



LISTEN TO THE
LAND!

RESPONDING TO
CRIES FOR LIFE

OIKOTREE MOVEMENT

Listen to the Land!
Responding to Cries for Life

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Preface

The Oikotree Movement is a global movement of movements striving for justice, peace, and fullness of life, and is sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the Council for World Mission. While we struggle for justice with people's movements and other organizations, the issue of 'land' has emerged as a crucial factor in the destruction of creation itself, with all its beings. Therefore, at the 2013 Oikotree Global Forum, the movement decided to develop a thorough theological reflection on the issue of Land.

The Oikotree Transformative Theology Working Group, one of the five working groups in the Oikotree Movement, has prepared these materials as a resource for churches, other faith communities, and social movements in their response to the economic and ecological crises facing the earth, her peoples and all her beings. We are deeply grateful to the other contributors to this work, listed in the appendix. Their honesty and gracious gift of passionate wisdom has provided the heart of this publication.

We offer this book in support of the peoples' struggles for access to land for satisfying their life needs, and encourage circulation, review, and blog responses/debates. We argue that the pillars of the present dominating system are money and private property linked with ego-centric individualism, which in turn leads to imperial and patriarchal violence.

We call the churches and other faith communities to join the people's struggles to undo hundreds of years of social and economic

oppression. At present, most churches have only condemned, lamented, and apologized for these injustices. The wealth of churches within the former colonial nations and former colonies is derived from the same economic system which has been destroying the lives of Earth's peoples for centuries.

It is time to move beyond confession, take responsibility, and act in solidarity with the people who continue to lose their land, suffer, and die at the hands of colluding governments, corporations, and paramilitaries.

Questions for consideration:

1. The WCC Bogor Statement calls for critical self-reflection and radical spiritual renewal on the part of churches and their members, both individually and communally. What would such reflection and renewal look like in your context? How might you and others engage such a process?

2. Pope Francis describes solidarity as thinking and acting “in terms of community, or the priority of the life of all over the appropriations of goods by a few. It is also to fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights.” How would the life of your family, your organization be changed if you lived in solidarity with the disenfranchised and homeless people in your community?
3. Every region of the globe has small or large social justice movements. How can you, your family, or organization build alliances with and act in solidarity with one or more of them? What holds you back from acting?

Our hope is that responses to these questions, both in thinking and action, will be widely shared with all individuals, communities, movements, seminaries, and churches who join this struggle together. The Oikotree Movement, through its Moderator, the Rev. Dr. Park Seong-Won of Korea, and/or the Oikotree Transformative Theology Working Group, through its Convener, Prof. Dr. Susan E. Davies, are happy to take a facilitating role in the solidarity actions.

Susan E. Davies

Oikotree Transformative Theology
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Table of Contents

Preface 5

Introduction 19

Chapter I. Voices from the Lands Cry for Life

Introduction 25

Statelessness and Identity 28

West Papuans Struggle for Sovereignty and
Justice 31

The Cry of the Palestinians (Kairos
Palestine) 34

The Struggle in Colombia 36

Land Struggles in India 37

Resisting Land Grabbing (Via Campesina) 39

The Mexican Land	43
Land Grabbing in India: An Historical Perspective	44
Conclusion	50

Chapter II. Biblical Voices and Visions calling for Justice

Introduction	52
The First Testament	54
The Second Testament	60
A Missional Theology of the Land	63
Conclusion	66

Chapter III. The Rupture and Hope: An Analysis of the Death-Bound Civilization

Introduction	68
Direct violence	71
Structural violence	74
Cultural violence	82
Religious violence: Prosperity Violence and the Gospel of Greed	84
Conclusion	87

Chapter IV. Towards a Culture of Life

Introduction	90
An Indian Perspective	91
A Black South African Perspective	95
Life-Giving Agriculture (LGA)	97
Indigenous Peoples in North America	101
A Cree view of the land	102
A Mohawk Philosophy of Land	105
Conclusion	108

Chapter V. Structural and Institutional Transformation from a Global Perspective

Introduction	111
A New Culture of Relational Life	112
Conclusion	119

Chapter VI. Initiatives Toward a Culture of Life

Introduction	121
Pope Francis, October, 2014	122
La Via Campesina	124
An Asian Perspective	126
Food and the Seeds for Life Movement	129
Aboriginal Peoples in Canada	130
Indian Nations in the United States	134

Land in Cuba 140

The Pan-African Programme on Land

Resource and Rights (PAPLRR)

Network 146

Conclusion 149

Chapter VII. A Pilgrimage of Justice and Hope

Introcuton 151

Ecumenical statements on land and life 156

World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of

Justice and Peace 157

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 161

What Churches and Congregations Can

Do 163

Conclusion: Toward Justice Together 167

Note on Sources 169

Oikotree Tranformative Theology working
group

Other Contributors/Sources

Listen to the Land!

Responding to Cries for Life

Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread within it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together. All things connect.
Humans merely share the earth.
We can only protect the land, not own it.
Chief Seattle

The Land is not a commodity
(Lev. 23)

The land is a base where life lives,
humans interacting with
the other living beings in the cosmos,
those living beings interacting with humans.

It is a place of conviviality of life
among all living beings.

Dr. Kim Yong-Bok

“Our present struggle for land is
for our future life”

Subothra Mondal, Govindpur, Odisha.

People and earth are crying out. Land is being grabbed, robbed, exploited, poisoned, desertified, eroded. Who responds? People's movements are struggling. But where are the churches? We only hear their loud silence. This is an urgent wake-up call.

Introduction

Land is God's creation, not our property. It is relationship, not solitariness. Land is the solidity on which we walk, our physical contact with the wondrous galaxies stretching beyond our imagination and telescopes. Land is gift and calling. Land is the ground of our life's breath, our experiences of wondrous powers beyond our dreaming. Land is home and labor, beauty and landslides, wholeness and broken life. Land is the past and promise of a future. Land is freedom, not oppressed statelessness. Land connects us with one another, the Earth, and all her beings. Land sings our deep roots in creation – life itself on this small blue, green, white and brown

planet in a tiny corner of the vast universe. Land is the multi-dimensional reality in which we are interwoven in the face of God, the creator.

In contrast to this vision, the European genocidal colonial project carried with it the ‘scientific revolution’ and ‘enlightenment’ which altered Western ideas about human relationships with the land, changing her from Mother Earth to a female thing which had to be chained, cracked open and tortured to reveal her secrets. The expansion of that scientific and mechanistic path is smothering the globe, and has brought us to our present ecological and climatic crises, warping, poisoning, and destroying the Earth and all her beings. Peoples throughout the earth are being systematically forced from their lands by corporations, governments, militaries, and paramilitaries in support of capitalist greed, which exploits and destroys the land. In 2013, the Oikotree Johannesburg Global Forum called for a theological document on land which supports peoples movements, social movements

and civil society movements struggling against these immense destructive forces.

This theological reflection on Land is a response to that call and we share it among human communities throughout the globe. We begin with the voices of suffering peoples, listen to the urgent voices of the Bible, explore the origins of the current death-dealing capitalist imperium, offer visions of new ways of being in solidarity in a post-capitalist civilization, make specific suggestions for structural economic change, name some of the ways peoples movements are both resisting and creating new hope in this critical time for earth's life, and call upon churches and other faith communities, ecumenical groups, and social movements to act urgently in this turning point for the earth and all her beings.

Oikotree is a movement of movements, a combination of critical church related groups, social movements, and individuals who want to stimulate all churches and social groups to cooperate prophetically with the prime actors who are struggling for justice and sustainability around land conflicts. Oikotree provides a platform for sharpening our vision of justice and renewing our solidarity in the struggle for justice in the economy and the earth. We live in solidarity with the social, economic, cultural and political initiatives of historically disadvantaged as well as socially and traditionally excluded communities. Oikotree accompanies its members and organizations through joint and collective actions for reforming faith communities and societies. Oikotree is nurtured, cared for and watered by the Council for World Mission (CWM), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). It is open to groups and individuals who carry justice in their hearts and share this dream of fullness of life for all.

Chapter I.

Voices from the Lands Cry for Life

Introduction

Theology is critical reflection on one's own faith and the received traditions in a particular context with a liberative motive. Most historical theological structures have emerged from the mystical experiences and logic of a few structurally powerful dominant individuals and groups in Europe and Western Asia. In contrast, the 1970s liberation theologians kept the human experiences of the historically,

socially, culturally, economically and religiously excluded communities as the bottom line for their theological articulations. According to the liberation theologians, 'there will not be a revolution without scripture'. The canonical Scriptures are the day-to-day experiences and critical reflections of grass-roots people and communities who, in generations past, struggled for their identity, lives and future. Those struggles and reflections have become the focal point and the source of doing theology.

Here we have documented some contemporary grass-roots experiences as post-canonical Scriptures. These Scriptures are not necessarily Christian encounters. Rather they are life encounters and life stories of peoples' communities. These are their personal stories. They are similar to some of the canonical stories found in Hebrew and Christian scriptures, such as the stories of Ahab and Naboth, the Exodus Narration, the Journey towards the Promised Land, and Joseph and Mary's flight to Egypt. We share these experiences with a commitment

to and conviction of liberative motives to inculcate a consciousness among the listeners/readers to engage in a dialogue of liberation and transformation.

The following first-hand stories give us analyses of suffering peoples whose experiences of the dominant socio-economic systems have resulted in twisted relationships with their lands. These voices from the lands cry for justice and will not be silenced nor submerged. Indeed the voices are both authoritative in their own right, but also representative, in that they amplify and echo real life circumstances and conditions of injustice that clash with their happiness, sense of identity, and well-being. Their refusal to be silenced or submerged is a mark of resilience in the face of ideological actions and distorted ideas of freedom and democracy that accompany capitalism, colonialism, exploitation, imperialism, and patriarchy. The expansion of corporate economic empires of injustice, opposed and resisted by voices from the lands, subvert the very essence of what the people believe and

imagine to be the purposes of peace, justice and shalom in the world. The following plurality of voices, like the lands they reflect, exemplifies a myriad of stories of resistance against the driving capitalist greed that undermines the fabrics of social interdependency that are socio-economic, ecological, environmental, theological, and universally all-life affirming.

Statelessness and Identity

My father was born in the Eastern Cape Province, in a small town called Qumbu, about fifty kilometres north of Mthatha in a Bantustan called Transkei. As a child of a man who was born in Transkei, I was automatically a citizen of Transkei. For many years as I grew up in the ‘South African’ township, I constantly had to contend with the fact that Welkom, the city in which I was born, was not my home and could not be ever be my home for as long as the status quo remained. My father had to carry a Section B passport, which allowed him only to work

in 'South Africa' because he did not qualify for citizenship. Therefore he required an identity document in 'South Africa', despite having stayed and worked in the city for more than forty years or so by the time he retired.

I am a child of a migrant labourer, with physical and psychological scars of living in limbo as I grew up in a place that was not home and could not be home save through constant struggle to carve out home in the city. The physical and mental dislocation from home shaped my upbringing and imaginary of landlessness in the country of my birth with millions of others who share the same experience.

While I continue to travel between my two 'homes'—I guess more spiritually and psychologically—I live in Johannesburg, which since the dawn of democracy in 1994 is becoming a forest of informal settlements. The mushrooming of shack dwellers is in itself an eloquent statement on landlessness and landedness in South Africa. Land evictions continue in

the new dispensation under the guise of a new logic of development in some places, and for market related reasons in others, while the old legacy and spectacle of evictions continues to be experienced by yesterday's landless people. One of the observations I have made, especially with regard to development and recognition of these communities living in shacks on the fringes of city life, is that on average, it takes about twenty years for a community to receive full services for water, sewer and electricity. Thabo Mbeki settlement, for example, is made up of a community that was evicted in 2004 when the land it occupied was sold to expand an airport in anticipation of the 2010 World Cup. Informal settlements are places of "living death" with untold economic and ecological forms of degradation.

The dominant paradigm in democratic South Africa, as shown by a White Paper in the period of transition, the Rustenburg Declaration, and the now current constitutional dispensation, is arguably that of the commodification of land.

Stories of eviction, property devaluation and the mushrooming of informal settlements have continued into the new democratic South Africa.

