

## MAJOR CHALLENGES THAT THE WORLD CHURCH FACES TODAY

### C. René Padilla

My basic premise in this lecture is that the main challenges that the Church faces today are directly derived from the phenomenon of *globalization*. I must not, however, assume that everyone would agree on the meaning of this term. In my edition of the *Oxford Dictionary* it does not even appear! One can hardly be surprised that there are many people who would find it exceedingly difficult to come up with a definition of it. That being the case, it may help us to start by referring to three cases by way of illustrations of globalization taken from real life.

*Case 1:* In Yalálag, a small village on the mountains of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, my wife and I heard a group of small farmers tell us why so many young people from the various surrounding peasant communities are leaving their lands: 'We cannot make a living by raising corn any longer', they said. 'The corn that we produce here is much more expensive than the corn which is imported from the United States, which is subsidized by the U.S. Government. Mexico lives on corn, but now most of the corn that our country consumes is imported, and we have been put out of business because we cannot compete with subsidized corn. As a result, many of our young people are migrating to the United States and sooner or later we have to sell our lands.' The fact is that, in a world in which more than a billion people live with less than \$1 per day, the Government of the United States allocates billions of dollars to subsidizing mainly large agribusiness. These subsidies lead to the massive 'dumping' of USA agricultural products on world markets, causing the bankruptcy of local farmers, who cannot compete with prices that are below their production costs.

*Case 2:* In North Carolina we heard a similar story, also related to free trade - one of the main aspects of the phenomenon of globalization. In this case the people affected were a family who owned a textile factory. But not only they, since that factory had been used for many years to empower poor people by providing on-the-job training which would enable them to eventually get better jobs. The death blow for that factory came with the importation of cheaper textiles from Japan.

*Case 3:* Another aspect of globalization is illustrated by the family situation described some time ago by Ignacia Chávez de Cabrera, a poor woman who was living with her five children in a Latin American slum. They had a television and a stereo set. 'Neither works', she complained, 'but we are still having to pay for them. It was my husband's idea. He was talked into it by the shopkeeper! Now 100 pesos a week go on those things and I do not have enough money for milk for the kids.'

Many similar stories could be told, showing the effects of globalization on people all over the world. On the basis of the three cases referred to, however, it should by now be clear the type of globalization that we are here talking about. We are not concerned in this lecture with globalization simply as the process through which multiple aspects of the natural, cultural, social, economic, and political reality that conform the *milieu* of human life have become interconnected in such a way that what happens or is done in one place is known by people in other places around the globe. Viewed from this perspective, globalization is experienced more than anything else in terms of a sort of planetary consciousness - the sense that a growing number of people all over the world seem to have of belonging to one world, as portrayed by the media. Perhaps a more appropriate term for it would

be *internationalization*. That topic would deserve serious study, but that is not the subject of this lecture. Nor are we here concerned with the anti-globalization movement, clearly portrayed by the massive historical protests that took place in Seattle during a summit meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in December 1999. Hundreds of thousands of protesters from all over the world compelled the WTO to interrupt the meeting, despite the efforts of heavily armed police to repress the demonstration. We do not intend to deal here with today's global battle against globalization. Our focus here is, rather, on the *capitalist globalization* promoted by business corporations and increasingly affecting people, especially the poor, everywhere, oftentimes in a negative way.

## **Transnational Practices and Assumptions**

The capitalist globalization is a phenomenon that for many people represents a curse while for many others suggests a blessing, depending on its impact on men and women, young and old, living under different circumstances. This ambiguity, however, is dispelled when it is recognized that the dominant form of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the globalization of so-called neo-liberal capitalism. According to Leslie Sklair (2002:8), capitalist globalization, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, is 'a particular way of organizing social life across existing state borders' and includes three inter-related transnational elements or (as he calls them) 'practices': 1) the *transnational corporation*, 'the major locus of transnational economic practices': 2) the *transnational capitalist class*, 'the major locus of transnational political practices', and 3) the *transnational culture-ideology of consumerism*, 'the major locus of transnational culture-ideology practices'. The primary moving force of today's economic global system is the transnational capitalist class made up of globalizing bureaucrats, politicians, and professionals', that, according to Sklair (9) 'derives its material base from the transnational corporations... and the value system of the culture-ideology of consumerism' and engages in 'practices that cross [national] borders but do not originate with state actors, agencies, or institutions.' All the evidence seems to point to the conclusion that 'Global capitalism, driven by the TNCs [transnational corporations], organized politically through the transnational political class, and fuelled by the culture-ideology of consumerism, is the most potent force for change in the world today' (47). The threat to democracy that this form of globalization represents has been eloquently brought out by George Soros, himself a successful capitalist, who writes: 'Although I have made a fortune in the financial markets, I now fear that the untrammelled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values into all areas of life is endangering our open and democratic society. The main enemy of the open society, I believe, is no longer the communist but the capitalist threat' (1997:45).<sup>1</sup>

