty, but a goal in itself, it passes the line to religious belief and can be

30 J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge 1971, 83.

31 Rawls, John, *Collected Papers* (ed. Samuel Freeman), Cambridge 1999, 594, footnote 55. This parallel was one of the central reasons for my own account of the convergence between Rawls' theory and theological ethics (*Vorrang für die Armen*, 306).

32. <http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme-issues/assembly-documents/2-plenary-presentations/economic-justice/wolfgang-huber-presentation.html>.

33. See the thorough empirical analysis in: Enrico Santarelli/Paolo Figini, Does Globalization Reduce Poverty? Some Empirical Evidence for the Developing Countries, in: E. Lee/M. Vivarelli (eds.),

analysed as a competitive theological (or at least an ideological) concept. Ulrich Duchrow and Franz Hinkelammert have analysed neo-liberalism in such a way.³⁴ Many others - as Max Stackhouse - have emphasised the danger of money becoming an idol in the process of globalisation.³⁵ But even secular writers have analysed the effects of neo-liberal economic policies in terms of perverted theological imagery. In his work on the "Collapse of Globalism", the Canadian writer John Rawlston Saul calls the programmes imposed on the poor countries by the world financial institutions before the turn of the millennium "crucifixion economics".³⁶ Even more, he describes those of us who live in the North, as watching the "economic and social auto-crucifixion of these societies. Then, when death has cleansed them of their sins, they will be reborn, healthy, strong and able to balance their national accounts because they will have learned the importance of responsible growth."³⁷

It is not appropriate to *replace* proper rational argumentation against liberal economic theory by denouncing it to be a religious or secular ideology. But the *intellectual sensitivity for ideology*, disguised as rationality, is part of any solid critical thinking and is maybe nowhere more important than in the globalisation debate.

The strong language, which the ecumenical documents have used, describing neo-liberal globalisation, can be read as such needed sensitivity for ideology. Their denouncement of neo-liberal globalisation as an ideology can cite allies whose economic competence is beyond doubt and who have experienced the criticised institutions from within. Joseph Stiglitz, the former chief-economist of the World Bank, has strongly emphasised the ideological character of these institutions' policies in his book on the role of the IMF and the World Bank in the process of globalisation. The grave mistakes that were made especially by the IMF and led to major economic crises were based on a narrow ideological approach which transformed the free market from a means toward more wealth for more people into an end in itself, making the actors blind for contradicting economic evidence.³⁸

Understanding Globalization, Employment and Poverty Reduction, Hounsgrave/New York, 2004, 247-303 (293). The whole volume documents a research project by the ILO and is currently - as far as I can see - the best collection of empirical evidence for assessing the social effects of globalisation. Less differentiated is Martin Wolf's general assessment that, through globalisation, the "welfare of humanity, judged by life expectancies, infant mortality, literacy, hunger, fertility and the incidence of child labour has improved enormously" (Wolf, *Why Globalization Works*, New Haven/London 2004, 171). As Dieter Duwendag shows, clear assessments are made difficult by problems in measuring poverty, depending on what role currency exchange rates play (Dieter Duwendag, *Globalisierung im Kreuzfeuer der Kritik. Gewinner und Verlierer - Globale Finanzmärkte - Supranationale Organisationen - Job-Exporte*, Baden-Baden 2006, 34-38).

34 Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy. A Confessional Issue for the Churches?*, Geneva 1987; Ulrich Duchrow/ Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Property for People, not for Profit. Alternatives to the global tyranny of capital*, London 2004

35 "... money can easily become an idol. It becomes Mammon when it is taken as the means of salvation, the source of security or the purpose of life. The worship of the 'almighty buck' needs disciplined institutions of accountability" (Max Stackhouse, *Public Theology and political Economy in a Globalizing Era*, in: W. F. Storrat/A. R. Morton (eds), *Public Theology for the 21st Century. Essays in Honour of Duncan Forrester*, London/New York 2004, 179-194, 186)

36 John Rawlston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*, Penguin Books, Toronto et al. 2005, 102.

37 *Ibid.* 107.

38 This analysis of the problems is something like a *cantus firmus* throughout the whole book. Cf. e.g. Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*, New York/London 2002, X, XIII, 36, 53f, 73, 186. The necessity to move away from neoliberalism is also emphasised in Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization. A*

4.3. A public theology of globalisation implies an “involved realism”

We have learned from Bonhoeffer that realism is not to be mixed up with a normative exaltation of the present. Whoever denounces visions of a just world as illusions by referring to the world as it is whether we like it or not, cannot claim to represent a theologically understood realism. This realism is a view of the world as reconciled in Christ. However it also involves seeing the difference between the world visible and the world as it is in Christ. Christian realism is aware of this difference and seeks to overcome it. Therefore it is always “involved realism” for it implies involvement in the world and for the world. For a public theology of globalisation, involved realism means the sober analysis of empirical data and economic facts, relating them to a perspective of the world which sees this world as a place “where justice and peace embrace” (Ps 85:11) and which implies the involvement for making this reality visible.