West Papuans Struggle for Sovereignty and Justice

“The forest is our mother,” say the Papuans. The forest is not only the source of their life, it is the house of their ancestors and therefore they should protect and preserve it. Their communications with and relationship to their ancestors are not about the past but rather the present and the future. Thus, taking away and exploiting the forests destroys the community and banishes the Papuans from the center of their life. The current economic development model destroys the land, and thus has a devastating effect on greater Papuans who depend on their mother and father, nature.

Papuans lived in harmony with their land for tens of thousands of years, and their culture is

the element the Papuan keep until today. The tribal and church structures do not align with either the colonial or the Indonesia government's, which divided the island of Papua into two Provinces. Rather, the Papuan structure consists of seven regions based on the 237 tribes with their land, territory and traditions.

Since Indonesian independence in 1945, the Papuan peoples have been challenging their integration into Indonesia. The New York Agreement of Act of Self Determination in 1962 was supported by the USA and conducted by UNTEA (United Nations Temporary Executive Authority) in July/August, 1963. In that sham process, 1009 Papuan people out of a population of 800.000 chose to join Indonesia. Challenges to that process have continued through the years, with no success as yet.

Under Indonesian rule, the Papuan people have not felt at peace or at home. Rather, they have become strangers in their own land as their economy and political life have been

dominated and controlled by non-Papuans and the central government. The exploitation of their land and sea by multi-national and national corporations, backed by Indonesian security forces, is ever more marginalizing them. Illegal fishing, mining and logging continue to destroy their food sources and homes. The central government responded to a recent report on killings, tortures, sexual violence, disappearances, rape and displacement by sending more troops and showering the Papuan with more money. When the Provincial Autonomy Law and programs were adopted, Papuan leaders called for dialogue with Jakarta because the new law failed to end the violence and actually increased 'development' on the island. Several reports and recommendations by the National Commission on Human Rights and the National Commission on Violence Against Women on the violation of human rights in West Papua remain on the shelf of several ministries.

The Papuan people are still crying for peace and justice in their land, 'West Papua'.

The Cry of the Palestinians (Kairos Palestine)

Our word is a cry of hope, with love, prayer and faith in God. We address it first of all to ourselves and then to all the churches and Christians in the world, asking them to stand against injustice and apartheid, urging them to work for a just peace in our region, calling on them to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land.

In this historic document, we Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed, a call to justice and equality among peoples.

Why now? Because today we have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The decision-makers content themselves with managing the crisis rather than committing

themselves to the serious task of finding a way to resolve it. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing? The problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church...

We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the

divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.

The Struggle in Colombia

The struggle for the land is at the heart of all struggles in Colombia. It has been this way since the Spanish conquests of our continent. The powers that be have been able to maintain their stranglehold on political, economic and military control of the land. They have always had to use violence to do so. However, it was not until the late twentieth century that the struggle for land became exacerbated by the War on Drugs, and drug barons became a part of the Colombian establishment. They did so through massacres, killings and forced displacement. Peasants have had to give up their lives for generations in this struggle against the unlimited accumulation of wealth. To be on the side of struggle for land is to be on the side of the struggle for life.

Land Struggles in India

“I will not let the Government of Orissa take away our land from any one of us!” says Subhatra Mondel (Female age 11), Govindpur Village of Jagatsinghpur District in Orissa, India.

Subhatra is one of the several hundred children who are struggling along with their parents for their homeland, their identity, their livelihood, their present and their future. The reason is that the State Government of Orissa has embarked on a process of land acquisition which it will hand over to a Korean based Phoang Steel Company, called POSCO, who came with 58,000 Crores of Rupees [\$58 billion USD] to engage in land ‘unearthing’ and steel production business in Orissa. Realizing and considering the serious negative impact of the POSCO project on their lives and land, the village people have unitedly come together, and have organized themselves to oppose the process of forceful land acquisition. They have engaged themselves in this non-violent campaign for the past nine years at

various levels. There have been ups and downs in their struggle, but the people have never given up their hope and are continuously struggling for their land and rights.

Now, the people have adopted a simple non-violent strategy of lying on the ground and ‘hugging Mother Earth’ in the face of police and government authorities who are trying to aggressively acquire their land. The children lie in the first row, women in the second row, men, senior citizens, and youth respectively in subsequent rows. This is indeed a very powerful strategy, which has attracted the attention of the public and the entire media world. Several civil society and church leaders have started visiting these villages and are expressing their solidarity by being with them. Many solidarity campaigns both physical and online have been organized all over India and in south Korea.

Subhatra says, “Land is our future, we think of the future only and not of the present. Our present is our ‘struggle for the future’!” A senior

lady from the same village says, “We do not want any kind of compensation or money. Please leave us to live peacefully in our own land”. Similar voices are expressed by several others in Govindpur, Dinkia, and the surrounding villages.

These “Economically Poor, Dalits and Other Backward Communities” [official Indian government titles], men, women and their children, who are in a highly vulnerable position because of the Government’s Development Policies and Projects, are fighting against the powerful. They are like Naboth struggling against Jezebel (the Government authorities) who wants to deceitfully and forcibly acquire their land and hand it over to Ahab (POSCO).

Resisting Land Grabbing (Via Campesina)

In Mali, the Government has committed to give away 800 thousand hectares (3088 square miles) of land to business investors. These are lands of communities that have belonged to them for

generations, even centuries, while the Malian State has only existed since the 1960s. This situation is mirrored in many other countries where customary rights are not recognised. Taking away the lands of communities is a violation of both their customary and historical rights.

Land-grabbing is a global phenomenon led by local, national and transnational elites and investors and governments with the aim of controlling the world's most precious resources. The global financial, food and climate crises have triggered a rush among investors and wealthy governments to acquire and capture land and natural resources, since these are the only "safe havens" left that guarantee secure financial returns. Pension and other investment funds have become powerful actors in land-grabbing, while wars continue to be waged to seize control over natural wealth.

Land-grabbing goes beyond traditional North-South imperialist structures; transnational

corporations can be based in the United States, Europe, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea, among others. It is also a crisis in both rural and urban areas. Land is being grabbed in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe for industrial agriculture, forest plantations, mining, infrastructure projects, dams, tourism, conservation parks, industry, urban expansion and military purposes. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are being expelled from their territories by armed forces, increasing their vulnerability and in some cases even leading to slavery. Market based, false solutions to climate change are creating more ways to alienate local communities from their lands and natural resources.

Despite the fact that women produce most of the world's food, and are responsible for family and community well being, existing patriarchal structures continue to dispossess women from the lands that they cultivate and their rights to resources. Since most peasant women do not

have secure, legally recognised land rights, they are particularly vulnerable to evictions.

The fight against land-grabbing is a fight against capitalism, neoliberalism and a destructive economic model. Through testimonies from our sisters and brothers in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and Uganda, we learned how land-grabbing threatens small scale, family based farming, nature, the environment and food sovereignty. Land grabbing displaces and dislocates communities, destroys local economies and the social-cultural fabric, and jeopardizes the identities of communities, be they farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, workers, Dalits or indigenous peoples. Those who stand up for their rights are beaten, jailed and killed. There is no way to mitigate the impacts of this economic model and the power structures that promote it. Our lands are not for sale or lease.

The Mexican Land

European land grabbing from the American Continent started with Christianity: when Pope Alexander VI granted in 1493 “the whole enchilada” to Spain and Portugal. To continue with the pious language, the United States of America reclaimed its Protestant manifest destiny to plunder from Mexico 51% of its geographical being in the mid-19th century.

Little wonder the Mexican revolution (1910-1921) was led by the two largest peasant armies from the Continent: the army of Francisco Villa alone grouped more than 30,000 women and men, and the army of Afro-Mexican Emiliano Zapata, later led by lay Methodist pastor and martyr Rubén Jaramillo. It was Afro-Mexican Lázaro Cárdenas who during his presidency of Mexico (1934-40) returned land to peasants. Among the Mexican descendants whose lands were taken away by the USA, Reies López Tijerina, a Pentecostal Pastor (1926-2015) deserves a place of honor for his land justice struggles.

The land wars are so pervasive in the current neoliberal system. Thus it comes as no surprise that the first worldwide rebellion against it was a peasant one. On January 1, 1994, the Neo-zapatista movement said “No!” to the privatization and commodification of land.

Once again Mexico is in the world news. This time the rural students of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, have raised their prophetic voice against neoliberalism’s criminal appetite. It’s important to remember that the “Raúl Isidro Burgos Teacher Rural School” was inaugurated by Presbyterian educator Moisés Saenz. Ayotzinapa’s four martyrs and 42 disappeared young people keep crying for justice from their mother land.

Land Grabbing in India: An Historical Perspective

In India, prior to the invasions beginning in the 8th century by Islamic armies and other colonizing countries, communities and their land were part of the region’s resources. They

belonged to either different ethnic communities or to local kingdoms ruled by feudal lords with their own territories. Most of the indigenous communities belonging to different ethnic groups had their own language/dialect, socio-cultural and economic systems of life, governance, and totemic spirituality. The invaders named the natives by different names as they perceived them (food gatherers, hunters, nomadic, settled farmers and communities in transition). Later on the invaders named them Tribals or Adivasis. The Islamic rulers invaded the feudal kingdoms, not the land. They captured the kingdom for its resources and its people, rather than the land as a commodity. Most of the wars were to make the people captives, and then to use them as slaves in building the invaders' aspirations – forts, palaces, conversion to their faith, wealth and such things.

The whole structure changed when the British came. They were invading the people—the indigenous communities which are now called as Tribals, Dalits and Fisherfolk—not only the feudal kings both Hindus and Muslims.

The British also captured the coastal regions occupied by fishing communities. Most of the indigenous communities were at that time in feudal kingdoms and paying royalty or taxes to the Kings and Queens. Many of us feel proud that it was the Tribals (Adivasis) in Kalinga (now Orissa or Odisha) who were the first ones to wage war against the British for their forcible occupation of the Tribal Lands, as early as 1768. That year, under the feudal kings, the tribals of Orissa battled the British and many people died. The indigenous people thought (and think) that the people, the land and resources were one. They fought to nurture and save the land and its peoples. The British took violent control over the forest, the land, and the water for their greed and looted the peoples' resources as a commodity, part of wealth creation.

After India's independence in 1947, most of the feudal kings became representatives of the new democratic government and continued to collaborate with the western powers and continued to loot the resources of the indigenous

peoples, who again waged war against the new Indian government. The peoples' current war is now against the corporates, just as they fought wars of resistance against the powers of the Indian government and the transnational companies, and before them, as they fought the invaders and British. Big dams, mining (extractive industries), plantations, and urbanization were the structural processes until the 1990s. Then the non-violent war of struggles became inevitable within and also against outsiders.

In 1991, India declared the New Economic Policy. The IMF and World Bank changed their economic policies, advocating growth and the development of large scale energy resources to provide for the forthcoming corporate invasion. At the same time in Orissa and India, under the government's claim of national security, the corporates developed nuclear power projects, missile projects and weapons/armaments. In 1991, the government of India took the resources of the

people and handed them over to the corporates in the name of National Development.

Now the struggle is not the communities against the Kingdoms, nor the British, nor the communities against the government, but the communities against the corporates. Liberalization, privatization, and globalization helped market forces exploit the mineral, water and forest resources without any consent of the communities. That does not mean peoples consented to legitimise the growth model based on greed and injustice to exploit the land and the earth. Community displacement of their habitat, their resources, their faith, spirituality and governance systems became an inevitable part of Indian national development in the name of Democracy.

So, when we talk about creation and resources, what we want to say is, we the people refuse to commodify the common goods and make them a market product. Does the constitution of India truly enable the representatives of the people

to appropriate the resources of all for the short-term gain called 'growth', without counting the long-term destruction of the resources and the people?

The fundamental theological flaw of European theology is God's 'ownership' of the land, of nature: understanding theology in the context of ownership. "This God belongs to me, as this land belongs to me." God is privatized. On the contrary, indigenous people do not build temples but rather protect the divine, nature. The totemic cultures have sacred places, sacred groves. In the name of nature, reptiles, trees and so on, we cannot destroy those species. Totemic cultures have conservation built into their very lives. Protecting sacred groves, mountains, water, trees, streams because these are all our ancestors has now been brought under sanction by the Indian government. We are not allowed to protect our sacred groves from the mining companies.

We are called to resist, reject, rebuild and hope.

