

DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF TODAY – THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND ITS CHAINS OF INJUSTICE. CHALLENGES FOR AFRICA.

**PAPER PRESENTED AT;**

**COVENANTING FOR JUSTICE IN THE ECONOMY AND THE EARTH.**

**WORKSHOP ON LIVING OUT THE ACCRA CONFSSION IN AFRICA.**

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## **Background.**

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Today, Africa is a tapestry of the exigencies of globalization. A site where, life sequences and livelihoods co-exist within contours of abundance and want.

Whereas this is mainly a function of Africa's flawed integration to the global political and economic architecture; with over five hundred years of slavery and colonialism,<sup>2</sup> it's the attendant neo-colonial pursuits masked under the high sounding name of globalization that are ripping the social fabric of the African community at the seams.

Most of all, my reading of Blaine Harden<sup>3</sup> and Patrick Bond<sup>4</sup>, have informed and reinforced both a fascinating interest into the interplay of Global Finance, Development and the attendant Corruption agency amongst and across the African polities.

Whereas it is not the task of this paper to interrogate the principal intersection of these values within the global dynamic, having this at the back of our mind is central to our understanding of the challenges facing Africa in the context of a critique of global capitalism and its chain of injustice.

This is not a theological critique, but more of a talking points summation of core values that informs our collective cognition to enable us decipher the principal contradictions our time.

The ascendancy of neo-liberalism as the dominant paradigm of our day locates itself within the dictates of a Reaganite/Thatcherite approach centered on the dictum that "There is No Alternative" (TINA), that gained credence in the early eighties and set the globalization wheel in motion. Best captured by Reagan's words, "A big government that promises you everything is a big government

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<sup>2</sup> See Rodney Walter, 1973, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. University of Dar es Salaam Press. Dar es Salaam.

<sup>3</sup> Harden Blaine, 1992, *Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent*, London, Fontana.

<sup>4</sup> Bond Patrick, 2006, *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation*, Zed Press/UKZN Press, London and Pietmaritzburg.

that will take everything from you.” Fawning over this kind of minimalist justification of the re configuration of the state has continued, but the seemingly triumph of neo-liberalism especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union and ascendancy of the US as the hegemony has drowned dissenting voices to the market ideology.

Shrinking of the social state, deregulation, privatization, liberalization and faith in the market as the supreme force in allocating values in society are its marked features.

Whereas this has continued to be pushed and presented as the reality of today’s world, especially through the Washington Consensus (the US Treasury, World Bank and IMF revolving door), the debilitating effects of neo-liberal policies like the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and their enhanced versions have decimated whole societies. Africa is caught in this vortex of the onslaught of market led policies and unfortunately the marked legacy of this unquestioned subscription is written in blood, pain, hopelessness and death.<sup>5</sup>

Key ideologues<sup>6</sup> of the global system contend that there is no way out for Africa but that it must integrate further into the world economy and fight for its share of the global cake. But even actors within the system like George Soros<sup>7</sup> have now started questioning the logic of the market itself and especially its ability to function and reach all the people.

## **The Praxis.**

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<sup>5</sup> A dearth of literature exists both on the negative effects of the Bretton Woods Institutions policies on Africa but also the alternatives to these flawed economic models and how to mitigate them. *The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Network (SAPRIN)* and the *Organization of Africa Union: Lagos Plan of Action* are notable and highly recommended.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “*The Clash of Civilizations*”, Francis Fukuyama, “*The End of History and the Making of the Last Man*”, Thomas Friedman, “*The Lexus and the Olive Tree*” and numerous think tanks like The Heritage Foundation, The Plan for the New American Foundation and the Cato Institute are some of the most virulent purveyors of this perverse logic, that left to its ends, the market will lift us all in the ocean of globalization.

<sup>7</sup> Soros George, 2002, *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, Harper, New York

*“A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I come so that they must have life and have it more abundantly.”*

*John 10:10*

The Accra Confession<sup>8</sup> is explicit that *“economic systems are a matter of life and death.”*

It therefore resonates that, economic systems are inherently power relation issues. Those who control the production, distribution and consumptive processes, exercise a power of monumental proportions over others.

Power on the other hand revolves around how it is exercised. In capitalism’s perverse logic of competition, self aggrandizement, individualism and “winner takes all, first to the pole” reality, power is an instrument of control and domination. It marks the domain of the “haves” and the “have nots”.

If neo liberalism and its attendant market driven orthodoxy is an entry point for the global takeover by Trans-national Corporations (TNCs), then the future looks very bleak. With profit as the end goal of corporations, then its guiding motif is the total subjugation of the human being as a value item in the profit maximization grid.

Whereas this entrenches the Darwinian “only the strongest survive” typology, it is imperative to ask ourselves; what happens to the weak, the poor and those who can’t compete? And in so doing, the answer is clear, that this is not only a morally and repugnant characterization of a human being and society, but it’s a negation of the life principles founded on Judaeo-Christian teaching.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2004, over one thousand participants, including delegates assembled for the historic Accra General Council. Theology of life was at the centre of reflections and deliberations. A major outcome of the General Council was the “Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth”. This was received by many churches (in both the north and the south) as a prophetic voice that is timely – raising critical questions and calling for a clear stance on the world economic order.

Certainly when God acclaims that “man is created in his own image....his own likeness”, the implication is that “man” should not be tethered to the dominion of other “man” created systems and processes. And the market is certainly a man-made process.