Involved realism leads beyond both the idealisation of the free market and the condemnation of the free market. Instead, a sober analysis needs to show in what cases liberalisation leads to an improvement of the situation for the poor and in what cases it leads to the opposite. The evidence shows that the neo-liberal shock therapy imposed on Russia and many other countries by the IMF has not strengthened their economies, but led to tremendous hardship for their populations while leaving the countries' economies unprotected against the far more competitive economic actors in the powerful nations of the North. In the case of the moderate and publicly supervised liberalisations of China, Malaysia and South Korea, economic development has reached the poor and led to a considerable reduction of the poverty rate.³⁹ Meanwhile there is a growing consensus among economists and political theorists that the experience of the Asian crisis must lead to a new international financial architecture.⁴⁰

The same applies to the role of transnational corporations. If foreign direct investments are part of a publicly accountable economic strategy, which makes sure that the benefit of these investments does not remain exclusively with the corporations, but reaches the population of the country, these corporations can be partners instead of adversaries, as the EKD document says. If these corporations destroy local economic development and pursue their interest by bribery and the exercise of power against the interests of the population of the host countries, they have to be confronted with a critical counter-public and governmental correction. Foreign direct investments, as Stiglitz shows with many examples, are ambivalent. Only an effective set of international rules supervised by democratically responsible international institutions can make sure that such investments really are also to the benefit of the poor. In any case it is clear that a global social policy is on the agenda.⁴¹

Critical Introduction, 2nd edition, Hounsgrove/New York, 2005: “... contemporary globalization could yield much better results in terms of human security, social equality, and democracy with a change of policy course from neoliberalism to a blend of ambitious reformism and cautious transformism ...” (8). For a critical analysis on neoliberal globalisation see also: Richard L. Harris/Melinda J. Seid (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Globalization and Neoliberalism in the Developing Countries*, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000.

39 Stiglitz, *ibid.*, 181f.

40 See Ben Thirkell-White, *The IMF and the Politics of Financial Globalization: From the Asian Crisis to a New International Financial Architecture*, Hounsgrove/New York, 2005. Similarly Heribert Dieter, *Die Zukunft der Globalisierung. Zwischen Krise und Neugestaltung*, Baden-Baden 2005. Dieter affirms Joseph Stiglitz' plea for a “Post-Washington-Consensus as a consequence of the analysis of the Asian crisis (394-396). A Comparison of different proposals for a reform of the international financial architecture can be found in Michael Frenkel/Lukas Menkhoff, *Stabile Weltfinanzen? Die Debatte um eine neue internationale Finanzarchitektur*, Berlin/Heidelberg/New York 2000, 102-112.

41 For an account of how such global social policy can be developed, see: Vic George/Paul Wilding, *Globalization and Human Welfare*, Hounsgrove/New York, 2002, 200-211.

The future ecumenical debate should carefully look at the different empirical cases of the globalisation effects on the various countries to make a judgement on the economic strategies in tune with the preferential option for the poor. It is noteworthy that if we assess the concrete steps, which are called for in the Accra document and in the German document, large areas of agreement become visible.⁴² If the concept of the liberalisation of markets is not a fig leaf for the powerful countries to get access to the markets of the South, but a chance for the countries of the South to sell their products in the Northern markets and thereby gain economic strength to develop a socially responsible economy on their own, such liberalisation has a potential to serve the poor and can potentially find consensus across the different views in ecumenical thought on globalisation. A “Cosmopolitan Social Democracy”⁴³ could be the vision, originating in “involved realism”.