Since that indictment against capitalism was written, the global capitalist system has shown to be the greatest threat not only to democracy but also to the environment and to the very survival of humankind and especially of the poor around the globe.

---

<sup>1</sup>Soros expanded this thesis in *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: The Open Society Endangered* (1998). In line with Soros, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, in *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*, chapter 2 (30-45), 'Disabling Democracy: Subordinating Democratic Political Power to Economic Power', convincingly argues that 'Corporate and finance-driven globalization disables moral agency by disabling democracy. More specifically, globalization subordinates democratic political power to unaccountable economic power. This corrosion of democracy undermines citizens' capacity to shape economic structures, policies, and lifestyles that will build social justice and establish regenerative Earth-human relations' (39).

In view of the predominant role of capitalism in this new era, a correct understanding of what is going on in the world in general and in the nation-states in particular, which affects the poor, requires an analysis of the basic assumptions of the global capitalist system. No full discussion of this subject is here possible, but the assumptions can easily be recognized in the arguments employed by the advocates of global capitalism to defend their position.

The most common economic assumption is that the integration of the local economies into the global capitalist system is the door that leads to economic progress - it benefits the industrialized as well as the 'developing countries', the consumers as well as the producers, and it fosters competition by spreading technological knowledge, thus raising the level of productivity and profit-maximization everywhere. Such integration involves 'deregulation', that is, the removal of barriers to the free flow of trade and capital investment, which will in turn set limits to the role of the government and reduce the possibility of corruption, stagnation, and bureaucracy - the evils that have hindered the growth of 'developing economies'. This orthodox recipe for economic growth through the free market is spelled out in the so-called Washington Consensus, promoted by the United States, and enforced by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. It is supposed to provide the solution to world-wide poverty - if faithfully applied, even the poor countries will eventually become a part of the so-called 'First World' and their people will be able to experience the joys of living in the consumer society.

Goudzwaard and de Santa Ana (2003) have summarized the basic characteristics of this approach in three principles: 1) The Galileo-Descartes principle of *the primacy of the mathematical method*, which implies the possibility to reduce *physis* (nature) to a series of calculated entities and is directly linked with the operational or instrumental side of modernity. 2) The Hobbes-Rousseau principle of *social-constructive rationality*, which regards natural law as the basis for a logical (re)construction of human society. 3) The Locke-Spinoza principles of *individual freedom and equality*, which started from the recognition of individual rights - including private property -, but were also related to a positive evaluation of *self-interest*. Eventually modernity and individual freedom came to be regarded as two sides of the same coin and found their way into the United States Declaration of Independence, into the new French Constitution, and into the structuring of economic life, for which Adam Smith laid the scientific basis. A further step was taken later on by Jeremy Bentham, the first thinker who used a mathematical method to check all types of social reconstruction with 'the maximum happiness for the greatest number', thus relating the ordering of society to the fulfilment of human wishes as the ultimate goal.

These Enlightenment principles became the basic assumptions of the ideology of modernity, which have permeated the Western spirit throughout the last three centuries. It was taken for granted that a rational approach would lead to socioeconomic reconstruction; that the mathematical-mechanical method was the way to attain economic efficiency; that autonomous will and individual self-determination were the main actors in economic development; and that utilitarian intervention in society is to be encouraged as long as it promotes the (material) well-being of all. On this basis, freedom and welfare became the political goals to be achieved not only in private but also in public life. Moreover, the relative rise in the standards of living and the achievements of science and technology led people to believe in the inevitability of progress - knowledge was increasing and, provided that the principles were faithfully applied, it would result in improvements in every area of human life. In time, this faith in progress through economy, science, and technology was firmly

established and found its way into a modernization program, of which globalization may be regarded as the latest stage. The transnational corporations are the latest and most sophisticated embodiment of assumptions that took shape in Europe before the eighteenth century. The members of the transnational class are direct descendants of the Enlightenment. The transnational culture-ideology of consumerism is a revised version of modernity.