Of note, with the hindsight of biblical teachings, is the folly of the market. Its blindness to the supremacy of human being; body and soul. The dignity and comprehension derived from the ability of drawing from consciousness. The ability to discern fallibility and infallibility. What is right and what is wrong.

This is aptly captured in the scriptures when Jesus whips and throws out the merchants and traders in the temple. The zeal for profit maximization is blinding and all too often drives people to sacrifice anything for the pursuit of the “Money God.” In this sense, the neo liberal driven market model cannot work for society because it’s purely premised on a clash between “Profit” and “Life”.

This mutative cycle of profit maximization at the expense of life, negates the very principle that its life that makes profit and not the other way round. What Canadian philosopher, John Mcurmtry calls, “the cancer stage of capitalism.”<sup>9</sup>

**Challenges for Africa. Making Poverty History, and not the History of Poverty.**

*The Jubilee Year.....  
Leviticus 25*

This leads me to my subject of the day. We are gathered here, joined by our shared belief in making the world a better place for all of us. A world less of want and more on the bounties of life. A world that respects human dignity as our basic foundation. A world that reveals and reflects our shared commonwealth. A better world for us all. A

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<sup>9</sup> Mcurmtry John, 1998. *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism*, Pluto Press, London.

world of hope and aspirations that we are making great futures for ourselves; for our children and our children's children.

We are talking about the very notions of taking our destiny in our hands. We are talking about the ability to dream. About the capacity to envision different futures. Having new cosmologies. Changing our metaphors and symbols. Having new identities. Having shared beliefs and values. Recreating our imageries. Standing tall in equality. Walking together hand in hand, besides and along each other.

When I see *Live 8* and *Make Poverty History*<sup>10</sup> talking about 30,000 people dying a day, for me this is not a statistic. The images that go through my mind when I see these numbers are the faces and names of real people, my family, my neighbours, my friends, my community.

Thus one challenge that Africa must overcome is the romanticisation of poverty. We must endeavour to portray the Africa that is waging a determined struggle against poverty and not one that is dependant on paternalistic aid and charity.

However the real transformation that is taking place is at the level of individual citizens in Africa. The people of Africa are increasingly refusing to accept a life of bondage, poverty and injustice. And our challenge as voices for Peace, Partnerships and Renewal is obvious that we as a civilization are at critical juncture that calls upon us to rethink our destiny. This is not a small task and will not be accomplished overnight. But its mere admission calls for us to dialogue. And it is this dialogue that will usher us into a new paradigm.

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<sup>10</sup> Live 8 was inspired by British rocker Sir Bob Geldof and his Irish counterpart and U2 band lead, Bono as part of their campaign against Debt and Poverty in Africa. It was a remake of the 1984 Live World that raised millions of pounds for famine stricken Ethiopia. It gelled with the Make Poverty History, the UK version of the Global civil society mobilization, Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), in the run up to the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. Thousands participated and it was watched by over one million people via TV.

Premised on the fact that the world is a shared heritage, we are saying that time has come when we have to free ourselves. In the context of our Larger Freedoms we must chart a paradigm shift that secures our Development, Security and Human Rights for all, we are reaffirming that we want freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom from indignity.

At the intersection of developed and developing countries, what we call globalization today and its concomitant subjugation of whole societies and civilizations to the control and domination of others the very fibre of our commonality: Freedom is under challenge. I know freedom is a cliché' in recent times, but people from Africa who are in bondage know the true meaning of the word.

We must of essence join and listen to the voices of the Africa. The voices of the people who make the world. Those who toil. Those who nurture. Those who have continued to breathe life irrespective of the dispossession conditions they live in. It is very ironical of the clear intentions and designs we continually put in place; each time history demands fundamental changes for human progress. But it's utmost that we now make the first step towards breaking the rigid walls of the dominant enclosures.

This is the time to audit ourselves for the long march we have taken in convincing ourselves that we are making any changes but we aren't. No wonder we are caught in between a cyclic debate of poverty reduction or poverty eradication.

The problem is the adoption of the whole poverty agenda.

Poverty cannot be eradicated without a comprehensive development programme. Therefore, we need to go back to a development agenda for the New Millennium. And this necessarily has to be a sustainable economic and social development model.

This is what has to be discussed. This is what the other-globalist movement should be involved in. Of course the debt of poor

countries has to be written off. Of course financial markets have to be controlled. Of course we need international taxes and an international distribution of incomes. And of course poor countries need policy autonomy in order to define their own development agenda. These are important criteria if we want to build another beginning. But they will not on their own solve Africa's problems if we don't address our Governance agenda and our polities.

We will need to talk about how to stop the depletion and squandering of natural resources. We will have to talk about food sovereignty. We will have to ask ourselves how to distribute production, trade and consumption. We cannot allow African countries to just produce for export and import everything they need. We will have to talk about some kind of world governance in order to plan, regulate and redistribute. Therefore, we will need democratic institutions. But the most important rationale is to break with the dominant worldview that only and only the markets will bring development.

With the hindsight of how to overcome the challenges thereof, then it becomes possible for us within the communion of the church, to address the glaring questions enumerated as;

1. What does it mean to be church in the context of neoliberal economic globalisation and empire?
2. How are churches living out the Accra Confession and how can Africa move forward with the Accra Confession?
3. What are signs of life and spirituality of resistance in Africa?
4. What can Africa draw from to mobilise people in a spiritual process of transformation and resistance?
5. What are the signs of covenanting for justice among churches and communities in the Africa and with partners from other regions?

