



Oikotree Global Forum 2013

Johannesburg, South Africa, March 2-8, 2013

A Report

Preamble

We, 59 representatives from churches, ecumenical and civil society organizations, and people's movements from around the globe, gathered as the Oikotree movement in Johannesburg, South Africa, from March 2 to 8, 2013, for the 3rd Oikotree Global Forum sponsored by the Council for World Mission, World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. In visiting local communities and landmarks, we were confronted with the realities of poverty, gaping inequalities, deep-seated racism and routine violence in South Africa – a microcosm of the world we live in today. At the same time, we derived tremendous courage and optimism from the continuing struggles of the people of South Africa against all forms of apartheid.

In this report from the Oikotree Global Forum, we address present manifestations of the dominant collective and individual consciousness and spirituality of greed, materialism, ego-centrism, lovelessness, abuse of power through fear, and a loss of a sense of oneness as humanity and nature (*ubuntu*). In addressing these manifestations, we, as Oikotree movement, commit ourselves to changing this spirituality and consciousness, along with its destructive manifestations in global capitalism towards affirming, again and again, that "Justice is at the Heart of Faith."

Discerning the Signs of the Times in the Whole Oikos

Capitalism is moving from dominating the global economy to controlling and transforming the larger civilization in its many institutions and relationships. The capitalist market and the empire are "diabolically mutating." Peace is being devilishly separated from justice. Empire decides what peace is, what justice is, what life on earth is. The new forms of imperial exploitation reflect the rise and consolidation of an international ruling class and the centrality of military power. This exploitation includes large-scale long-term criminality: the illegal and extra-judicial character of imperial war-making is a key component of the process of capital accumulation.

Domestic collaborator classes and political elites are essential in sustaining the US/EU empire. They facilitate paramilitaries within their own countries who fight against peoples' struggles. The role of militarism is changing, as the fear of terrorism causes a loss of moral, religious and other just war boundaries to military action.

Democracy is increasingly dismantled, so that people and states are losing sovereignty through international and bilateral trade and investment agreements negotiated by power elites, as well as the rules of the World Trade

Organization and regional associations of states such as the European Union and the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These regional and global organizations were not formed by the peoples of the world; their representatives were not elected by the peoples, yet they claim to make decisions on behalf of the people. In decisions on “economic development,” the promise of profits overrides people’s interests.

Today, the mechanisms by which global profits are enhanced have gone far beyond the exploitation of markets, resources and labor; they now embrace entire nations, peoples and the public treasuries, not only of regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America but include the so-called ‘debtor countries of Europe,’ Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Iceland, among others.

Moreover, corruption is increasing on all levels, affecting governments, investors, donors, recipients, and beyond. The corporate-controlled media are distorting public knowledge about these issues, so that people are made ignorant.

Nation states now are too often opposed to and threatened by their own people, whose movements and organizations are seen as enemies of the state and globalization. Protest and social movements are criminalized, particularly in India, Colombia and the Philippines.

The power of capital – greed, materialism, ego-centrism, lovelessness, abuse of power and loss of ubuntu – has managed to penetrate the souls and thoughts of all of us. It is not just somewhere else, in the market, in the church or church structures, but everywhere, taking us over! Empire and corporations have even commodified sports and sexuality, turning them into consumer products and distorting them.

The ecological question is looming over us with the impending reality of eco-cide: we have exceeded the productive and renewable capacities of creation itself. We have hit the outer limits of creation’s capacity to support economic growth such that all social justice and equity actions need to be rethought within this looming parameter.

Genocide of women (femicide) is growing throughout the globe. Every year, millions and millions women are missing because they were never born. Millions of children are damaged and die because of the empire’s sanctions on North Korea and Iran. We are seeing massive displacements of people, geographically, culturally, politically, economically, and ecologically, in the name of development.

Many church structures, congregations and theologies are intertwined with empire.