### **The class-polarization**

There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that the validity of the economic system built on the assumptions of the Enlightenment can no longer be taken for granted. Far from reducing poverty, the capitalist global system has become the main contributing factor in the extension and deepening of this major scourge. Indeed, the net result of the free-market formula is what Leslie Sklair has called a 'class polarization' - the emergence of a 'corporatocracy', managed by a transnational class made up of materially wealthy and politically powerful people over against increasing masses of poor and deprived people unable to satisfy their basic needs everywhere. The widening gap not only between rich and poor countries but also between the rich and the poor within countries, including those belonging to the First World, clearly shows that the global capitalist system benefits the rich minority but locks the poor majority into poverty.

The fact is that no analysis of Western society is complete if it does not take into account the role that material wealth plays in the free-market economy not only in the industrialized countries but all over the world today. Built on the assumption that economics is a positive, neutral, value-free science dealing with questions of production, consumption, income, and money in the market, the global economic system is almost totally oriented to the accumulation of wealth rather than to the satisfaction of basic human needs. According to Goudzwaard and de Lange, this system has as a result neglected at least four fronts: economic needs, nature and the environment, economic accountability, and labour. 'Neoclassical economics was not designed to help these problems.' (59) Wealth for the sake of wealth is the motto. The profit motive takes precedence over the subsistence motive; labour and raw materials are mere commodities. Under the rule of Mammon, the world is deeply affected by ecological, economic, and human vulnerabilities. It has become a 'global casino' (Toffler 1975:1), one of whose fundamental characteristics is 'the inability of national regulatory mechanisms to deal with transnational economic realities.' (5)

This last statement by Toffler points to one of the main marks of the present-day global capitalist system: 'transnational economic realities which transcend national regulatory mechanisms'. The institutional forms of these realities are transnational corporations, banks, and international financial institutions whose economic practices transcend national boundaries. In the Latin American countries we are painfully aware that, whether we like it or not, we are part of a world economic system over which our nation-states and their governments have very little control or none at all. To speak of globalization today is basically to speak of 'transnational economic realities' that decisively condition human life all over the world on both an individual and a community level. What has been globalised is, in fact, the so-called neo-liberal capitalist system with the industrialized countries at the centre. The transnationalization of productive, trading, and monetary capital has transformed the planet Earth into a world market oriented toward the accumulation of capital for the benefit of a small powerful minority who are able to define national policies according to their economic

interests, with total disregard for the basic needs of the population.<sup>2</sup> As Duchrow has put it (1995:71), ‘With the transnational finance markets as the agents of the owners of money assets, the capitalist market economy has made significant progress towards its goal of running world society as an appendage to self-regulating markets.’

If anything is clear today, it is that the solution that politicians, under the control of, or in connivance with, the wealthy minority, are trying to implement in the face of the paradoxes posed by the present global economic system is simply not working. At the root of the solution they propose is the assumption that economic problems are to be solved by letting the market of goods and services function freely, in conformity with the principle of competition. In practice, in a society characterized by a stark imbalance of power, the unavoidable result of competition is that the strong become stronger and the weak become weaker. In economic terms, the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. That this is, in fact, what is happening does not need to be demonstrated here. There is an overwhelming quantity of published evidence to show the devastating effects that market fundamentalism is having on the poor sectors of the population not only in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but also in the wealthy countries; and not only on people, but also on the environment.