Conclusion

These voices, from a variety of faiths, lead Christians to look at land differently. According to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, land is the focus of theological expression and articulation. Beginning from the creation narrative through the vision of a 'new heaven and new earth', land is both a reality for the people and a metaphor in which God is always identified with the land, and the land sustains and liberates people.

These stories remind us that the real-life experiences of the peoples' struggles open our eyes to a wide range of land-experiences, from oppression, loss, and exploitation to recovered health, justice and flourishing. Land and human life are interrelated gifts of God, which people have all too frequently turned into mutually exclusive commodities in the all-consuming empire of greedy destruction and death. These stories and historical perspectives remind us to direct our analysis and action so that they concretely serve and support the achievement of

a just and sustainable life for struggling peoples
and the future of the wounded earth.

Chapter II.

Biblical Voices and Visions calling for Justice

Introduction

The cries of suffering peoples urge us to listen afresh to the urgent voices of the Bible. The White churches in South Africa participated theologically, socially, and economically in the violent dispossession and theft of Black South Africans' land. This culminated finally in apartheid, which crushed Black South Africans, and continues to oppress those forced into the

forest of informal settlements. Under ANC rule, South Africa still faces major hurdles to equitable and just land redistribution. Palestinians call all other Christians to revisit any theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people and the dispossession of their land. Via Campesina declares that ‘taking away the lands of communities is a violation of both their customary and their historical rights.’ The communities in Orissa continue their centuries old struggle against the theft of their lands, in Colombia and Mexico the struggles for the land have continued since the Spanish conquests in the name of King and Pope, and in Papua the people still struggle against their government and invasive corporations.

The canonized Scriptures are the testimony of struggles for faithfulness, identity and future by grass-roots people and communities against the principalities and powers of their times. The testimony of current struggles for faithfulness, identity and future can serve as ‘post-canonical scriptures’, a crucial source for doing theology

in our time. In the previous chapter we reported grass-roots experiences similar to some of the stories found in Christian scriptures such as Mary and Joseph's flight to Egypt.

The Bible records the complex history of that land, its peoples and communities, and their struggles for God's justice against military, governmental and economic powers stretching from antiquity through the first centuries after Christ. Every biblical interpretation is situated in particular historical, social, economic, theological and political contexts, so it is important for the reader to know that the Hebrew Scripture interpretation and the Missional part are by a Christian Palestinian, the New Testament by a Christian European.

The First Testament

“Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Deut. 16:20)

A theology of the land according to the Hebrew Bible acknowledges that:

- The land mediates the presence of God and as such demands holiness.
- The land is covenanted. It is always a mandate and not a possession, and as such it requires accountability.
- The land is where the reign of God takes place and it calls for God's agenda to be applied through God's vicegerents.

This means that tenancy and equality are basic categories of a Hebrew theology of the land. No one can claim possession or ownership of any land. Human beings are only tenants in the land, and as such must share the blessings of the land with their neighbors. The land in the First Testament was supposed to be divided equally between the families, and was supposed to be characterized by justice and equal opportunity. It was also to be a safe place for the marginalized and the sojourners.

This is reflected in Psalm 37:10f. – later picked up by Jesus:

“Yet a little while the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight in abundant prosperity.”

The context of that psalm is the situation that the rich have amassed their wealth by direct and structural violence (debt mechanisms). So the psalmist wants to comfort the impoverished by saying:

“Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security”
(v. 3)

This evidently builds on the key message of Deuteronomy: The people must decide between life (the blessed land) and death (loss of land). This relates to the main context of the land issue in the First Testament, i.e. the situation of exile: why has God taken the land away from

us? The answer is: the land in the context of the people of God is the place where God wants to introduce the alternative of justice into the rest of the world, which is characterized by structural sin, violence and death. So land is linked to the decision between goodness and life, evil and death.

In concrete socio-historic terms this decision relates to the debt mechanisms in the new economy built on money and individual private property. Beginning in the 8th century BCE, when free land users could not pay back a credit, they lost their land and had to go into debt slavery because they had been forced to give their land as a pawn for getting credit for seed, charged with interest. This is still happening in India, which has led to 300,000 farmer suicides, many of them women, since the opening of the markets beginning in the 1990s.

The other side of the coin in the Hebrew Scripture is the growth of big landowners (latifundia). Isaiah warns them (5:8f.):

“Ah, you who join house to house,
who add field to field,
until there is room for none but you,
and you are left to live alone
in the midst of the land!
The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing:
Surely many houses shall be desolate
large and beautiful houses without
inhabitant.”

In addition, the theology of the land had always had a universal dimension, pointing towards expansion of the land and the inclusion of new “families” into the family of Israel. This inclusive nature must be rediscovered and highlighted, especially in the face of the many exclusive and excluding voices today. Embedded in the Abrahamic covenant and the so-called Messianic Psalms is the potential for expansion of both land

and people, pointing toward a more inclusive Israel.

The most striking statement that speaks of the inclusive nature of Israel in the coming age is the one by Ezekiel towards the end of his book. He says that sojourners shall be allotted an inheritance among the Israelites (Ezek. 47:21-23). The book of Isaiah has also a strong positive and inclusive attitude towards the nations. The Zion we find there will be inclusive of other ethnicities and nationalities, and the words of God will guide all the nations (Isa. 2:2-3). One of the clearest statements in Isaiah that shows a remarkably positive attitude towards the nations as it pertains to the temple is found in Isaiah 56. There, Isaiah claims that one day the temple will be a “house of prayer for all peoples” – the words Jesus quotes when cleansing the temple (Mark 11:17). In the new temple, everybody will be equal, reminiscent of the original state of humanity.

Isaiah's remarkable vision of a universal Zion and his statement that the temple will be called a house of prayer for all peoples, Ezekiel's words about the equal status of the sojourners and their sharing of the inheritance, and Joel's prophecy that all flesh will receive the Spirit – all reveal a voice within the First Testament tradition that hopes for a future in which Jerusalem, the temple, and the land will be inclusive and open to all. There will be no pure and impure. In this sacred geography, all are sanctified. This should not be seen as an entirely new and surprising development in the biblical narrative. Rather, it was the original purpose of the calling Abraham, which culminated in the declaration that through Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed. Abraham is, after all, the father of many nations (Gen. 17:5).

The Second Testament

A New Testament theology of the land must recognize Jesus' messianic power over the

land (Matt. 28:18, Gal. 3:16). God's people must embody this reality. The non-violent and sacrificial approach of Jesus in receiving his inheritance determines the nature of his reign and the method and approach of his followers in every land.

The most obvious verse about the land spoken by Jesus is Mt. 5:5 in the Beatitudes:

“Blessed are the meek [the non-violent], for they will inherit the earth.”

Here Jesus quotes Psalm 37:10f., cited above. He clearly understood his own mission in the spirit of the Hebrew Bible, the Book of his people. According to Matthew, this can be seen as Jesus begins a long series of parables with the parable of the different kinds of land (Mt 13:3ff.): land can be possessed by Satan or it can bring forth fruit hundredfold. This means that Jesus—like the Deuteronomist—calls the people decide between good and bad use of the land, between life and death.

The prophetic warning against big landowners is taken up in the Second Testament by James:

“Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh, since you have stored up fire for the last days. Listen! The wages of your laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.” (Ja. 5:1-6)

Here the injustice of amassing land by transforming free peasants into day laborers and slaves is expanded by refusing them their wages. So justice and land are linked throughout the Bible.

A Missional Theology of the Land

Let us summarize the biblical understanding of land by sketching what can be described as a missional theology of the land, which applies a Christian version of Israel's theology of her land to new lands. It emphasizes that the land is something to share, not to possess. It is given as a gift for the good of the community, and is shared equally between the members of that community. The principle of shared and inclusive land means that an ideal land is a place where people of all ethnicities and social backgrounds are treated equally. This can be seen in issues like racism, having equal access to education, health care, and job opportunities. Equality also means that people should have freedom of thought, faith, and conscience. These are the basic biblical dimensions of the land issue.

Social Justice: The theology of the land also reminds us that the land is a place where the vulnerable in the society, such as the widows, orphans, and the sojourner (and their equivalent

in today's world) are cared for. This goes beyond acts of charity. Political and economical systems in which a certain privileged minority controls the majority of the land or the main bulk of the economy should be challenged and opposed. The Bible includes many principles that aid the Christian voice and mission as it pertains to socio-economic justice. In today's world, where material possessions are valued more than anything else, Christians should promote adaptable versions of principles such as releasing the land and forgiving debts (the jubilee).

Reconciliation: The gift of land is viewed in the Bible as a step towards the restoration to Eden – a place where humans exercised their vicegerency for the good of creation. An ideal land, following the pattern of Eden, is thus a place where order reigns. This means that we must make every effort to make the land a place of peace, fellowship, and reconciliation. The principle of redemption reminds us that we must make the land a place where enemies meet and are reconciled. The principle of re-

commissioning reminds us that the church should be a community of peacemakers. It must be engaged in active and sacrificial peacemaking in the land.

Care for Creation: The theology of the land (also following the pattern of Eden) realizes the goodness of God's creation. God's intention is to redeem this world, not to annihilate it. God's vision and agenda for the world should be the vision and agenda of God's Church. The theology of the land realizes that we as humans have been entrusted with this earth and we should do our best to use its resources in a responsible way. The Church as God's redeemed vicegerent must thus be actively engaged in care for creation, and participate in discussions about issues like climate change and recycling. The theology of the land means that ecological concerns can never be merely a "side-issue" for the church.

Finally, we must warn against idolizing the land – something to which this very same land itself testifies. Our connection is with the God

of the land, the God whose story the land tells, and not with the land itself. The Crusades and the Crimean War are just examples of how far Christians are willing to go when the land is absolutized over the God of the land.

Conclusion

The Land and all her beings, including humans, are inextricably connected in the creative, justice-seeking purposes of God. The human economic, political, theological and social structures which create the cries for justice we hear in Chapter One, condemned in this chapter's interpretations of the Bible, are violations of God's creative intentions. Jesus is not just the liberator of our minds and spirits; Jesus is the liberator of all peoples, bodily and historically, and the earth herself from exploitation. Land is God's creation, not our property. The land is meant for the use of all the earth's beings, for communities of people, not for the profit of the Roman Legion inhabiting the 1%, the modern Gerasene demoniacs.

It is time to drive out the greedy, all-consuming Legion from the imperial demoniacs, restoring them to their right minds.

Chapter III.

The Rupture and Hope: An Analysis of the Death-Bound Civilization

Introduction

We now explore the origins of the current death-dealing capitalist imperium. The dynamics of capitalist structures, linked to a faith in the human ability to master and dominate nature, are now paradoxically diminishing and destroying the very fruitfulness and viability of creation. We face a novel situation in which

there will be less and poorer land, water, air and ecological systems available for use by a growing human population, and to serve the multi-dimensional needs of ecological systems. The ‘ecological question’ is becoming an immense obstacle to peoples’ access to the land. So when we try to analyze the issues of land we have to always keep the wholeness of life in mind.

Briefly stated, the “ecological question” involves five tightly interlinked features: (1) The 20% Haves of humanity are over-using many of creation’s renewable and non-renewable ‘resources.’ (2) They are over-using creation’s ability to absorb and disperse waste and pollution. (3) The extent of human over-use of these capacities is now so serious on a variety of fronts that we are gradually diminishing and destroying these creational capacities to produce renewable resources and to absorb waste/pollution. (4) The rates of overusing natural resources and waste/pollution absorption, as well as the rate at which we diminish creation’s capacities to provide these functions, is now

growing exponentially. (5) While this is a global statement of the ecological question, there are important variations in the rates and intensities of each of the above four features on the local, regional and watershed-level scales, and by types of ‘resources’. Furthermore, the richest 1 billion of humanity are responsible for a vastly disproportionate share of the of material, energy and resource consumption that is causing the ecological destruction.

The looming threats of the ecological question are an enormous additional barrier to equitable and just access to the land and will fundamentally alter the way humans are able to achieve social, economic and ecological justice in the future.

The goal of our theological document on land is to help change this situation. We are not doing the analysis for academic reasons but to support the struggles of the people for access to land for satisfying their life needs. This means we can help clarify and strengthen arguments in the struggle. In addition, theological reflection can

make people confident in the struggle when they realize that their struggle is in line with God's will and liberating history. We also have to look closely at what causes people to lose access to their land, and what barriers prevent people from reclaiming land. The most common hindrances are structural, direct, cultural, and religious violence. However, there are also common features, regional specificities, and historic differences.

