97. Enrichment, impoverishment and the power of exclusion.

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Documents from this consultation can be found at:

http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/argentinadocs.html and in particular "Seeking Solutions - Moving Forward: the Protestant Churches say 'Enough is Enough' "

We live in a world of big, even extreme, differences between wealth and poverty. According to recent UN statistics, the private property of the richest 225 people in the world is as high as the annual income of the poorest one-third (2 billion people) of the world's population. And that global inequality is growing. An often-quoted statistic is the ratio between the average income per head of the richest 20% and the average income per head of the poorest 20% among the world's population. Calculated on the basis of a comparison of states, the UNDP found for 1960 a ratio of 30:1, in the eighties of 60:1, and in the 1990's of as much as 78:1. A similar tendency towards growing inequality is present within the richest states of the world. For example, *The Economist* of 16 January 1999 reported: "The gap between America's rich and poor has grown in the past 20 years. Whereas the average earnings of the top fifth of male earners rose by 4% between 1979 and 1996, those of the bottom fifth fell by 44%".

This presents all of us with an important question, namely this: does the enrichment of those who are already rich stand on its own in the world today, or has it also simultaneously led to more poverty? We see that enrichment and impoverishment seem to go hand-in-hand, statistically speaking, but can we say that there is also a causal relationship between the two, so that we can speak of a kind of robbery by the rich from the poor?

Sometimes this causal relationship is quite evident. For instance, the US figures we just mentioned which refer to 1979 and the years following. This was a time when Ronald Reagan became president of the USA. He intentionally lowered the taxes for the rich, and to enable him to simultaneously increase outlays for armaments he had to cut social expenditure for the poor. Or, even more convincing, look at what happened recently in Argentina. The rich were afraid about an impending devaluation of the pesos; they took huge sums of capital out of the country and in this way deepened the economic crisis and caused an even greater fall in the value of the currency. All imported goods became far more expensive as a result, which then led to a sharp decline in the living standards of the poor who never received any kind of cost-of-living income-adjustment for the increases. But what about the rich? Well, they could repatriate their capital back into Argentina for almost double its previous worth in pesos, for they had speculated with dollars and euros against their own home-currency, and they won. No wonder that Buenos Aires has now become a city of deep contrasts between exorbitant luxury on the one side and thousands of homeless people on the other. Enrichment in this case thus indeed caused further impoverishment. The new wealth of the rich is in truth stolen from Argentina's poor.

Enrichment can indeed cause impoverishment within one nation. But can something like that also happen on a global scale? Most economic textbooks will tell you the exact opposite: if some countries grow richer, then this usually implies positive side-effects for other countries. But, we pause to ask, is this picture still valid in a time of rapid economic globalization, in a time when – to quote the 'Basta' report of the CLAI – money itself has become a commodity? (see page 8 of the English edition http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/CLAI-paper12-03.pdf). It is worthwhile to sort this out, also because it has huge moral and social implications that will eventually become evident.

In the following paragraphs I will first try to prove, that in the present world a fully grown *dynamics of enrichment* has indeed come into being and it is fed and sustained by the new global financial economy (par 1). Then will follow an analysis of the three *elements of exclusion* which are inherent in this process of enrichment (par 2). On this basis it seems feasible to prove the existence of an ongoing *dynamics of impoverishment* (par 3). In the final paragraph we will look for possibilities of breaking through these trends, and to ask about the role which Christians could possibly play in this (par 4).

par 1. the dynamics of enrichment

In most analyses of the process of globalization the paramount role is ascribed to the so-called global financial markets. And correctly so, because the amount of international financial transactions has simply sky-rocketed in the last decades. Compared with the amount of money which is used and needed for the payment of real goods and services in international trade, international financial transactions (of which about 80% is used for speculative purposes) are at least fifty times higher. Within each one-and-a-half days more international money goes around the world in this way than the total debt of all so called third-world countries put together.

Where does all this money come from? From where does it originate? It is quite clear that this new international money is in the main generated from Western Banks and their daughter-banks in the South. They have the capacity to open new accounts for their clients and in almost all cases credits is given or allowed in the so-called key-currencies. This is the money of the rich countries: the dollar, the euro, the English pound and the Japanese yen.