The emergence of the new class polarization – the polarization between the rich and the poor, the most dramatic effect of the global market economy -- becomes most visible in the Majority World. At the top of the social ladder are ‘the elect’ who benefit from the system - the owners and managers of financial assets, the politically powerful, the market consumers *par excellence*.<sup>3</sup> At the bottom are ‘the excluded’ - the increasing mass of people whose role with regard to the market is limited to that of (largely uninformed) spectators. They are excluded from the market, although not from society, because they are regarded as totally redundant in relation to the national and international financial transactions that take place at the top of the economic system. They are the first to suffer the consequences of climate change as well as of drastic budgetary reductions in education, health, housing, social security, retirement programs, etc., imposed by the power holders. Unable to cover their basic needs, they pay the so-called *social cost* of macro-economic development. They are the victims that the system sets aside for the human sacrifice required by the ‘idolatry of the market’! (Assmann and Hinkelammert 1989).

A few years ago it was often said that, by selling their raw materials to the wealthy, the poor countries were mortgaging their future. Under the present capitalist global system their predicament has worsened to the point that there is no exaggeration in saying that no longer do the poor have a future to mortgage, for their future has been sold to the wealthy together with their present. Add to this the obvious ecological unsustainability of this perverse economic system, and one cannot avoid raising the question as to how it is possible that the myth should persist that *laissez-faire* capitalism

---

<sup>2</sup>According to Sklair, this [class] is transnational in at least five senses: [Its members tend to share global as well as local economic interests; they seek to exert economic control in the work place, political control in domestic and international politics, and culture-ideology control in everyday life; they tend to have global rather than local perspectives on a variety of issues; they tend to be people from many countries, more and more of whom begin to consider themselves citizens of the world as well as of their places of birth, and they tend to share similar lifestyles, particularly patterns of luxury consumption of goods and services” (2002:28-29).

<sup>3</sup>To them Toffler refers in the following terms: ‘Multinational corporate executives, bankers, and money people are not sinister characters out of some *Pravda* cartoon. They are not all spies and counter-revolutionary saboteurs as the T&T role in Chile suggests. They are simply investors, managers, and planners taking advantage of the world’s biggest loophole [the lack of adequate regulations for global corporations] and upsetting the world economy in the process’ (1975:78).

will lead the whole world into an era of bonanza in which ‘the maximum happiness for the greatest number’ will be attained. The answer lies in what Sklair has aptly denominated the ‘transnational culture-ideology of consumerism’, effectively spread all over the world through the mass media (2002:108-115). In fact, the mass media today play a predominant role in creating a global consciousness but also in facilitating the wide acceptance of the values of the consumer society, including the priority of money and material things in all areas of life. When public opinion is subjected to manipulation on the part of big economic interests, questions of public education, health, housing and ecological sustainability are indefinitely postponed for the sake of short-term profit-maximization and economic growth. To this end, the mass media make a qualitative difference with regard to the way in which power is today exercised by the powerful.

## II. IN SEARCH OF A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO GLOBALIZATION

A sad comment on the neglect of the negative effects of capitalist globalization on the part of Christians is the almost total absence among us of a social and political ethic. No one would deny that there is a great distance between *understanding* the complex problems that beset the poor on a local, national and global scale and putting into practice that which ought to be done. Even so, the least one would expect of people who claim to believe in a God of love and justice is an effort to articulate, in light of Scripture, a vision of a better world - not the Kingdom of God on earth, but here and now through human effort, but a more just society, more coherent with what God intends for humankind. On the basis of that vision, we will be in a better position to answer questions that are absolutely basic for a truly Christian lifestyle: What is the Christian response to capitalist globalization? How can Christians, as individuals and as communities, make a difference in a globalized world dominated by a transnational capitalist class that derives its power from the transnational corporations and the culture-ideology of consumerism?

I cannot even begin to suggest a detailed response to these questions in this essay. The most I can do is to attempt to mention some of the main challenges that these questions pose to those of us who confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and accept the authority of Scripture in all matters not only of faith but also of practice. Prior to the consideration of these challenges, however, we need to agree on the legitimacy of the questions. Sad to say, we cannot even take for granted that Christians in general will agree that the questions of involvement in issues of social and economic justice are relevant to the life and mission of the church in today’s world!

### Four Disabling Factors

There are at least four factors that oftentimes prevent Christians from dealing with these issues. One factor is the passive acceptance of economic Darwinism. From this perspective, hard work results in individual success - individual economic progress -, while poverty is the result of laziness. Does not the Bible say, ‘A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come on you like a robber and want like an armed warrior’ (Prov. 6:10-11)? In answer to this position, it must be said that no one would deny the frequent connection between laziness and poverty and between hard work and wealth. But what about other reasons for poverty, such as natural disasters or exploitation, and other reasons for wealth, such as inheritances and oppression?