Direct violence

Probably the oldest means of tearing people out of healthy relationship to land is direct violence. Many political systems have used direct violence, including monarchic, aristocratic, imperial, legal, colonial and capitalist systems.

Direct violence can occur in many ways. A group of people may develop more sophisticated warfare (e.g. with horses) and make a raid upon a neighboring tribe to rob the land. Or it may occur

within a kingdom. According to the biblical story, King Ahab wants to have Naboth's vineyard and manipulates the court to kill him (1 Kings 21). The clash of two legal systems is another form of direct violence: on the one side, the old biblical concept of land inherited from the ancestors to be passed to the next generations, using it for the life of all, and on the other side, the absolute power of the king. Empires engage in direct violence when, in grand style, they raid and rob the land of whole nations, as in the Hellenistic-Roman Empires. The colonial history of Europe since 1492 is a prime example of systemic land-robbing by direct violence. Particular states also use direct violence to rob people of their land, as dramatically illustrated today by Israel. Palestinians are robbed of their land by way of legal tricks, military ethnic cleansing, building a wall through Palestinian land, threatening people with settler violence, and so forth. Direct violence today also takes the form of paramilitary violence. In Columbia, for example, some trans-national corporations hire paramilitaries to

chase peasants from their land so the companies can use it for palm oil production.

The most common and important use of direct violence today, occurs when neoliberal states serve corporate interests by perpetrating various forms of direct violence. This occurs through the use of various instruments: 1) Making laws enhancing and protecting corporate interests; 2) Using police force to clamp down on protest movements; 3) Developing military and intelligence intervention forces to protect economic interests worldwide. The contribution of militaries to the destruction of land and whole ecosystems cannot be overestimated. Since states spend more than a trillion dollars per year on armaments, militaries have huge impacts on the land in terms of resources, energy consumption, pollution and greenhouse gas contribution to climate change.

Structural violence

A second means of tearing people out of a healthy relationship to land is structural violence. It is the most complex method.

Money: The roots of the current structures of violence which dispossess people from their land go back to the 8th century BCE in the Mediterranean region with the invention of money. Professionalized soldiers started to use small pieces of precious metal for daily transactions, which led eventually to calculating everything in money terms. Lending money to others eventually led to charging interest for the use of the money, which institutionalized limitless greed. To purchase seed, for example, debtors had to pay back more than they had borrowed. They also had to put up their own land as security. If they could not pay back the debt, they lost their land, which could lead to debt slavery for the whole family. The creditors, on the other hand, could collect more and more

land, money, and debt slaves. This led to the emergence of a class society in antiquity.

Land: Land was also directly commercialized through the use of money and property rights, and thus was subjected to the structural power of money. That is why the Torah forbids commercialization or commodification of the land: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine: with me you are but aliens and tenants” (Lev 25:23). The land belongs to God so that all God’s children may make use of this common gift to sustain their lives. This is why in Ancient Israel there was no absolute property right and charging interest on loans was prohibited.

A totalistic view of property ownership was created and legalized in the Roman Empire, which later became the basis for the western capitalist way of relating to land. Roman law introduced a basic distinction between **possession** and **property**. Possession was the actual having of a thing and designated all

possible utility rights to a thing, even if they are partial or temporary. In contrast, **property** was understood as ‘dominium’, which designated a comprehensive right to a thing, a “full right” not limited in time. It includes being able to rent, lease, and use land as collateral, as a pledge for a loan. It enables encumbrance, a claim against the property, to secure a loan.

Property as dominium is characterized by five crucial features :

1. It covers the substance of the thing. A thing as a whole is exclusively allocated to a person who can use it with complete freedom and exclude every other person. This right grants protection in key relationships: against withdrawal, against damage, against other effects; the owner enjoys complete freedom of use including sale and destruction; and the owner can leave the property to heirs. In a nutshell: “ownership is the right to use and abuse/consume/destroy your thing as far as compatible with ratio, i.e. the logic of the law”.

The core of this statement is the absoluteness of property and hence its designation as ‘dominium.’

2. Dominion is meant literally, not just metaphorically, and goes to the heart of the matter. The concept probably originated in the rule of the house father (Greek: despótes) over the persons in the household and the furnishings. The power of the house-father over the family—i.e. women, children, slaves, livestock—entailed rights over life and death because they were merely things. Dominium became the basis of landed property.
3. Dominium did not contain any relational elements, e.g. the fact there are owners and non-owners in a society, and that ownership by some could have an impact on the non-ownership of others. Nor did it involve any ecological considerations. Dominium was an absolute rule over things (*jus in rem*), and excluded every other claim.

4. Partial rights to the thing are envisaged as restrictions on ownership, particularly pledge rights (the pledge goes into the possession of the creditor or serves without actual seizure as a mortgage) and the transfer of the security. The distinction between property and possession of security, as in Greece, made the lending business possible on the basis of credit collateral.
5. Roman law distinguished between dominium from patrimonium. Patrimonium was the property inherited from the father, which has to be passed onto the children. Patrimonium actually excludes the possibility of the “thing” wearing out or even being destroyed. This distinction was abandoned by capitalism, where everything becomes absolute property in the sense of dominium.

The Roman understanding of the absolute dominion over things, persons and land was adopted into western capitalism. It was philosophically unfolded in Europe by John

Locke, who linked it to the state by arguing that the key task of political institutions is to protect private property. This view was adopted in all western constitutions. Absolute property was introduced in the economy through the Code Napoleon, which served as the basis for all western type civil codes. European colonialism spread this view of absolute dominion of things around the globe, where it now serves as the legal base for treating land as a commodity. As a result, the most common view of land today is that it is private property under the absolute ownership of private actors. Some countries still apply restrictions on the ownership of land, e.g. China, but the most common trend is to commercialize and privatize everything, and certainly the land.

This view of private property, as the absolute ownership of things by private actors, further shapes the structures that integrate states, legal systems and economies into a globalized system. Building on contemporary private property systems, the global capitalist economy

is integrated through private money-creation and interest systems, distorted investment and financial systems, unfair remuneration systems (massive inequality of profits, executive incomes, and worker wages), and discriminatory trade rules. These global systems of resource extraction, trade, and finance contain and promote powerful enrichment and impoverishment dynamics.

The enrichment dynamics of these global structures steer investment, energy and expertise to select countries, corporations and individuals, while impoverishing others by draining away investment and wealth. The enrichment and impoverishment dynamics of these global systems dramatically redistribute wealth and power. This multiplies the power of the rich to access the land and the fruits of the earth, and weakens the capacity of poor and marginalized peoples and countries to resist the seizure of their land.

The World Bank and regional development banks are facilitating land and water grabs by

promoting corporate-friendly policies and laws, facilitating capital and guarantees for corporate investors, and fostering an extractive, destructive economic development model. The World Bank, IFAD, FAO and UNCTAD have proposed seven principles that legitimize farmland grabbing by corporate and state investors. Led by some of the world's largest transnational corporations, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) aims to transform peasant agriculture into industrial agriculture and integrate smallholder farmers to global value chains, greatly increasing their vulnerability to land-loss.

A further devastating aspect of structural violence in the current capitalist system, is the imperative for capital to grow. 'Capital,' understood as assets measured in terms of money, must be invested in order to get more capital. In order to do so, the system is under constant pressure to increase production and consumption. This leads to increased consumption of raw materials, which in turn contributes to all kinds of ecological damage and climate catastrophe to the earth.

Our analysis of how the view of private property, as the absolute ownership of things by private actors, became the basic legal framework for most economies and states around the world, helps explain the structural violence experienced by so many people over land. These global political and economic systems must be reshaped in order to enable just, caring, and sustainable relationships with people and the land, and salutary dynamics leading to justice.

Cultural violence

This analysis of land under direct and structural violence shows that culture also plays a decisive role. In the previous section, for example, we asked why Rome gradually built a structure and set of laws that recognized property as absolute ownership. Why did they adopt the patriarchal idea of the ‘father of the house’ as the structure of Roman families, giving absolute arbitrary and unaccountable power over the land, women, children, slaves, and livestock to the male head of

the household? This is particularly striking when seen in contrast to ancient Israel's view that "The land belongs to God in order that all God's children may make use of the common gift". This is why in Israel there was no absolute property right.

In both ancient Israel and Rome, we detect the deeper shaping influence of faiths and 'visions of life.' St. Augustine's analyses of the Roman Empire, for example—while clearly he did not fully escape its patriarchal influences—shows that Rome's power structures were shaped by a deeper love of power and glory. This stands in sharp contrast to the Hebrew Bible and Gospel call to love God above all and one's neighbor as oneself. Rome's obsession with human power and glory led them to produce and trust in the twisted structures of absolute private property, socio-economic structures of slavery, and brutal political power in order to achieve their goals. This became a kind of idolatry of money, property and military power.

Contemporary capitalism is also shaped by an overarching love. In this case, it is a deep love of individual freedom, mastery [male control] of nature, and ego-centric happiness. When this utopian quest became an obsession, however, and ultimate trust to secure it was placed in the ‘means’ of money/finance, science, technology, the ‘free market’, and economic growth, Idolatry sprang to life.

Religious violence: Prosperity Violence and the Gospel of Greed

The ‘good news’ preached by capitalism declares that if we fully “trust and obey” these tools, they will deliver our goals. Scripture teaches, on the contrary, that idolatry is born in the human heart when we trust that created means/tools will themselves give us life, happiness, meaning, and shalom, rather than receiving them as gifts from the Creator. This idolatry has been widely defended as a kind of “faith in progress,” and provides the powerful dynamic that shapes the

unfolding of capitalist structures and practices such as “private property” and “money.” Capitalism encourages us to use and exploit land, people and money without any accountability to God, neighbor, or the earth.

When capitalism denies so many people access to land for satisfying human needs, therefore, we confront not only direct, structural and cultural violence but also a dynamic idolatrous faith that breathes poisonous, deadly ‘life’ and ‘energy’ into contemporary global structures and practices.

One particular pattern of religious thinking has led to land-grabbing and land-robbing in grand style: the concept of the “chosen people”. This concept has biblical grounds but can be turned around to its opposite meaning. Originally it did not mean a privilege but a task – the task of being a living example that another world is possible, a world of justice and peace (cf. Jesus’ word “You are the salt of the earth”, Mt 5:13). But already in biblical times people misinterpreted this as if

it were saying “You are better than others and therefore you can take their land.”

Since the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized the Christian faith and Emperor Theodosius made it the state religion in the fourth century CE, Christianity has consistently misused the concept of the chosen people. It has been interpreted as the privilege of imperial conquest of all ‘non-Christian’ lands, particularly in the Doctrine of Discovery promulgated by Popes and European kings in the 14th and 15th centuries CE. Its use in the wholesale displacement, poisoning and slaughter of the indigenous peoples in the Americas has left the churches with bloodstained hands and souls. In recent history the Boers in South Africa saw themselves as ‘chosen people’ who cleansed the land of black people by slaughter and by pushing them into homelands. Now Judaism in the form of the Israeli State has become Constantinian in systematically robbing the Palestinians of their land.

Conclusion

In order to change our current situation, and allow all people access to land, we must analyze the mental, psychological and even religious dimensions of the land issue. There will be no structural change without also mental and spiritual change (and vice versa). The calculating, conquering and egocentric mentality which has developed interactively with the money-private property economy, is now culminating in a system of financial capitalism. As long as most people raise only the question of “What’s in it for me?” or “How can I consume more”, capitalism will never be overcome. This question is constantly repeated by capitalist media and politicians to effectively brainwash/twist us and have us accept that their policies serve the people and land while in reality they serve the interests of capital.

In recent years, however, more and more social movements throughout the world are emerging and pulling back the curtain on the destructive

nature of financial capitalism. Furthermore, indigenous understandings of land such as Pachamama, Sang Saeng, Ubuntu, and Sumac Kawsay, as well as ecological movements, are reasserting positive visions, understandings and behaviors that seek to protect the land and creaturely flourishing. As Pope Francis notes in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*.

In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make

room for agricultural or mining projects
which are undertaken without regard for the
degradation of nature and culture. (146)

Chapter IV.