Why do banks make such opportunities available for their clients? It is because this newly created money can be used to make profits. It can be used for direct investment elsewhere, or for the profitable development of new markets. But it can also be used to finance huge take-overs of other companies, or for property-and-value speculation. The more positive these expectations are, the more money is created. It usually passes all national barriers with ease; the so-called 'global' capital can easily enter into a national economy but also leave it overnight. But most of this newly created money remains in the protected markets of the West, or else it will find its way to the so-called emerging markets in the South. For developing markets are still very lucrative, even after the partial collapse of the markets specialising in information–and communication-technology (the ICT market). This is also the case because modern firms can, to some considerable extent, steer or even 'produce' the markets for their own products by keen demand-management. By rough estimates more than 25% of the outlays of modern business firms relate to such acquisitive/commercial activities. New profits are continually looming on the horizon.

If, and to the degree that, these positive expectations turn out to be true, then a new round of credit can usually again be obtained from the banks. The expectations can go up and down in waves, and this related to the so-called volatility of the financial markets. Banks and their clients can thus grow richer together in an almost autonomous or closed circle of enrichment. And this especially so, if they can use the possibility of evading taxes by moving capital to tax-havens or by opening secret accounts in Western clearing-houses. One of them, Euro-Clear, has for instance now a yearly turnover of no less than $3000 billion (3,000,000,000,000).

Of course, there are other methods for increasing wealth and property than simply entering into the financial circuit. But in the world-economy of today it is the most promising way, and it surely shows the strongest growth. It is also true that now large-scale organised crime is using this circuit. The financial markets increasingly control and steer the real economy. And so, a new type of Capitalism has recently been born, the Capitalism of Global Finance.

par 2. three types of exclusion.

In the description of the process of financial enrichment there are at least three ways or forms of exclusion become apparent, and these either directly or indirectly harm the vital interests of poorer or the less "privileged" (whether peoples, persons or nations). Together they indeed lead to an ongoing "dynamic of impoverishment" in the world of today.

a. new property-exclusion .

Taking the world as a whole, the level of production and trade is almost substantially higher in each year than it was the year before. This is also due to the fact that the world's population is still growing. It is therefore quite understandable that the amount of (international) money grows year by year; otherwise a world-wide process of deflation (a lowering of prices) would occur. But what is less understandable is why the amount of money grows far more than is really needed, and moreover why it grows in a such an extremely lopsided way. The banks and financial institutions of the West possess in fact a total monopoly over the creation of all forms of international money (or so-called international liquidities). And they can lend this newly created property – for money has indeed become a separate good, in which you can trade - to whomever they will. We hear in our time a lot about acts of privatisation, but usually forget that the first, and perhaps most important, act of privatisation took place when the state no longer issued most money, but left it mainly to private banks to create it. This, however, leads now to huge inequalities in the world economy. If a country like Zambia needs oil, it has for instance to pay the full price in dollars or euros - so money which is created by Western Banks (for no oil company will ever accept *kwachas,* Zambia's own currency, in payment). But if a rich country like the US needs higher imports, it can pay for them with its self-made money, which is created by US banks at almost no cost. The economy of the US is for instance an economy which, year in year out, imports far more than it exports – simply because this "trade-deficit" is paid by its newly created dollars, which are still accepted everywhere, and so pour out into the world-economy.

In this way, however, other poorer countries are in fact fully excluded from any share in the huge benefits (the so-called *seignorage*) which derives from the creation of international money in today's world. International money is the property of the rich and that includes the right to create new money. Of course, there have been proposals in the past to change this system of money-creation, for instance by allowing the International Monetary Fund to issue new world-money in the form of so-called SDR's (special drawing rights), which could be distributed among all its member states. But proposals like these have always been vetoed by the US with the silent support of all other rich countries.

The systematic exclusion of the poor countries from these property-rights is, in fact, also the real source of their constant indebtedness. For where the powerful do not share the rights on this newly created money, the powerless have to borrow it. Possessing, not sharing is the dominant way of the West. You can observe that trend also in the legal sphere. The rights to pollute in other countries are seen by the West and bought by them as rights of property. Western transnational companies create continually numerous patents, even on living material, just to extend their own privileges in other countries by investing in this way in their new exclusive property rights - they do so even if that prevents other nations in the future from accessing these resources.

b. entry- exclusion.