Another disabling factor is the privatization of faith. In a world that is split between the sacred and the secular, faith is restricted to the private life; it bears on questions of individual morality but is totally unrelated to worldly matters such as economics and politics. Accordingly, the task of the church is to preach the gospel for the salvation of souls; it should not be distracted with tasks that may be good but do not directly bear on the question of eternal life. Issues of social and economic justice should be left to the state. But what then is the role of the state? Should it be reduced to insuring religious freedom, curtailing abortion or homosexuality, and promoting economic growth through business corporations?

A third factor is a sort of eschatological paralysis derived from a futuristic view of the Kingdom of God. In the future, it is said, God will establish his Kingdom of justice and peace. We need not be concerned about changing the world, which, according to Biblical teaching, it is said, is going to get worse before Jesus' return and will in the end be destroyed. Our present task is restricted to making disciples, not to changing the world. Besides, did not Jesus say, 'the poor you will always have with you'? The question we have to raise in response to this position is whether the Kingdom of God can be properly understood exclusively in terms of a future category. If Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord 'to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Lk 4:18-19), does his mission make any difference with regard to the way in which the church today prolongs his mission in the present, in anticipation of the consummation of the Kingdom? Does the inauguration of the Kingdom in the person and work of Jesus Christ have any relevance for the way in which the church understands her mission?

Christians who reject the idea of involvement in issues of social and economic justice because of one or more of the three factors we have mentioned so far may appeal to Scripture in order to support their arguments. A much more difficult task, however, is to marshal Biblical evidence to provide a rationale in favour of what may be the strongest factor disabling many Christians all over the world to express love for justice in practical ways, namely, a massive accommodation of the church to the consumer society. As Sklair (2002:116) has put it:

'Without consumerism, the rationale for continuous capitalist accumulation dissolves. It is the capacity to commercialize and commodify all ideas and the products in which they adhere, television programmes, advertisements, newsprint, books, tapes, Cds, videos, films, the Internet, and so on, that global capitalism strives to appropriate. Habermas... pointedly termed this 'the colonization of the lifeworld'.'

Sad to say, all too often it is this 'colonization of the lifeworld' by consumerism, effectively promoted by the mass media, what prevents us from putting into practice the Pauline injunction to Christians not to conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, so that they can discern 'what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. 12:2).

## Three Basic Challenges

Only if we agree that we Christians ought to be involved in issues related to the care of God's creation and socioeconomic justice, we will see the need for a Christian response to present-day capitalist globalization. Time does not allow me to try to provide a full-fledged response, but I would like to briefly outline three important challenges that the Church must face in order to be faithful to God as she seeks to respond to this global phenomenon: the theological challenge, the missiological challenge, and the spiritual challenge.

### *The Theological Challenge*

Western (at least Protestant) theology is all too often divorced from practical life. Its focus is on orthodoxy, oftentimes in academic garb, with little or no concern for orthopraxis. In Dyrness' words (2003:15), 'If medieval theologians were preoccupied with being, one might say Protestant theologians came to focus almost exclusively on truth.... Religiously speaking, one might say that *doing* something was in danger of being replaced by *thinking* about something.' As a result, theology frequently fails to provide the church the necessary guidelines for the care of God's creation or for action on behalf of socioeconomic justice in society.

As heirs of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, we all agree that salvation is by grace through faith: 'it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one can boast' (Eph 2:9). But we cannot stop at that. In Ephesians 2 Paul goes on to say that we are God's workmanship, 'created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (v. 10). If we believe that our God is a God of justice, and if justice is 'to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them' (Walter Brueggemann), what are the good works that God expects from us as his people in the face of a world controlled to a large extent by a transnational class that, for the sake of profit, is increasingly institutionalizing injustice on a global scale? What is God's will for our way of life today, and in what sense is it a far superior alternative to the way of life designed according to the values of the consumer society?

The way of life that God wills for those who have been created in Christ Jesus is a way of life that God wills for every human being. It is not to be attained by human effort, but it does require decisive human participation, and it is in connection with this requirement that God has instituted the State as an agent of justice. From this perspective, I would like to propose that one of the most urgent challenges that the Christian Church has to face today is the task to define in light of Scripture the role of the State in relation to God's purpose that justice and peace prevail in society.