Towards a Culture of Life

Introduction

We have heard the voices of the lands cry for life, analyzed biblical texts and principles undergirding God's justice, and examined the roots of the direct, structural, cultural and religious violence which are tearing apart the earth and all her beings. We turn now consider a culture of life, to share new/old ways of being human in community with all the earth's beings, and the earth herself. We hope the theological

and philosophical visions of people-in-the-land in this section will provide rich wisdom for reorienting our relationships with the land and one another.

An Indian Perspective

Right from the beginning, even at the time of God creating the world, we find that it is done with the basic principle of relationship. Something is created for Something else and someone for another. The day is distinguished from the night not as opposites of one another but as that which is continuous, one with the other. The land and the sky and the ocean are not three distinct compartments of the cosmos but one that continues with the other and are absolutely interwoven with each other, interdependent and therefore absolutely equally interlinked. Even in the case of the creation of human beings in God's own image, we find a distinct continuity when it comes to the creation of Man, Woman, Female, Male. It is in this spirit and framework

of continuity that we can conceptualize with freedom, uniqueness and justice, the place and space for those who are neither female nor male, or both male and female – an identity that is affirmed as uniquely equal, just and inclusive in Galatians 3:28.

The principle of continuity helps us to understand not only ecology, theology or any other ideology on its own but to see it in continuity, continuous with Life. Life is the bloodstream that runs in various forms in every living being, every thing in the cosmos. It is this ability to multiply and give birth to Life in quality that is to be understood as the purpose of God's creation. Very often, it is misunderstood to mean Life in quantity. Stewardship is misunderstood as absolute/ unconditional/ even authoritarian control over Life. The same idea is used to legitimize the market, productivity, governance, and empire.

What we find as a corrective in the Old Testament is the way God calls the earth to testify against

the people of Israel who had forgotten about their Creator and Liberator God (Micah 6:1-4). In the book of Genesis, God calls upon the Earth to be a partner in the Covenant (Genesis 9:13). In the New Testament, the Earth is referred to as one that groans in travail, waiting for the whole/holistic liberation (Romans 8). Earth, her body and blood, screams for liberation!

In the principle of Continuity (which is also very instrumental for our understanding of Trinity), we are actually referring to a demystifying of boundaries. It is important to see that the land, the sea, the air, the oceans, the plants and the trees, the animals and all that dwell thereupon, are connected and interconnected. Women's bodies perceive this link in a distinctive way because their bodies resonate with the rhythms and cycles of the earth as she is located in the larger solar system. It is for this reason that we have seen women in the forefront who have risked their lives in protecting the land, the environment, the air, the land and everything. (Women-led movements include the Chipko

movement, Gabriella, the South African Landless Peoples movement, the Koodangulam anti-nuclear Struggle, the Green Peace Movement, the Greening Africa movement led by Nobel Prize Winner from Kenya Wangari Mathai and others.)

The earth therefore is not just connected with human beings but related!!! In my language, Tamil, the Biblical verse which says: “From dust you were taken and it is to the dust you will return” is translated as “You are taken from the mud/ land/ earth... and it is to the earth that you will return.”

Therefore... hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!! After all, we are all nothing but hydrocarbons in different shapes and sizes, created in different forms. The earth reminds us that our ultimate essence is of absolutely equal and of intrinsic value. The earth receives us back in her womb and gives birth to new forms of life and utilities for Life.

The Land therefore is not a thing but a Being. A Life. We are all living in different parts of

the earth. Unless and until we are reminded forcefully that our God is a God of Life, who gave us the gift of Life, and that the Land is also part of that gift, just as we are introduced to the Earth as her gift, we will be far away from the truth of God's plan for the whole of creation.

A Black South African Perspective

Another source of (re-)new(ed) ways of being in solidarity with each other and the land, in a post-capitalist civilization, is the Black African understanding of land as a sacred gift from God.

Genuine theological reflection on the question of land cannot avoid the context of the violent dispossession, disinheritance and theft manifest in the century-long internecine wars characteristic of the encounter between Black Africans and Whites in South Africa. Inevitably, the story of land in this context is fraught with ideologies and falsifications of truth in contradistinction to the narratives of the wounded and humiliated

victims of land dispossession. Land in South Africa remains the site of the economic struggle between owners and non-owners of land.

Theological reflection on land in South Africa should inter alia begin from the Black South African understanding of land as a sacred gift from God. Black South Africans understand land to be a God-given resource for life, not only as a source or tool of life, but verily an intrinsic part of life itself. Black South Africans believe that land has moral and spiritual significance central to their view of life that values the integrity and harmony of creation. The sacredness of land derives from the fact that land itself is part of the earth spirit. The praxis of this belief is apparent in birth rituals that see umbilical cords buried in land, the songs sung to express rootedness to land, rites of passage and the art created by Black South Africans. Land for Black South Africans is *nahala*, it is inheritance that renders its reification and commodification by the market a perpetual hoax. For this reason, given the history of the Western Christian tradition and its use of

the Bible in the dispossession and oppression of Black Africans, land in South Africa post-1994 is a hermeneutically contested question.

The beneficiaries of land dispossession and victims alike are Christians inspired by the same Bible. Hermeneutical starting points, therefore, can legitimize powerful traditions of the landed against the landless' weaker traditions that are silenced both in the Bible and our current local and global political discourses. Land is life. Land is justice.

Life-Giving Agriculture (LGA)

The 2005 Life-Giving Agriculture Forum in Wonju, South Korea, is another source for discovering (re-)new(ed) ways of being in solidarity with each other and the land, in a post-capitalist civilization. The Report ("Life-giving Agriculture is Possible") states:

On this basis we affirm that the Earth is not our property, but created by God as home and garden for all creatures. Hence, all must have their legitimate place and share in the resources of the world. Life-giving agriculture means that what we produce excludes no one. None goes hungry while others consume excessively.

Human creatures should not assume the role of the Creator, but must respect and care for the creation that God has made. We cannot worship God the Creator if we despise, destroy or pollute the creation that God has made. We cannot claim to respect all creatures if we allow the patriarchal domination of women and nature to continue. This must change if we want to integrate ourselves into the web of life.

We cannot keep breaking the strands in this interconnected web by cultivating only what brings profit to us and pushing other species to extinction. We must contribute to the preservation of biodiversity, because each

species has a role in sustaining and promoting the health of the organic whole

The 2015 Life-Giving Agriculture Forum in Bangalore, India, issued this call:

We the participants therefore call upon both the Indian and Korean Churches and Civil Societies,

- a. To bring to the centre the rural Dalit and Adivasi Churches which are predominantly agrarian and who constitute eighty percent of our congregations but have been pushed to the margins for generations;
- b. To re-read the Bible through the eyes of the marginal farmers and evolve liturgies that reflect agricultural motifs, seasons and festivals.
- c. To lobby with the Government to implement radical land reforms and sustainable agriculture in the society-at-large.

- d. To plead with Indian Churches to entrust vast tracts of land in their fold with local congregations promoting LGA rather than keep the land idle.
- e. To motivate Churches in India to campaign for Food Sovereignty and negotiate with their respective States to ensure the just and fair public distribution system, and draw up schemes to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, and hunger deaths.
- f. To organize Indian Churches to lobby for just and pro-farmer Land Legislations, and also reject the Land Acquisition Ordinance, 2014 introduced recently that supports multinational industries and corporate houses, and takes away the fundamental rights of farmers.
- g. To promote alliance building with neighbouring South Asian countries so that churches and farmers' movements learn from each other through exposures, joint

consultations and best practices in Life Giving Agriculture.

- h. LGA in Korea and India to address the serious problem of youth abandoning agriculture in villages and address the same on war footing.
- i. LGA in Korea and India to explore new ground for ecumenical cooperation and collective action between rural and urban churches and between diverse denominations with LGA as focal point for the ecumenical journey tomorrow.
- j. LGA in Korea and India to influence Seminaries to adapt theological education per se to include LGA in their regular courses as part of Ministerial Training.

Indigenous Peoples in North America

Another source of (re-)new(ed) ways of being in solidarity and accompaniment with each other

and the land in a post-capitalist civilization are the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Cree are one of the First Peoples of ‘Canada’, and the Mohawks are an Indian Nation living in the ‘United States’ and ‘Canada’. They both refer to the continent as Turtle Island.

A Cree view of the land

For the Cree People, who live and walk, die and restore, on this Land, there is a mutuality in the relationship. Cree—Nehitawak translated into English—means people of the land. There is a tightly entwined relationship between the two legged creature and the land which they walk. Land is a deep relation, an entity that lives, breathes, is hurt, and is in constant need of being treated with care. We are called to dwell with the land as one would treat an honoured family relation in our own home. Mother Earth, this great provider, is the first teacher in life. How we treat Mother Earth, this one that gives

all of herself, will determine the nature of our character.

There are three primary teachings that come from the land. The first is love. Not a love that can be purchased or owned, but rather a love that comes with the shared knowledge of the beloved. The Cree say they love the land. The cause for this out-pouring of love is not the scenic vista or the economic value that seemingly needs to be unearthed. Rather, it is the connectivity to the past and the future that rest in the memory of the land that is cherished. What has been built together with the land and what is left to be built is the hope of this mutual love.

The second teaching is humility. The vastness of the land and the un-limitedness of its gifts, stirs the heart of humanity. Like the flesh and blood of humanity, the land is both fluid yet solid. Think of a river. During one season it is calm enough to bathe the most tender child, and in the next season, so rapid that even the bravest person would not dare enter its rushing energy, and

yet when it is frozen over it looks like a sleeping child that is blanketed for a season of rest. Land is the heart and veins for the plants and creatures that need its nutrients to survive. This reciprocal respect invokes great humility.

Civility is the third teaching. When we first encounter a new born child, just days from the womb, we approach this beautiful and wondrous treasure with delicate thoughts and deeds. This level of civility is how we are to treat the very gift of land. Civility with the land is not what we can rationally explain when we can steal its treasures or the horror that it can cause when the land is under assault. We have to come to the land with a thanksgiving that will tell us how we are. One of the first teachings that many First Nations people have lost, and are trying to re-engage, is the Teachings from the Land. This reinstatement of our core identity will be an act of reconciliation with a treasured teacher.

“We all walk this Good Earth Road as creatures of the One Creator. The rising and falling of

the Sun each day, the seasons, the gifts of food, shelter, love and friendship are there for each of us in the One Circle. If you cannot find the way to be grateful in your heart, the fault lies within you.” (Tecumthe, Tecumseh)

A Mohawk Philosophy of Land

Each human being at one time belonged to the unborn generations whose faces come toward us from the earth. A human body is composed of matter that was once part of soil, rock, ocean, plant, and other animals, and all of those beings have spirit. A human being also has spirit, for a body without spirit is a corpse. A human being must be aware that his or her existence results from a combination of flesh and spirit in order that he or she develops an awareness of spirit.

(.)

Thus are the grasses and the trees that exist upon the Mother Earth both real and spiritual beings. They exist, and they exist in a way that follows the ways of the Creation. They also make life as

we know it, in this place. If the grasses ceased to follow the way of Creation, if they ceased to grow and to provide food for the other things of this place, Life as we know it may cease.

(.)

The grasses, too, are real beings. They carry on in certain ways, grass ways, and their ways are life supportive. Each blade of grass is real, and each is a manifestation of the Grass Spirit, the energy force that exists upon the earth and that is shown to us through the existence of that species of grass. Thus there is upon the earth real grass and an energy force manifested to the Creation that we call the Grass Spirit. It is an energy force that has a great power, for within the grasses there is a power to heal and a power to bring beauty. The grasses hold the Earth together, and they are beings to which the animal life is tied. It is their way of being that they are spiritual participants in the process that is Life in the Creation.

(.)

Thus, Life as we know it depends upon the Spirit of the Grasses, that their spirits be kept strong

and powerful and that they be able to maintain balance on the Earth.

(.)

And as we look about us on the Earth, we see that there are many, many other spirits, and that they too are participants upon the Earth. We can see that there are trees, and that they are manifestations of the Tree Spirits that exist on this place. The oak tree is a manifestation of the Oak Tree Spirit. That power alone can come to be an oak tree. And as we look about us, we can see that the Oak Tree is not a spirit unto itself, for the Oak requires the Mother Earth on which to plant its feet.

In the same way, there is seen to be a Spirit of Human Beings that is recognized by the Real or Natural People. The Spirit of the Natural People is said to be of the Mother Earth, and the Real People know that all the People who walk upon the earth are brothers and sisters, for they share the same Spirit of the species and they are all the children of the Mother Earth.