Middle income and poor income countries are often advised by Western countries, and also from the international financial institutions, to expand their exports. For in that way, it is said, you can overcome all your debt-problems and start out on your own self-generated path of growth. So almost all countries of the South have been pushed to follow the export-scenario. But the same Western countries, which gave or supported that advice, continue on up until this day by hindering the entry of the products of the South in their own markets by the use of high tariffs and other trade-barriers. The tariffs for agricultural imports and for most manufactured products are still very high, as much in the US as in Europe, and they are kept high because of the enormous lobbying power of their own producers. But that implies that the Western advice to the South to choose the export scenario is intrinsically hypocritical. The West wants its corporations and investments to enter other countries without any restriction; it even tries to enforce it by all the means available to them. But it excludes, denies these rights to others as soon as Western markets are concerned.

c. scarcity-exclusion.

As soon as international money is created it begins to look for profitable outlets. A very important part is used as capital to invest abroad. If some form of decision-power is related to that it is called foreign direct investment (FDI). This is truly active capital which can promote the economic development of a country. It is therefore important to look where it goes.

The flows of direct investment to the so-called developing countries grew seven times between 1990 and 2000, which was indeed an enormous expansion. But if we look more carefully at the destination of all those capital-flows we see, firstly, that they contain less than one-fifth of the world's total Foreign Direct Investments flows. So more than 80% stays or is used in the Western economies. Moreover, no less than 93% of the capital-flows to the South went in these years to the middle income countries (this data is based upon a recent report of the European Commission). So, if we look to the so-called low-income countries, where about 40% of the world population lives, a small calculation shows that they receive(d) in recent years only 0.20 x 7%= 1.4% of all productive capital flows.

Why is it that the poorest countries are so clearly excluded? The main reason is that the home-markets of the poor countries are not markets where a lot of money can be earned. Profits can be made in emerging markets, especially those which are linked to the development of new products which can be easily exported. Foreign direct investments thus do not go to the traditional sector, but to the modern or modernized sectors of the economy. And this is in fact nothing less than another type of exclusion. For it means that the real scarcities in poorer countries stay mainly as they are and where they are. Instead, new forms of scarcity are introduced, or even 'produced' by Western transnational companies which are looking for new markets. But this newly created scarcity drives out the possibility to satisfy already existing scarcity. In the competition for capital, land and other resources the home market-development of the South is almost always on the losing side. It loses the battle from the big capital-rich companies with their often aggressive style of acquisition and advertising.