I am aware that the task that I am proposing falls in the field of social ethics – a field in which evangelical reflection, deeply affected by individualism, registers one of its greatest deficits. The task is made all the more urgent, however, by the global economic system described above. One of the basic assumptions of this system is that, in accordance with the neo-liberal ideology, since the market is the "invisible hand" that works in everyone's benefit. State economic regulations are not only unnecessary but also obstructive to economic growth. The logical consequence of this approach is the privatization of every sector of economic life, which in turn results in the virtual disappearance of the State with regards to the common good.

To be sure, there is no basis to believe that our duty as Christians is to seek to install a State that will impose Christian morality on everybody. It is clear, however, that if the State is to fulfil its God-given role in relation to justice, it is its duty to act in order to make sure that food and water, health care, education, housing, social security, pure air and religious freedom are accessible to all the members of society without exception. It is totally unacceptable to leave the task of insuring that common people are able to meet these basic needs in the hands of opportunist politicians, selfish entrepreneurs or financial speculators. The State cannot privatize these sectors because the aim of private capital is generally the maximization of profit and not the well-being of all. The State that, either due to ineptitude or negligence, ignores the needs of its people is not fulfilling its most basic commitment and places itself under God's judgement. In evangelical tradition the State is one of the orders of creation whose inescapable duty is to provide for all human beings adequate opportunity for a decent life and relationships based on justice.

### *The Missiological Challenge*

For too long in evangelical circles we have identified the mission of the church with transcultural missions and have defined our task as that of saving souls and planting churches. I have no doubt that mission includes personal evangelism, and that evangelism involves a call to repentance and faith. Scripture, however, does not allow us to reduce the mission of the church to the oral proclamation of the Gospel nor to view mission as the responsibility of a few Christians willing to become overseas missionaries.

The International Congress on World Evangelism, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, was a milestone in the evangelical camp in terms of the acceptance of a new understanding of the comprehensive character of the mission of the church. Paragraph 5 of the *Lausanne Covenant* exemplifies this understanding in the following terms:

'We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty, for both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exit. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.'

Since this statement was drafted, the situation of the world has become much more complicated from the perspective of class polarization and the destruction of the ecosystem. Today it is all the more necessary to recognize that the mission of the church includes the prophetic word and involvement in issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The need for a view of mission that gives proper attention to the personal as well as to the social dimension of the gospel and grants equal importance to being, doing, and saying the witness to Jesus Christ is present *everywhere* - in East and in the West, in the North and in the South. That is the view of mission that the Micah Declaration calls *integral mission* and defines in the following terms:

‘Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.’

If there was a time when *mission* could be defined primarily in geographical terms, as a one-way movement from Christian countries to ‘mission fields’ beyond, that time is past. Mission (in singular) begins with God and is at the very heart of the church; missions (in plural) are the multiple ways in which the church everywhere crosses a wide variety of frontiers in order to make the transforming power of the triune God visible in every area of human life. Every human need is a ‘mission field’ and all believers are called to cooperate with God in his purpose to manifest, in relation to that purpose and by the power of the Spirit, the love and justice that were revealed in Jesus Christ. The benefits of the gospel cannot be separated from mission as the central task of the church. Consequently, for every person who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, active participation in God’s mission to make life whole is both a privilege and a responsibility.

Undeniably, ‘the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil’ 1 Tim. 6:10) and government policies in the ‘global village’ today are controlled by a transnational class of decision makers dedicated to serving the god Mammon. If that is the case, it is of utmost importance that the Church everywhere face the challenge to develop a missionary strategy that takes serious stock of the need for Christians in different walks of life to fully recognize that ‘one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions’ (Luke 12:15) and support an economy designed for people, not for profit. The call today is for a missiology that, over against the globalization of an unjust economic system built on selfish individualism, aims at the globalization of solidarity across national and ethnic borders.