All the beings upon the Earth follow the Natural or Real ways – the ways of the Creation. And all of those beings are related in that they belong to the family of Creation. They support one another. The Oak Tree gives of its oxygen that the Rabbit may breathe, and the Rabbit gives of its flesh that the Fox may live. And the Fox, in death, returns to the Earth from which the Grasses feed, and the Grass gives of its flesh that the Rabbit may live. All things, in their real ways, support life. It is only when beings leave their real ways that they cease to support Life – that they break away from the Life Cycle. It is the way of the Creation that all things exist in real ways and in the world of human beings, it is necessary that all things maintain real ways for all life to continue as we know it.

Conclusion

The visions of people-in-the-land in this section suggest ways to reorient ourselves with the land and others. We are all connected in the web of

life. We are interdependent/mutually dependent members within the circle of creation. As we affirm life as God's gift for the whole creation, we also realise and confess that the quality of life lived by every being born into this world has not been the same. Injustice and discrimination are grounded in ideologies and practices that deny and deprive certain peoples of their right to be fully human.

We call for the careful discernment of those pseudo-values that are offered as 'life oriented', while in fact they can be life-negating. At times, the dominant forces co-opt the language of the weak and the oppressed and hollow out the essence of life within them. The Spirit of God helps us in this discernment. So also, we need to be clear on the matter of death. Death and dying are not the opposites of life and living. Injustice is.

When one dies with dignity there is affirmation of one's continuing to live in spirit, whereas when powers suck out the life of the poor,

they reduce them to living corpses. Death and dying therefore are important to be understood and affirmed in the continuity of life.

Chapter V.

Structural and Institutional Transformation from a Global Perspective

Introduction

These rich relational visions need to be further developed into structural and institutional forms in mid-term perspective, in order to counter the current social, economic and capital constructs that are leading humanity and the earth on a way of death. The dominating imperial capitalist civilization is necessarily coming to an end.

This is why, in the long run, a whole new culture of relational life needs to be developed, not only one or two elements. If it is true that the pillars of the dominating system are money and private property linked with ego-centric individualism, which in turn lead to imperial and patriarchal violence, then it is precisely at these points that the visions and thinking in social movements and liberation theologies in all religions have crucial tasks today.

A New Culture of Relational Life

To begin moving towards a new financial order, money will have to be changed from a commodity for accumulation to a public good that is democratically managed. Money has to remain an instrument for exchange and credit, not something to be amassed for power and selfish satisfaction. This is already practiced on local and regional levels with regional, interest-free parallel currencies and Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS).

But this is not enough. Private banks must be prohibited from creating money by credit with interest (debt money) and only central banks allowed to issue money. In the long run this must be adopted even at global level. The most important economist of the twentieth century, John Maynard Keynes, proposed this in 1944 at the Bretton Woods conference when he proposed a global central bank with the political reserve currency “bancor”. The USA at that point rejected this proposal because they wanted the U.S. dollar to be the world-money. As the present financial system moves from one crisis to the next, there may come the moment when some form of Keynes’ proposal will have a chance.

Banks in a new order will have only the role of managers of public money to be used for producing needed goods and services, not the role of amassing wealth through interest, speculation without labor and so on. This is already the role played at a small scale by cooperative and democratic banks as well as credit unions.

A new property order will need to be built on the commons, which sees the world as a gift to be used for life, not as privatized commodity. This starts with land, water, air, and seeds but also includes common cultural goods produced by collectives such as the internet. Consequently all basic goods and services for the satisfaction of basic needs of people, including transport, education, health etc., should be fully accessible to all and, if necessary, publicly provided.

This does not mean that all this should be turned into state property. Public property must and can be organized as near to the affected people as possible. Currently, there are already many legal forms by which this has been done. Hans Christoph Binswanger from St. Gallen, Switzerland, for example, calls for a fundamental revision of constitutions regarding the ownership of land. With a research group, Binswanger has presented proposals for a total revision of the Swiss federal constitution to bring about a phased, more or less radical abolition—or at least restriction—of absolute private dominion

over land. The different types of legal property arrangements in relation to land they propose are:

- Turning real estate into public property, be it of the municipality or the state. For example, in Germany there is the legal institution of “hereditary tenancy” (leasehold) of land for a period of 99 years. The land belongs to the municipality, the legal users of the land (e.g. for building a house) have to pay a rent to the community but they can be sure not to be chased away by the authorities, and even their children have a primary right to prolong the agreement.
- Distinguishing between property for use or for disposal, turning the latter over to the local authority or the state; property for use would be subject to public regulations.
- Property would be divided up in this way in urban settlements and property for disposal would be turned over to newly formed public

owners' associations, either consisting of all inhabitants or of the owners but allowing the inhabitants a say.

- Excluding the right to build on property.
- Retaining a comprehensive concept of property but having the state or local authorities restrict the freedom of use.
- Maintaining the guarantee of ownership but restricting the freedom of disposal by the local authorities or the state.
- Introducing state taxes on the basic income from the landed property, which also gives direction to the market.
- Adopting state regulations on ownership, e.g. so that legal entities can only be owners in the public interest and that only restricted ownership of housing and building land is allowed – related to a proprietor's own use.

These variants clearly show that arrangements for a transition towards a post-capitalist order are possible depending on political feasibility, but in no case is there to be a guarantee of unlimited ownership of land for unlimited wealth accumulation.

Communal property is the optimum solution from the angle of real life and the involvement of all local stakeholders. That way people can decide, as a function of their cultural traditions, whether and to what extent they want to leave land to families for their personal use, e.g. for agricultural use or in hereditary tenure as their own home, which has a long tradition in many cultures. They can decide whether and how much is to be handled by cooperatives, indeed whether and on what terms they want to let big industry settle in their area. Here clashes of interest with the state are possible, or even probable. It is better to work through these conflicts than to let the power of money decide over the heads of the people concerned.

On no account should the centralist solution of general state ownership be preferred as an alternative to the all-out market – perhaps to avoid conflicts with the local population. All alternatives today must be developed from below. That does not exclude state ownership of land. For example, it is sometimes a good idea for large forest areas extending over the area of municipalities to be administered as state property for specified public interest. Likewise there will be other public facilities on state land. The essential point is that land should not be at the disposal of private wealth accumulation.

Can this be applied in practice? There is hope, if groups spring up in civil society, delegitimize the present system, fight to amend the legal situation and start to live out alternatives from below. Here the movements of indigenous peoples and the landless in Latin America have raised awareness worldwide. The struggles against privatization together with the struggles against the empire which serves capital, are the main alliance partners for liberation theology and

churches besides initiatives building up such new order from below.

Conclusion

Communities in every part of the globe are organizing, struggling against immense military, governmental, and economic powers to live into a future where the Earth is understood as God's creation, not our property. They are doing so all around the earth, on every continent and island, and in a great variety of ways. They are holding governments responsible for the international treaties they signed. They are networking and experience-sharing amongst themselves, e.g. Africans on their own continent, rather than at the behest of outsiders, organizing against land-grabbing by every means possible, and proposing specific economic restructuring which may be lived out from below while delegitimizing the present system.

We face enormous and critical challenges in upcoming decades as climate change increases flooding and desertification, as immense international business and financial conglomerates gain control of more and more of the earth and all her beings, and as hundreds of millions of people lose their lands and their lives.

Chapter VI.

Initiatives Toward a Culture of Life

Introduction

We now revisit the People's Movements whose cries we heard in the first chapter, to hear their wisdom for moving to a culture of life on the land. First we hear Pope Francis as he addressed the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Rome, October, 2014. Then we hear from and about a variety of local, regional, national and international organizations working to organize,

resist, and create justice for the Earth's peoples and all her beings.

Pope Francis, October, 2014

This meeting of Popular Movements is a sign, it is a great sign: you have come to put in the presence of God, of the Church, of peoples, a reality that is often silenced. The poor not only suffer injustice but they also struggle against it!

They are not content with empty promises, excuses or alibis. Neither are they waiting with folded arms for the aid of NGOs, welfare plans or solutions that never come or, if they do come, they arrive in such a way that they go in one direction, either to anaesthetize or to domesticate. This is a dangerous means. You feel that the poor will no longer wait; they want to be protagonists; they organize themselves, study, work, claim and, above all, practice that very special solidarity that exists among those who suffer, among

the poor, whom our civilization seems to have forgotten, or at least really like to forget.

Solidarity is a word that is not always welcomed; I would say that sometimes we have transformed it into a bad word; it cannot be said. However, it is a word that means much more than some acts of sporadic generosity. It is to think and to act in terms of community, of the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. It is also to fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It is to confront the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced displacements, painful emigrations, the traffic of persons, drugs, war, violence and all those realities that many of you suffer and that we are all called to transform. Solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history, and this is what the Popular Movements do.

La Via Campesina

La Via Campesina is “an international movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. It defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. It strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are destroying people and nature.” Started in 1993, it now has “national organizations in 73 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas... it represents about 200 million farmers. It is an autonomous, pluralist and multicultural movement, independent from any political, economic or other type of affiliation.”

La Via Campesina’s approach to change is reflected in their 2011 Conference Declaration: “Stop Land Grabbing Now!” Here they reiterate their “commitment to resist land-grabbing by all means possible, to support all those who

fight land-grabs, and to put pressure on national governments and international institutions to fulfill their obligations to ensure and uphold the rights of peoples.” To do this, they outline an integrated series of actions:

- Organize rural and urban communities against land-grabs in every form.
- Strengthen the capacities of our communities and movements to reclaim and defend our rights, lands and resources.
- Win and secure the rights of women in our communities to land and natural resources.
- Create public awareness about how land grabbing is creating crises for all society.
- Build alliances across different sectors, constituencies, regions, and mobilise our societies to stop land-grabbing.
- Strengthen our movements to achieve and promote food sovereignty and genuine agrarian reform.

Additional specific actions and strategies under each of the above are outlined further in the Conference Declaration.

An Asian Perspective

Agriculture is Life for Asian lands. Asian communities are basically agrarian societies. The economy of life in this region of the globe is determined by agriculture. For Asians, agriculture is a tradition, culture and way of life. In fact, Asia feeds the entire globe with food grains. The modern developmental model of growth is slowly eliminating agriculture from the very life of the societies in Asia. Instead, agriculture has become a market-driven agribusiness. The rich, the capitalists and the powerful have taken both the land and agriculture from the communities for their own profit. Thus, agriculture is moved from life-orientated communities to business-oriented communities. The new technologies introduced to agricultural fields are poisonous, anti-human

and anti-earth. Farming communities have been and are being forced to adopt 'modern scientific' technologies and fertilizers. Farmers are forced to buy GMO seeds and chemical fertilizers to increase their harvest. As a result, the soil becomes unproductive and the bio-diversity of the soil, land and water is destroyed. These changes restrict the diversity of indigenous and tradition-based agricultural life, which causes displacement, migration, drought and even farmer suicide because when they cannot repay the loans necessary to buy GMO seed and fertilizers, they lose their lands.

The conflict between modern and traditional farming and agriculture has been hotly debated in Asia for years. In the recent past, policy makers in Asia have seemed to support agriculture and traditional farming through Land Acquisition Regulation and Rehabilitation, Food Security and Energy Security bills, including water. But the reality is, these bills have driven traditional agriculture to the verge of death. They are anti-agriculture, and are used

to harass farmers and agriculture. In the face of assurances from the States and governments in Asia on agricultural and development policies, the issue is snowballing into major national and regional debates.

Faith Communities in Asia, especially Christian Faith Communities, need to play a major role in restoring agriculture to community life, as it is the community's right to feed itself and others. Questions such as these provide us with an opportunity to seriously study the issue.

- Is agriculture not a life right of the Community?
- Does agro-ecology have a space in our theological and ecological debates among the Christian faith communities and theological fraternities?
- Can the Church re-read and re-look at the agricultural and related policies of the States?
- Does the introduction and application of modern technologies in agriculture challenge the Mission of the Church?

Food and the Seeds for Life Movement

The annual Food Week of Action and World Food Day in North America, as well as the global Seeds for Life movement, understand food, the land on which it grows, labor, production and distribution, as a matter of justice and well-being for all people. Agricultural and commercial food workers throughout the U.S. are organizing for fair wages with significant successes. Food is being privatized and commodified throughout the world, causing hunger, malnutrition, and starvation while trade in food makes it a source of great profit.