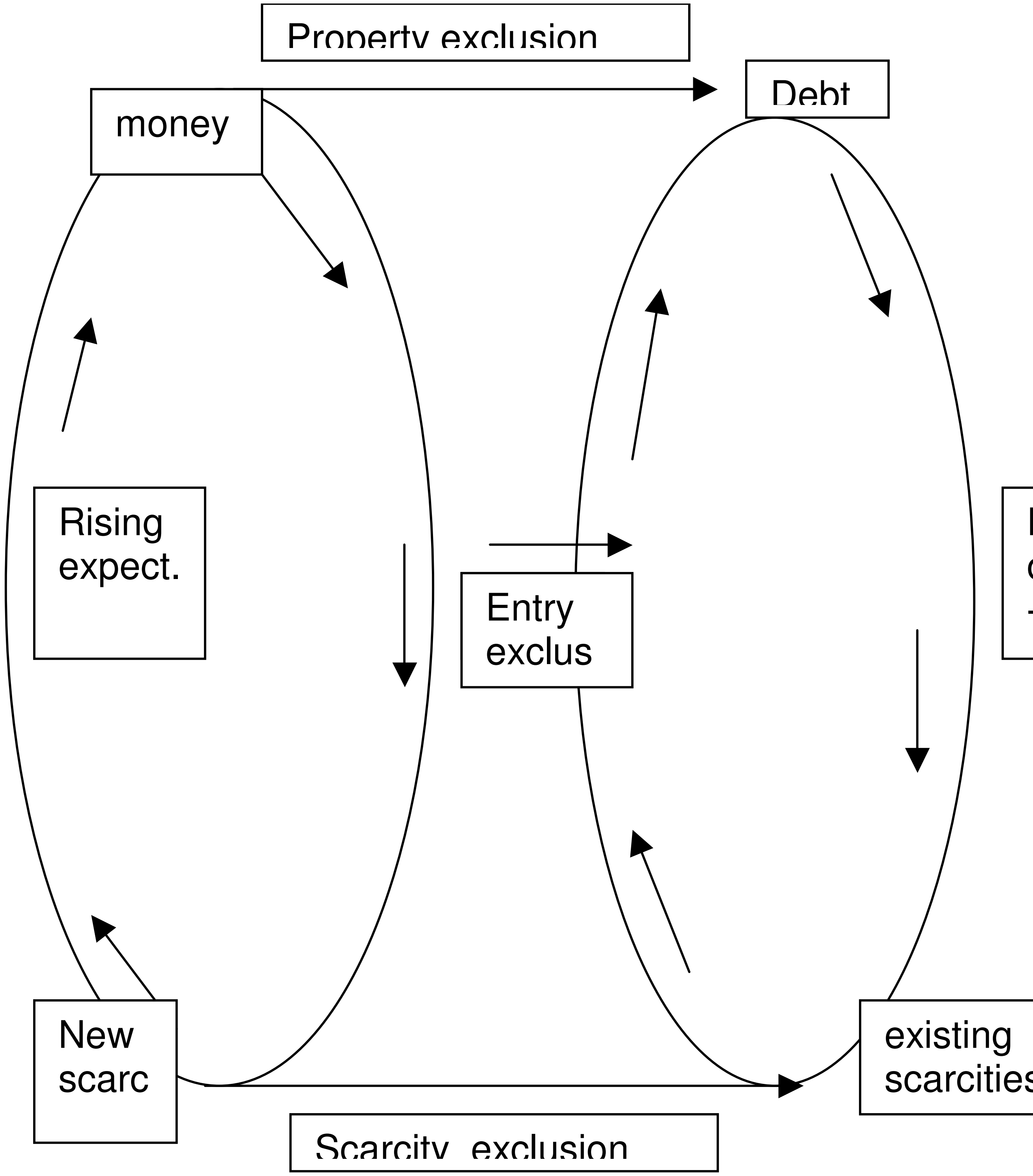
par 3. the dynamics of impoverishment.

The three forms of exclusion – property-exclusion, entry-exclusion, scarcity-exclusion - are often jointly active. If and where that happens it results inevitably in an ongoing dynamic process of impoverishment. In most countries of the South the ongoing global enrichment thus causes and indeed nourishes ongoing systemic poverty.

The dynamic of impoverishment starts with the reality of property-exclusion in relation to newly created international liquidities. All countries in the world are to some extent dependent from some goods or materials which they have to import, but rich countries can pay for that in their own valuta. Countries of the South are excluded from that privilege, and thus can only obtain international valuta by earning them - by exports - or by borrowing them. Any other solution leads to a poor country's devaluation or depreciation of its own currency. And so debts to foreign banks or states easily grow, especially if some imports (oil for instance) become more expensive. Debts however have also to be paid for in international currencies, so that sooner or later the country is indeed forced to choose its own export scenario.

But immediately other exclusions are activated. The choice for the increase of exports implies firstly that resources, which otherwise could have been used to build up the home market and to feed the nation's population, have to be used in the modern, export-oriented sectors. The new scarcity drives out the fulfilment of old scarcities. Secondly, the choice of the export-scenario is severely hampered by the entry-restrictions which are used by western governments for their own markets. You can only come in by paying what are often exorbitantly high tariffs. The export-scenario can also fail because the export-markets are often not so deep, especially not for unprocessed raw materials. If several low- or middle-income countries choose together for an accelerated export scenario - because no alternative is offered to them – then usually a kind of over-supply will take place with a sharp deterioration of their export-prices as the almost inevitable result - the so-called Triffin dilemma: *the more you pay, the more you owe*. To balance the debt via the route of higher exports may lead to such a lowering in export prices that the total export value becomes less than its initial value. Under those conditions the existing needs of the poor are not satisfied, and it is not hard to see that they will grow. As well, all efforts of the indebted country will then be oriented to overcoming the debt problem and the economy is turned inside out - it becomes subject to the claims of rich banks and to the wishes of rich foreign consumers. And very often this export drive will be undertaken even if, from the beginning, it has been of the view that no lasting solution can be found down this path. The powers of exclusion can indeed be so strong that they drive an economy to a substantially higher level of poverty . It is the story of most countries in Africa, and now repeats itself in a country like Indonesia.