The empire and global capitalism have divided and co-opted many churches so that ideas and practices of justice and peace are often confused. These norms and values frequently now lack clarity, coherence, and a holistic character. We repeatedly speak with forked tongues. Worse, we are allowing the empire to define justice and peace, rather than Christ. There is a trend in the ecumenical movement to capitulate to empire, financially, structurally and theologically. The ideology of individualism and the prosperity gospel have permeated many churches, while others have lost their prophetic stance. A sort of “imagined helplessness” has taken hold of too many of us. Forms of fundamentalism are growing in the churches. The voices of women and youth are silenced.

Yet there are signs of hope.

Congregations, church organizations and other faith communities are working for a culture of life, addressing injustice at all levels, self-critiquing our theology, and siding with marginalized people.

Throughout the globe, peoples’ movements and organizations are rising up against an unjust and unsustainable international regime. The people in Latin America have been fighting for fundamental changes in their

governments, for example, in Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Honduras, Peru, and Uruguay. As these countries and their people are bringing about change, they are sometimes stigmatized as “allies of terrorism” and their leaders are called trouble-makers. Social movements and popular organizations are dynamically active on a number of fronts and in multiple locations, raising alternative and prophetic voices, moving toward transformative action. The Arab Spring movements and the movements of the Indignadas in Spain demonstrate the peoples’ resilience and strength, light in the midst of darkness. African feminist movements, Indian street power against the government, alternative economies and governing structures in Latin America, the courage and survival of people living in poverty – all embody the transformative power of movements. They have much to teach us as Oikotree and we must stand with, accompany and support people’s struggles.

Discerning the Way Forward

Theological reflection and challenges

Life begins now, that is, life is to be lived before death not just life after death. God’s presence and healing are identified in the scriptures: John 3: 16 (“God so loved the world,” that is, salvation is for the earth and all its inhabitants) and Luke 4: 18-20 (“The spirit of the Lord is upon me...”). God has come to give life, and life abundantly (John 10: 10). God’s time is now (*Kairos*), to realize the Kingdom of Justice and Peace. The biblical vision calls us to radical change in our theological frameworks, to new curricula for our theological education.

Among the social structures critiqued in the Biblical narrative are idolatry, money, private property, and empire. Money and private property not only introduced new economic structures, but money itself was also changed from a useful instrument for exchange to an end in itself through interest, causing people to become greedy for more and more. It became an idol. ‘Greedy money,’ created at the same time as private property rights, has changed souls, hearts and minds from community values to egocentric lust for more money. This new economy, thinking and ideology were linked to empire and patriarchy in biblical times and throughout the Roman Empire. From the prophets to Jesus the counter message to greedy money was justice and love. Theological reflection is needed on the desire for money that is driving capitalist greed, as we move toward the transformation of our economic system. Contrary to the theologies of ‘God and me’ and the ‘gospel of wealth’, we need theologies of life and sufficiency.

The capitalist system is walking among the people, hooking into their dreams to make them shift their goals and become addicts of materialism. As theologians, we must work with local communities and harness our strength in theological education, using theological tools, as with David’s sling, to uncover the myth that money and possessions are sources and measures of happiness and well-being.

The current global capitalism is a form of imperialistic pillage. Capitalist power is intentionally instigating economic chaos in regions, countries, and globally, in order to use these situations of chaos – the absence of rules and regulations – to enable further exploitation and control. We need theological grounding for commitments to transforming conditions of injustice and war, in Colombia, Philippines and Palestine, for example, as they clash with God’s purposes of peace, justice, and shalom in the world.

Action by the US empire in the Philippines, Korea, India, Colombia, and elsewhere is justified to the American people as a means of spreading vital American values of democracy and freedom, as well as protection from terrorism, rather than as protecting the US’s vital interest in amassing economic wealth. The theological issues that need to be exposed here include: what lies beneath these defenses and rationalizations? What ideologically distorted ideas of freedom, democracy and peace are undergirding this expansion of corporate economic empire?