Seeds are gifts from God, and the Seeds for Life movement supports local, national and global efforts to promote and scale up small and medium-sized farming, fishing and livestock production using agro-ecological approaches. Access to and control over natural resources, including defending and localizing seed keeping in the face of corporate seed patenting, is critical for the global viability of small-scale

food producers, sustainable agriculture and, ultimately, for addressing hunger. Seed keepers not only save seeds but also the culture that seeds bring and embody.

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been at the forefront of ongoing social and ecological struggles over land issues. For centuries, they have suffered the impacts of exploration, invasion and colonization. Today, corporations, along with national and provincial governments, are engaged in an extraordinary push to extract natural resources from vast tracts of land that are either un-ceded by First Nations or subject to joint treaties. These treaties have been broken, indigenous rights have not been honored or fulfilled, creation's lands, waters, animals and plants have been poisoned, and inequality between First Nations and settler society is growing.

The struggle is directed against the primary mechanism for removing people from the land, which is the socio-economic structure of capitalism. Transnational corporations are systemically enabled to amass the investments and power to build massive resource extraction projects. Since it is assumed these projects are ‘automatically progress-creating developments,’ and that aboriginal people’s way of life is regressive, corporations in cooperation with government are legitimated in grabbing control of land and resources from aboriginal peoples. On behalf of the state, governments enforce a legal regime of land tenure in which land can be reduced to private property, commodified as a product for lease and sale, and then handled as a mere factor of production in the natural resource industry. In doing this, the state dispossesses aboriginal people from the land, undermines their way of life, and disregards their integral view of the land.

The popular aboriginal movement, “Idle No More,” recently arose in Canada to resist this widespread

destructive trend in Canada. “Our people and our mother earth can no longer afford to be economic hostages in the race to industrialize our homelands,” states Eriel Deranger, “It’s time for our people to rise up and take back our role as caretakers and stewards of the land.” [<http://www.idlenomore.ca>] The government of Canada, “in accordance with the principles of coexistence and mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples,” is called on by Idle No More to:

- repeal provisions of Bill C-45 (including changes to the Indian Act and Navigable Waters Act, which infringe on environmental protections as well as Aboriginal and Treaty rights) and abandon all pending legislation which does the same.
- deepen democracy in Canada through practices such as proportional representation and consultation on all legislation concerning collective rights and environmental protections, and include legislation which restricts corporate interests.

- in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' principle of free, prior, and informed consent, respect the right of Indigenous peoples to say no to development on their territory.
- cease its policy of extinguishment of Aboriginal Title and recognize and affirm Aboriginal Title and Rights, as set out in section 35 of Canada's constitution, and recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
- honour the spirit and intent of the historic Treaties. Officially repudiate the racist Doctrine of Discovery and the Doctrine of Terra Nullis, and abandon their use to justify the seizure of Indigenous Nations lands and wealth.
- actively resist violence against women and hold a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and involve Indigenous women in the design, decision-making, process and implementation of this inquiry, as a step toward initiating a

comprehensive and coordinated national action plan.

To do this, Idle no More engages in a wide range of actions:

- stimulating First Nations local community meetings and education on land
- initiating public teach-ins, rallies, and protests to raise awareness
- engaging in actions of resistance to neo-colonial use of resources and land, through blockades, spirit vigils, marches, etc.
- using media campaigns (esp. social media) in order to raise awareness, organize events, and draw in participants.

Indian Nations in the United States

The Mother Earth Accord

During the last fifteen years, as the oil and gas industries in the United States have shifted to fracking the earth, the devastation of Indian

Nations' land, Mother Earth and all her beings, has grown so intense and destructive of both Mother Earth and thousands of Indian communities that the Rosebud Ogalala Sioux Tribe Emergency Summit in September, 2011, declared a "Mother Earth Accord". It has since been revised and signed by many Indian Nations/ Canadian First Nations, and says:

Therefore, we are united on this Mother Earth Accord, which is effective immediately, that it be resolved as follows:

- We support and encourage a moratorium on tar sands development;
- We insist on full consultation under the principles of "free, prior and informed consent," from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples both in the United States and Canada;
- We urge regional authorities to halt the Exxon-Imperial and ConocoPhillips Heavy Haul shipments of tar sands equipment through the United States and Canada;

- We urge the United States and Canada to reduce their reliance on oil, including tar sands, and invest in the research and development of cleaner, safer forms of sustainable energy and transportation solutions, including smart growth, fuel efficiency, next-generation biofuels and electric vehicles powered by solar and wind energy.
- We strongly believe that the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is not in the national interest of the United States or Canada; and
- We urge President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry to reject the Presidential Permit for the Keystone XL pipeline. September 23, 2011

Healing the Trauma of Loss (Maine Wabanaki REACH)

The indigenous peoples of the Americas have lost their lands, their deep connection to the Sacred, through the European onslaught which brought disease, war, murder, forced removals, and

devastating public policies such as the bounties placed on Indian scalps. The Wabanaki, or “People of the Dawn,” are the first people of the area known today as Northeastern New England and Maritime Canada. Historians claim that the Wabanaki have lived on this land for more than 12,000 years; oral history asserts they have been here since the beginning. They defined their richness by the health and balance of their people, their relationship with the land and all her beings, and their ability to ensure the health and well-being of their people in practical ways.

Before the European colonists arrived, the Wabanaki peoples lived in all the land now called the State of Maine. Today, 16 of the original 20 tribes in the region have been completely destroyed. The four remaining tribes, Mi'kmaqs, Penobscots, Passamaquoddys, and Maliseets, have approximately 1% of their former lands. That loss has deeply affected the spiritual and cultural lives of the remaining Maine tribes. As the Passamaquoddys put it, their “spiritual equilibrium” requires “physical and spiritual

connection to our buried ancestors and sacred land.”

Beginning in the late 1800s and continuing until the 1950s, strategies to eliminate indigenous people included forced assimilation and the taking of Wabanaki children away from their families, land, and communities to boarding schools in the U.S. and in Canada. They were stripped of their cultural identities, punished for speaking their language and abused physically, emotionally, mentally, and sexually. While many died in these schools (the school graveyards often carry only a number on the gravestone), thousands of former students, residential school survivors, live with the lasting impact of this history.

Even more Wabanaki people were separated from their families, land and communities through adoption, foster care and placement in orphanages. A 1977 U.S. Senate report revealed that Maine had the second highest rate of Indian foster care placement among the states. Even

after Congress passed the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) which gave Native children and families more protection by recognizing the inherent rights of the tribe in child welfare cases, Maine continued to have one of the highest rates of removal of Indian children.

In 2012, the Wabanaki peoples and the Maine State government created the first State/Indian Nations Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the United States. Composed of three non-Native and two Native people, it investigated the effects of the Federal and Maine Child Welfare policy on children, families and tribal communities. The Commission's long, painful listening/receiving/hearing with survivors and their lost families revealed deep transgenerational trauma. The work of the TRC culminated in a 2015 Healing Ceremony and Report to the Nations and to the State, which includes recommendations for revision of State policy. Loss of land is loss of culture, language and identity. The Maine Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a significant milestone on the road to recovery and healing.

Land in Cuba

January 1, 1959, marks the Cuban beginning of the process of great political, economic and social transformations, led by then commander in chief of the rebel army, Fidel Castro Ruz.

In 1956, the Catholic University Association described the reality in which the Cuban Revolution began. The capital, Havana, was prosperous and attractive, while the farm workers existed in a dramatically different situation of stagnation and misery. The country at that time had about 350 000 agricultural workers, representing approximately 34% of the population. North American companies (1.5% of landowners) owned 46% of the cultivable area of the country. Large and medium landowners in the country accounted for another 9.4% of the population and owned 73% of Cuban agriculture. Unemployment levels were high and increased in the so-called “dead time” when the sugar harvest ended. The CUA also reported that 91%

of homes had no electricity and only 25% had health services.

A few months after the triumph of the Revolution, on May 17th 1959, Fidel Castro, Premier of the Cabinet of the Revolutionary Government, and Manuel Urrutia, then President of the country, made public the first reading of Agrarian Reform Law. The Agrarian Reform proscribed large estates and set the maximum land area which might be held “by a natural or legal person” at 30 caballerías (about 402 acres). The land was given to the peasants who worked up to 67 hectares individually, while part of the cultivable area was transformed into cooperatives and called people’s farms. This law was a sign of the popular character of the revolution and was one of the first triggers of confrontation with foreign corporations operating in the country, mainly from the United States. In 1963 a second law, complementary to the first in order to completely eliminate the remaining estates, decreased the amount of land for all owners.

This radicalization of land ownership greatly reduced unemployment and improved living standards for the peasantry. About 30% of the arable land was in the hands of small farmers. Electrification reached the most remote areas; schools and health posts were built up in the mountains; and the literacy campaign, in one year, brought the illiteracy rate throughout the country from 11% in urban areas and 47.1% in rural areas to 3.9% throughout the country.

After the enactment of agrarian reform in the 60s, almost spontaneously Agricultural Associations or Peasant Societies arose as forms of cooperative production. Credit Unions and Service (CCS) were organized, where peasant members maintained individual ownership of land, but agreed to hire certain services, and borrowing was then structured. Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPA) also arose, in which the owners of the land and other means of production voluntarily decided to be collectively owned.

The 1959 Agrarian Reform Law was accompanied by other processes such as the Literacy Campaign, the Urban Reform Law, and nationalization of the educational and health systems, among many others. All these changes opened many opportunities for people who had been excluded, thrown to the periphery of society, to participate in the triumph of the Revolution.

In turn, this began a migration from the countryside to the city, not so much seeking better economic conditions but rather seeking, above all, opportunities for access to higher education. Field work, food production, were no longer attractive to the new generation of Cubans who wanted to become doctors, engineers, architects, scientists, etc. The free education at all levels made a way for these generations that had never been possible for their parents.

This process came along with the so-called “institutionalization of the country”, which was now part of the socialist block. Cuba gave up the diversify of its agriculture because its

fundamental contribution to the global socialist economy was mainly sugar production. The crisis that hit in the 1990s from the dismantling of the socialist block greatly affected the economy, especially the agricultural sector. At the same time new opportunities arose for more local initiatives and greater diversification, along with the search for sustainable organic farming and discrete urban agriculture. In these years, Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC), composed of workers with autonomous management and administration of their resources, and socioeconomic organizations, received the land and other property in usufruct indefinitely, meaning they had the right to retain income from the land.

Since 2007, among a number of measures to revive the agricultural sector, many functions were decentralized, the city became a center for performance, and decisions were made through simplified structures and ministerial functions, which produced delivery of idle agricultural land. These deliveries, under conditions of usufruct

to individuals, were performed under lease for a period of 10 years, renewable. Thus almost three-quarters of the arable land passed to the non-state sector. According to the 2011 Yearbook of the Cuban National Bureau of Statistics, (estimated figures):

- Cuba has 6, 2 million hectares of arable land
- 1 million hectares are idle
- 80% is state-owned
- 70% is managed under non-state formulas (in usufruct)

Over a 50 year span, the Cuban economy (including the agriculture sector) has been totally reshaped three times because of structural changes in the country: first, coming from US dependency to an independent Cuban project, then the move to the Socialist countries' standards, then from the Socialist block to whatever we have had since the so-called "Special Period" in the 1990s.

Much more work is necessary in Cuba to continue to encourage agricultural production,

decentralize and improve access for people with fewer economic resources, and production in the cooperative and private agricultural sectors. The possible dismantling of the blockade by the United States brings new challenges to Cuba, and raises expectations. It also raises new questions about how to maintain a balance between what has been achieved in terms of working the land, the sustainable production of food, self-management, organic and urban agriculture, etc. while protecting against the onslaught of corporations with attractive formulas for the possible increase in production but with the ideology of capital as the drive shaft of any proposal. New times, new challenges. Hopefully, Cuba will overcome itself!

The Pan-African Programme on Land Resource and Rights (PAPLRR) Network

The Pan-African Programme for Land and Resource (PAPLRR), is a partnership programme

between the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya; Community Conservation and Development Initiatives (CCDI), Nigeria; The Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), School of Government, University of Western Cape, South Africa; and the Social Research Centre (SRC), American University in Cairo, Egypt.