4.4. A public theology of globalisation is designed to support a strong role of the churches in global civil society.

Public theology must choose a language that can be understood by secular society without denying its theological origin. Wolfram Stierle has argued that both fundamentally critical language and reformist language has a place in contributing to the public debate. Beyond the question of how much new social movements such as “Attac” or church groups such as “Kairos Europa” can contribute to practicable solutions for a reform of the global economic system, they have an important role in bringing the ongoing injustice of the present system to the mind of a global public and to the mind of the leading elites who are sometimes astonishingly remote from the situation of the people about whom they decide. Joseph Stiglitz has underlined the important role of the anti-globalisation demonstrations in Seattle 1999 and afterwards for the beginning atonement of the international financial institutions. Practically overnight - he says - globalisation became the most urgent issue of our time passionately discussed all over the world. Stiglitz also expressed - and this is remarkable from the mouth of one of the leading actors in these institutions - that these protests have led governments and international institutions to a critical re-evaluation of their policies.⁴⁴ The demonstrations with their effect of public de-legitimisation of neo-liberal globalisation policies have opened up new space for debate on the effects of globalisation and the necessity of reform.⁴⁵ Therefore, academics and church leaders of the North who criticise undifferentiated language and uncompromising attitudes in the documents and actions of the ecumenical movement, especially by its representatives from the South, should keep this aspect in mind. The effectiveness of strategies for change in a world dominated by power interests is not always congruent with the Habermasian ideal of discourse.

At the same time such discourse plays a crucial role in global publics strengthening their democratic potentials. The change in the heads of more and more politicians and economists

42 Hitzler, *ibid.* 199

43 This is the programme which David Held and Anthony McGrew develop from their discussion of the arguments of defenders and critics of globalisation. See especially: David Held/Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization*, Cambridge/Oxford/Malden 2002, 118-136.

44 Stiglitz, *ibid.* 4.

45 For an interpretation of the anti-globalisation movement as the potential for a fundamental systemic change see: Henry Veltmeyer (ed.), *Globalization and Antiglobalization: Dynamics of Change in the New World Order*, Hunts/Burlington 2004, especially in the conclusion of the editor (196). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have continued their analysis of the “Empire” by describing the role of the “Multitude”, that is the power of the people to resist the empire and develop a new global society beyond “empire” (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York 2004).

questioning the neo-liberal approach is only possible because there are people who can explain the good reasons for the protests beyond the slogans demonstrators use to gain attention. Economists like Stiglitz, as much as church leaders like Wolfgang Huber and secular intellectuals like Jürgen Habermas, who would all run as representative for the reformist approach, have a crucial role in helping to transform a situation of questioning the old approaches into the rise of new policies. To put it in one sentence: Fundamental critics and reformists in the ecumenical debate are allies. Both approaches are needed and both need to understand what the crucial role of the other is. There are only few people who embody the legitimate concern of the radical and the reformist in one person, combining the radical's clarity of decision and dedicated involvement with the reformist's ability to move in the world of the powerful. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of them - at a specific place and in a specific time. Even if these qualities do not appear in the same person, the awareness of their value is needed.

4.5. A public theology of globalisation is a theology of hope trusting that this world is reconciled.

Assuming a destructive internal dynamic of competitive global markets, which can never be stopped or modified, would be a declaration of moral bankruptcy for the world community. It would sacrifice democracy as the power of the people to be agents of history on the altar of economic power. This cannot be an option for Christians. Christians worship a different God. Christian faith assumes that God is the creator, governor and redeemer of the world and that the world has been reconciled by Christ. Witness to God in our times means actively living toward making a world visible that mirrors the dignity of every single human being created by God. The power and motivation for this witness comes from the experience of God's love in worship, prayer and Christian fellowship, as Christians experience and enact it in their churches. It also comes from a redirection of our senses away from an agony that stares at the catastrophes and overlooks the signs of hope.

A public theology of globalisation is based on faith, love and hope. Let me therefore quote again Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His famous words are a beautiful description of this perspective. In the midst of his involvement in the resistance against Hitler, Bonhoeffer writes:

“It is true that there is a silly, cowardly kind of optimism, which we must condemn. But the optimism that is will for the future should never be despised, even if it is proved wrong a hundred times ... There are people who regard it as frivolous, and some Christians think it impious for anyone to hope and prepare for a better earthly future. They think that the meaning of present events is chaos, disorder, and catastrophe; and in resignation or pious escapism they surrender all responsibility for reconstruction and for future generations. It may be that the Day of Judgment will dawn tomorrow; in that case we will gladly stop working for a better future. But not before.”⁴⁶

There are many examples in history where the impossible has happened. The image of Nelson Mandela dancing before the eyes of the world after his release from prison has been eternally ingrained into the memory of the world. As a German who had been raised 10 kilometres from the barbed wire which separated the two parts of Germany and then witnessed the fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 I am blessed enough to have experienced the openness of history in my own life. After the lifting of the *Iron curtain* between East and West, it is the great challenge of our time, now, to lift the *Golden curtain* which separates us in the North from the people in the South, so that gold and riches are no more a reality that divides the world but are used to commonly serve the whole world.

46 D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York 1972, 15f.