[A picture is added to illustrate this. In this picture the left hand-ellipse shows the dynamics of enrichment, which (following the arrow) starts with additional money-creation (at the top) and leads to the development of new markets. This takes place under entry-restrictions for almost all competitive products from elsewhereincluding nations caught in the empoverishment cycle. The profits which are realised in this way lead to higher positive expectations in the financial markets and so induce the banks to start with further rounds of liquidity creation. This whole process is built on three forms of exclusion (see the horizontal arrows - monetary exclusion, market exclusion, scarcity exclusion) which, in their turn, feed on the impoverishment process. That process is sustained via the presence and growth of debts, the consequential enforcement of disappointing (often entry–barred) export-scenarios (see middle arrow), and the decline of all possibilities to develop one's own blossoming home markets. Positive expectations which could lead to capital-impulses from abroad are thus not realised. So also here the circle tends to repeat itself].



A diagram to illustrate the parallel cycles of enrichment and empoverishment. This was an earlier sketch of the diagramme that was later used in <u>Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for</u>

<u>Confronting Global Crisies</u> Baker 2007 p. 163.

The combined appearance of enrichment and impoverishment in the world of today finds thus its main explanation in various forms of exclusion which to a large extent are systemic and inherent to global financial Capitalism.

This conclusion is further strengthened if we add (?) two necessary nuances to this analysis. The first is that huge enrichment can also take place, and does take place, in the heart of the South itself. The second is that also in the North we now find clear indications of growing impoverishment. These nuances should not surprise us. For they emphasize that powers of exclusion are not restricted solely to relations between nations or blocks of nations. They are universal features of the rise of one global economy.

Within nations of the South indeed several forms of enrichment-by-exclusion take place. Some of them, like property-exclusion, have already been known for decades and even for ages, as with the denial by the rich of access to land by the poor. But new forms of each of the three forms of exclusion now seem to merge with the old ones. The access to cheap credit, in any case to international capital is, for instance, prevented if it is poor people who are seeking it. The rich escape where the less-rich cannot escape and lose. The rich are also able to buy the consideration of their national governments to protect their own international financial interests. And the entry of small entrepreneurs into new markets is often prohibited or hampered by national and international patents. And advertisement-campaigns from the large Trans-National Corporations continually appeal to the poor and their children to give priority to needs other than traditional ones. Some middle-income countries like Argentina, Korea, Brazil now show two faces at the same time. The one part of the nation lives in the context of a culture and economy of enrichment, and the other part lives in the context of a shadow-culture of impoverishment. Also here these two parts are however highly interdependent and relate to each other by continuous effort or by forces of exclusion.

The story of the present impoverishment of many people *in rich countries* sounds different, but is in fact very similar. One in four children in the USA (usually non-white children) has a direct experience of hunger, and the European Union has now even millions of people living under the poverty line. Recent research points out that these 'new poor' usually cannot cope with the demands of a hasty and highly efficient modern society, and are therefore easily left behind, expelled or excluded. They can scarcely enter the labour market, have to live with lowered social security payments, and are often over-burdened by growing debts - also because of constant social pressure you may also have to adapt to the (expensive) life style of others if you wish to be accepted by them. So you go into debt. Until, of course, that option is no longer possible and so you move to the less expensive urban or rural ghettos, the last place of social acceptance.

Exclusion is thus present as a power in all societies and even in churches. It is not by accident that most Western churches have lost most of their poor members. The other way is seldom heard; rarely will the rich adapt themselves to the needs and possibilities of the poor; in rich societies that option is seldom heard and rarely practised.

par 4. Alternatives; the Power of Inclusion

The previous analysis can easily lead to feelings of despair, as if no escape is possible. But there are strong reasons for drawing a different conclusion – reasons based on reality itself.