Capitalism is increasingly anonymous. Thus, in local struggles and social movements, we do not know who is really in charge and responsible and thus whom to hold responsible, oppose, and fight. Theologically, we need to identify responsibility and accountability for injustice and exploitation. To be clear about the characteristics of capitalist being and action, we need to reflect more deeply on our weaknesses in face of this capitalism.

We need to theologically expose and analyze how gender, class, and race come together in capitalist empire. In our theological work, for example, we need to attack patriarchy as intrinsic to capitalism, that is, that capitalism reproduces itself through sexual relations, social relations, dependency on labor of women, and so on.

Theologically, we need to be attentive in our own processes as churches and social movements, that our methods of working, by, for instance, failing to address issues integrally and multi-dimensionally, may be reproducing the way capitalism works.

Theological language, process, and logic need to be decolonized. The Western epistemology on which it is based is racist, built on theories of white supremacy which were used to justify imperial domination for nearly 2000 years. One recent example is the imperial language of Christian 'mission,' which assumes that Christians have the truth, and that Christians have the right and duty before God to impose their faith on the ignorant, filthy, animist 'heathen.' A non-imperial alternative would be the welcoming nature of invitation.

Strategies

Inspired by African wisdom ("*motho ke motho ka batho*," that is, a person is a person through others) and biblical teaching (1 Corinthians 12: 26, "and whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it"), we affirm that the Oikotree movement is a "movement of movements" striving together for justice, peace and life in fullness for all in the spirit of *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng*.

In this spirit, as Oikotree movement, we discern the following as our key strategies:

1. Intentionally connecting with, identifying with, supporting struggles of, and creating spaces (e.g. at the World Social Forum) for discussion, mutual learning and joint action with people's movements as a faith imperative;
2. Committing to endorse and promote the Oikotree movement, and actively seeking an organizational joining of forces and sharing of resources (financial and otherwise) among network partners;
3. Organizing regular fora (e.g. Oikotree Global Forum) among network partners for discussing, exchanging experiences on, and refining political instruments and strategies for transformation;
4. Conducting research based on multidisciplinary approaches and using gender/class/race lenses to document social and ecological realities and to imagine and elaborate alternatives;
5. Promoting transformative education, building capacity, and raising awareness among network partners and the general public through the development of a transformative, socialized theological curricula (e.g. Oikotree Roving Faculty), trainings and seminars, an interactive website (e.g. maps with flash points), newsletters, visual, musical and other forms of media;

6. Conducting community outreach including through using social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) and organizing mass actions such as demonstrations, campaigns, boycotts, divestment and sanctions;
7. Holding governments and governmental institutions accountable through letters/memoranda speaking to power, people's tribunals on development policies and programs, intentional dialogues with policymakers, critically engaging with global and national decision-making processes, and prophetic public ecumenical witness; and
8. Holding corporations accountable through targeting corporate images, conducting audits of corporate social and ecological debts, and developing methods of reparations.

Areas for joint struggle

We identify 'land' as an overarching theme for theological reflection, education and awareness-building, networking, research and advocacy for in the next two years (2013-2014) inasmuch land issues bring together peoples' struggles around the world against socio-economic and ecological injustice and their links with increased militarism. We further identify the following as critical areas for joint struggle in the next two years:

1. POSCO Steel Company in Orissa, India;
2. Palestine occupation;
3. Militarism in Columbia;
4. Militarism in the Philippines; and
5. Poverty and socio-economic, gender and racial inequality in Southern Africa.

Structure and working groups

As a movement composed of churches, ecumenical and people's organizations, and people's movements, the Oikotree movement aims to promote justice and life through several working groups, namely:

1. Transformative theology working group;
2. Transformative education working group;
3. Joint struggles working group (working on the struggles identified above);
4. Networking and communications working group (attached to the Oikotree secretariat headed by a moderator);and
5. Resource mobilization working group.

The Oikotree movement will be coordinated by the Oikotree facilitating group composed of convenors of the five working groups, representatives from the three sponsoring ecumenical organizations and a moderator. A simple secretariat is attached to moderator.