### ***The Spiritual Challenge***

The result of our critical analysis of the globalization of neo-liberal capitalism may be the feeling that nothing can be done with regard to the problems that this form of globalization has created, especially the polarization between rich and poor and the destruction of the ecosystem. This feeling of helplessness, combined with the common assumption that there is no alternative to the capitalist system, may be the main reason why so many people, Christian and non-Christian, who recognize the negative impact of this global system on life on planet Earth abstain from actively participating in the struggle for socioeconomic and political transformation.

For Christians, however, resistance to the consumer society - a system built on false assumptions and distorted values - is not optional. The problems that global capitalism poses are not merely, nor even

primarily, economic or technical, but moral and spiritual. Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda is right in claiming that ‘the call to “love thy neighbour as thyself” includes a call to subvert structures of exploitation and to forge faithful alternatives’ (2002:xiv). In *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (2008) Tom Sine has provided a wide-ranging survey of many ways in which Christians in many parts of the world are putting into practice this forging faithful alternatives on the basis of values of the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, however, we need to acknowledge that the struggle to which we are called cannot be faced on the basis of mere human strength, since ‘our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (Eph 6:12). As I argued in a symposium on the *Lausanne Covenant* many years ago, ‘Behind the materialism which characterizes the consumer society lie the powers of destruction to which the New Testament refers’ (1976:211). I synthesized the New Testament (especially Pauline) teaching on ‘this world’ as ‘a system in which evil is organized in opposition to God’ and concluded:

‘Both technology and capital can put themselves at the service of either good or evil. From their union, which recognizes no ethical principle, has emerged the society which worships economic prosperity and the consequent material well-being of *homo consumens*. The consumer society is the very social, political and economic situation in which the world dominated by the powers of destruction has taken form today: the blind faith in technology, the irreversible reverence for private property as an inalienable right, the cult of increased production through the irresponsible sacking of nature, the disproportionate enrichment of the multinational [transnational] corporations which further impoverishes the ‘disinherited of the earth’, the fever of consumerism, ostentation, and fashion. This materialism is the ideology which is destroying the human race (213).’

If this interpretation of the nature of the struggle in which we are engaged is correct, as I believe it is, the first requirement for the fulfilment of our call is to heed Paul’s exhortation to be ‘strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power’; to put on ‘the whole armour of God’ consisting of the belt of truth, the breastplate of justice, the gospel of peace; to take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit; and to ‘pray in the Spirit at all times’ (Eph 6:10-18). In other words, the challenge that the Church has to face today in order to respond to the dehumanizing form of globalization that we have briefly analyzed is the challenge to acknowledge with utter seriousness that her life and mission are rooted in the Gospel - the good news concerning the life and work of the our Lord Jesus Christ - and that faithfulness to God in the fulfilment of his purpose for the Church is contingent upon ‘prayer in the Spirit’.

**Rene Padilla**  
**Global Connections’ “Thinking Mission” forum**  
**8 October 2008**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Assmann, Hugo, and Franz J. Hinkelammert. 1989. *Aidolatria do mercado: Ensaio sobre economia e teologia*. Sao Paulo: Vozes..

Duchrow, Ulrich, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action*. Utrecht/Heidelberg: International Books & Kairos Europa.

Dyrness, William A. 2003. 'Reformed=Protestant Imagining', *Theology, News and Notes*. Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary. Fall issue, pp. 14-16.

Goudzwaard, Bob. 1979. *Capitalism anProgress:Diagnosis of Western Society*. Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation.

Goudzwaard, Bob, and Harry de Lange. 1995. *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Goudzwaard, Bod and Julio de Santa Ana. 2003. 'Glolalization and Modernity', Unpublished paper.

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. 2002. *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Padilla, C. René (ed.). 1976. *The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Sassen, Saskia. 1998. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: The New Press.

Sine, Tom, 2008. *The New Conspirators; Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*. Milton Keynes, Bucks: Paternoster Press.

Sklair, Leslie. 2002. Third edition. *Globalization: Capitalism and Its Alternatives*, Oxford: University Press.

Soros, George. 1997. 'The Capitalist Threat', *The Atlantic Monthly* (February): 45-58.

Soros, George.1998. *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Open Society Endangered*. New York: Public Affairs.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2002. *El malestar en la globalización*. Buenos Aires: Taurus, Only the Spanish translation was available to the author.

Toffler, Alvin. 1975. *The Eco-Spasm Report*, New York: Bantam Books.