Across the African continent the land and resource rights of the rural poor are threatened by inappropriate policies and institutions (including global treaties); unequal social, political and economic relations; the actions of powerful vested interests (wealthy national or local elites, international aid organizations, multinational corporations); and the weakness of grassroots organizations. It is against this background that the Pan-African Programme on Land and Resource Rights (PAPLRR) Network's initiative to analyse, understand and engage with these issues was conceptualized by four African centres of excellence that subsequently developed the programme in 2001.

... By coming together in forums such as PAPLRR, Africans are able to share their concerns and develop capacity to articulate their opinions and influence outcomes in the international arena.

... A key focus of the programme is the role of land and resource rights in the struggle against poverty, exploitation and oppression as well as their contribution in solving real world problems of African people, not as academic objects to be studied, but as key components to the struggle.

The objective of PAPLRR is to develop and articulate a pan-African voice on land and resource rights, policies and advocacy, and engage with other stakeholders at regional and international research and policy-making event. Among other things, PAPLRR is an attempt to undertake networking and experience-sharing amongst Africans on their own continent, amongst themselves, rather than at the behest of outsiders. PAPLRR attempts to shift the balance and re-locate the centre of debate, learning and

knowledge on land, resource tenure and rights in Africa, back to the continent where it belongs.

Conclusion

Land is the center, the core of communal, community, family and individual life. Without land, we cannot exist. Without the earth, we do not exist, unless we fly to Mars. Throughout the globe, people are organizing to retain or regain local control of the lands they have inherited from their ancestors. In the solidarity of which Pope Francis speaks, poor and marginalized people are struggling to regain their dignity and their life-giving lands. Agricultural and food workers are organizing, seeds are being saved from the predations of patenting corporations, Africans are re-locating the center of land policy back to the continent where it belongs, First Nations are fighting back against corporate pollution and land-killing, healing is happening for those whose lands have been taken, Cuba is once again facing new, and possibly exciting,

land challenges, and the church is called to restore agriculture to community life.

We live at the edge of a fundamental shift, which can bring collapse to our human systems, or restore our God-given life as part of the earth's ecosystems.

Chapter VII.

A Pilgrimage of Justice and Hope

Introduction

We began this journey by listening to the voices of those struggling for land justice, turned to the Christian scriptures for insight into God's purposes for the earth and all her beings, looked at the origins of the current death-dealing capitalist imperium, listened to voices pointing us to new/old ways of creating a culture of life, looked at alternative economic structures, and heard the voices of those who are taking steps

toward a a life-giving culture. We close by calling upon churches, ecumenical bodies, and social movements to act more urgently at this turning point for the earth and all her beings. In the words of the WCC Bogor Statement, “Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call to Action,” 2012:

The belief that God created human beings as part of a larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole creation (Genesis 1) lies at the heart of biblical faith. The whole community of living organisms that grows and flourishes is an expression of God’s will and works together to bring life from and give life to the land, to connect one generation to the next, and to sustain the abundance and diversity of God’s household(oikos). Economy in God’s household emerges from God’s gracious offering of abundant life for all (John 10:10). We are inspired by Indigenous Peoples’ image of “Land is Life” (Macli-ing Dulag), which recognizes that the lives of people and the land are woven together in mutual

interdependence. Thus, we express our belief that the “creation’s life and God’s life are intertwined” (WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) and that God will be all in all(1 Corinthians 15:28).

Contrary to this vision of human beings as ‘part of a larger web of life’, however, the post-1492 European missionary enterprise had an imperial theology which included human domination over creation, Christian domination/conversion/destruction of all non-Christian peoples, and a focus on an afterlife of hell or heaven rather than on justice and peace for the current lives of all earth’s beings, including humans. In the Americas, that meant the near or total extermination of peoples who had lived on and with those continents and islands for tens of thousands of years. In Africa it meant the disruption, enslavement, and devastation of peoples who had lived on and with the continent for two hundred thousand years. In Bishop Desmond Tutu’s words, “When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the

land. They said ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.”

At the same time, in every point in the church’s history, there were also other theological voices, including intra- and inter-generational voices engaged in dialogue and critique of theologies and contexts. While many churches colluded with the imperial project, there were always communities of people challenging the church to be the church, to repent of her ways and return to the urgent call from Jesus of Nazareth. Voices of dissent and hope continue in such communities as the Quakers, Mennonites, and the Amish, along with groups in all the churches. Such groups include the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, the Oikos Theology Network, Kairos Palestine, and the Minjung theology movement.

In the 1970’s and 80’s, liberation theologians fostered the Basic Christian Community movement in Latin America, which arose as

a voice of dissent to bring change in the land. Theology and the Bible were used to raise consciousness about justice for the people and the land. They supported struggling congregations as they found strength from the voices of the Bible to change the crushing economic and political systems in which they lived. Bishop Romero's murder at the foot of the altar reminds us of the empire's response to such threats.

Theologies today need to be theologies of the people. The people who are most directly impacted by the current imperial economy are creating the struggle, and the churches and other faith communities are called to join them in undoing hundreds of years of economic and social oppression. At present, most of the churches have gone only so far as to flag these issues of injustice, and to reorganize. We have only acknowledged and apologized, only lamented the evils of the past and present. We have not moved beyond confession to take

responsibility, and act in solidarity with the peoples' struggles.

In response to the peoples' call, we present ecumenical statements calling for justice for the land and her beings, and offer alternative visions and actions for justice in our common future. The churches must confess, take responsibility, and join the peoples' struggles.

Ecumenical statements on land and life

The recent strong statements by international ecumenical and church leaders on how our contemporary global economy is systematically promoting and engaging in land grabbing provide a crucial opening step in this process of acknowledging and correcting past and present unjust practices. These statements fail to acknowledge, however, the ways in which churches and ecumenical bodies continue to benefit from the global economy.

The present kairos moment within the ecumenical movement may be seen in decisions and documents of the WCC Assembly in Busan, October 2013, which focused on an eight year “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, and further in Pope Francis’ November 2013 Apostolic Letter “*Evangelii Gaudium*” which makes the same clarion call for justice and peace for the earth’s peoples, and the earth herself.

World Council of Churches’ Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

The Message of Busan 2013

We live in a time of global crises. Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us. In darkness and in the shadow of death, in suffering and persecution, how precious is the gift of hope from the Risen Lord! (...) Listening to voices that often come from the margins, let us all share lessons of hope and perseverance. Let

us recommit ourselves to work for liberation and to act in solidarity.

Several important ecumenical documents serve as the basis for the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace:

- the 2004 World Alliance of Reformed Churches, "Accra Confession",
- the 2012 WCC Mission Declaration "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,"
- the 2012 São Paulo Statement by the WCC, the Council for World Mission, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches: "International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life".

The Bogor Statement of 2012 is the most direct WCC reference document. It says:

We can and must shape an Economy of Life that engenders participation for all in decision-making processes that impact lives,

provides for people's basic needs through just livelihoods, values and supports social reproduction and care work done primarily by women, and protects and preserves the air, water, land, and energy sources that are necessary to sustain life (Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific). The realization of an Economy of Life will entail a range of strategies and methodologies, including, but not limited to: critical self-reflection and radical spiritual renewal; rights-based approaches; the creation and multiplication of spaces for the voices of the marginalized to be heard in as many arenas as possible; open dialogue between global North and global South, between churches, civil society and state actors, and among various disciplines and world faiths to build synergies for resistance to structures and cultures that deny life in dignity for many; taxation justice; and the organization of a broad platform for common witness and advocacy.

In 2014, the Caribbean and North American Area Council sent an Open Letter to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, saying:

we support efforts to de-centralize control of food and farm systems and work with global civil society to strengthen local and regional food economies that are just and sustainable.

Therefore we will support:

- efforts to shift control of food and farm systems back into the hands of people and communities
- work with civil society to build just and sustainable local and regional food economies everywhere
- ensure abiding access to water, land and resources necessary to ensure sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food, fair prices for producers and abundant livelihoods for all.

By unique ecumenical fortune, a little later than Busan, in November, 2013, Pope Francis issued his Apostolic letter *Evangelii Gaudium*. Here we find the same prophetic, post-capitalist perspectives as in the documents of Busan. The following passages illustrate:

There are other weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.

In his message to the Rome Meeting of Popular Movements in October 2014, Pope Francis said:

An economic system centered on the god of money also needs to plunder nature to sustain the frenetic rhythm of consumption that is inherent to it. Climate change, the loss of bio-diversity, deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in the great cataclysms we witness, and you are the ones who suffer most, the humble, those who live near coasts in precarious dwellings or who are so vulnerable economically that, in the face of a natural disaster, lose everything. Brothers and sisters: creation is not a property which we can dispose of at will; much less so is it the property of some, of a few: creation is a gift, it is a present, a wonderful gift that God has given us to take care of and to use for the benefit of all, always with respect and gratitude.

This ecumenical convergence of the WCC and Pope Francis calls all Christians and all social

forms of the church, together with other faith communities and social movements, to develop a groundswell for land justice by overcoming the current capitalist system personally and collectively, step by step. God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

What Churches and Congregations Can Do

Confess our Complicity

To begin, churches must acknowledge and confess our complicity in historic regimes of colonialism and contemporary practices of land grabbing, and seek solutions.

In both North and South America, many churches have acknowledged their complicity in systemic colonial destruction of indigenous peoples, and systematic and most often unjust seizure of land. More reflection, work, and action are needed on this front. Churches need to acknowledge that their organized institutions occupy and/or benefit from the

use of this land. Furthermore, the members of these churches, in their homes, businesses and forums share in these benefits. The churches need to acknowledge that ‘their’ land was most often appropriated under deceitful practices, but more importantly, under the justification of false doctrines such as the Doctrine of Discovery and similar rationalizations.

In the past decade, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have been used in painfully unjust and exploitative situations to expose the truth and to find ways of reconciling and moving forward South Africa—post-apartheid; Canada—residential schools for indigenous children, Maine—child removal from tribal homes, and so forth. Perhaps the churches need to enable and participate in a TRC process focused on their own historical and contemporary roles in land grabbing.

The vast land holdings of some churches throughout former colonial lands provide one concrete option for action. The churches should

not sell or even give the land away as private property, because this simply moves the land from one private owner to another, perpetuating fundamental problems. In the realm of private property, as critiqued above, land comes into the absolute control of the owner without openness to the needs of other people, the common good, or the requirements of associated ecological systems. Instead, in the case of agricultural land holdings, churches may dissociate themselves from 'land as private property' and instead move towards an alternative model of landholding. This would avoid commodifying land, and instead honor its character as a gift of the Creator, requiring care and stewardship for the wellbeing of all human and non-human creatures (Lev. 25:23). Thus, land should belong to the community, and local people should have use of the land for their lives. Churches could move their land into this order of ownership, through the specific step of opening a 99 year lease with users in the community. The idea is to arrange, by some legal means specific to a country (such as a Community Land Trust or

[German] a church trust foundation), by which the church can still use land for its purposes, but foreclosing the possibility that it could be commodified in the future.

Through these and other actions, churches can participate in a process of developing a “life giving culture” in relationship to the specific land location they share with neighbours.

Build alliances with social movements in the struggle.

In Chapter VI, we have given several examples of struggles for people’s access to land. Churches are based on biblical foundations, and thus are called to join those struggles unambiguously. We have a prime example in the Palestinian churches who put forward the Kairos Palestine document, *A Moment of Truth*, in 2009. They are working with social movements and faith communities to win back their land and end the occupation. Since then, other churches around the world have joined the struggle, such as the Presbyterian Church in the US, the Anglican

Church in England and the Reformed Church of Scotland, which have joined the BDS (Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions] struggle. Others, such as the German churches, still hesitate to follow. The Muslim religious community has joined the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

Conclusion: Toward Justice Together

We urge churches and faith communities around the world to act in solidarity with people's struggles for land and life wherever they happen. Land is the gift of life – life in all its relationships, life as web, life as the beauty of our blue and white planet. As life is endangered by the dominating imperial capitalist system and its agents (which includes all of us if we do not resist), we invite Christian congregations and churches, people of other faith communities, and other social theories/philosophies to join one another in the struggles for land and life.

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live...” DT 30:19

Note on Sources

This Theological Reflection on Land was prepared by the Oikotree Transformative Theology working group in cooperation with the contributors listed below.

We have done so in solidarity with peoples movements, civil society movements and social movements of other religious traditions to provide study and action resources in response to the economic and ecological crises facing the earth and all her beings.

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