The present world-wide process of increasing enrichment-by-exclusion may indeed seem very strong. But it takes place on a unstable foundation. Often we feel impressed, to use a metaphor from the book of Daniel, by the image of such an enormous giant. That is until we see that it stands on feet of clay. Some indications of that part of reality are the following:

1) The *volatility of the financial markets:* markets which are mainly driven by collective subjective expectations - which is surely not a firm base - have now reached a level which looks more like flickering stars and insecure waves, than as trustworthy compasses for the future. This implies a constant lack of balance in the process as a whole. The enormous amount of speculative money in the financial circuit spoils the game, as it were. It is moreover money which cannot always be absorbed. Sooner or later, it will come down to earth, and we will return to the real economy, but then with devastating consequences for the real as much as the financial parts of the economy. George Soros has already convincingly shown in his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism* (1998) that financial markets have no tendency to inner stability. One day the dream will be over.

2) The explosion of enrichment in the North and in parts of the South goes along with an enormous amount of *resource-use*, also per head of population, and with a lot of *environmental pressure* and damage. Combined with a growing world population, the earth can not endlessly carry this burden. Climate change, increased stress among workers, enormous loss of species – they all indicate that we have come near to some crucial ecological borderlines. Shortages of resources are leading already to new wars, while the great disparities in income between rich and poor countries generate further huge migrant-flows. Together with the rapid increase of *'new' poverty* in the rich nations all this will unavoidably lead to more social unrest and deep instability. An economy always rests upon what people, the earth, and societies can endure and if it ever forgets those limits, it will crash, sooner or later.

However knowing about and expecting these events can never be a reason for joy. For many will deeply suffer under those developments, especially the weak. But it is also true that problems like these can function as allies. They can help us to urge others to break with their illusions and to return finally to reality. The time for change has really come; it can no longer be postponed.

The need of that can also be illustrated in another way, namely by looking to the *weak architecture* of the present process of Globalization. The basic concept of the present development of the world-economy is in fact a tunnel-model (an image which was first used by the English economist John Maynard Keynes). A tunnel is a project of unhindered progress, and it induces many cars and vehicles to move forward at a maximum speed. A lot of noise is what characterises a tunnel, because everyone wants to reach its end, where it is open and where there is light as soon as possible. Heavy traffic, slow cars are not permitted to enter into the tunnel, because they could slow down the speed of all. Compare now the speed in the tunnel with the pace of economic growth; see the energy of the cars as a picture of the striving for highest productivity in markets; view the noise with pollution and other environmental damage; and consider those cars which are left out the weak and the unemployed - not only individual persons but also non-competitive nations - and the picture of the present global economy is almost complete. We can even add the role of finance as a bunch of selecting and controlling traffic-police officers. The image shows however at the same time the very problematic side of the building-style of such a world-economy. The pollution grows, the number of excluded persons and nations increases, and continually rising productivity asks for constantly higher burdens. And as these damages are financially compensated there seems to be no other outlet than to intensify the growth, to go for even more productivity and for higher 'competitiveness' – the sacred cow of almost all now- living politicians. But this implies, at the same time, that the light at the end of the tunnel will never be reached. The tunnel may even end in a kind of a deadlock if the walls are increasingly closing in on each other.

Often it is said that this may well be true but there are no available alternatives. Such an assertion can be easily falsified by starting from another model of growth – the growth of a blossoming fruit-tree. A healthy tree is full of energy – in that respect there is no difference with the first image. But it is related to a type of growth in which all cells are involved, and no cells are excluded. The tree moreover lives in harmony with its environment, and does not overburden its own soil. And it bears fruit – compare this with a possible fulfilment of all basic needs in the economy and the presence of meaningful labour of all. Why then is a simple tree able to perform all these functions, while our most advanced tunnel- economies do not fulfil these functions but simply fail?

The simplest answer to that question is that no tree will ever try to grow to the clouds. Otherwise it would indeed overburden its soil and have to exclude all weaker cells. But that answer has also a deep significance for overburdened present ‘modern’ economies. Every economy, every society should be continually aware of, and build on, its own conditions and boundaries, because in trespassing these it is asking for trouble. A wisdom which we also discover in the Scriptures (for instance in Psalm 1 in the image of a watered tree). Said otherwise: every tree needs to build up its own organic reserves ***before*** it is able to start blossoming. Similarly, each economy to some extent needs the power of a common restraint by its people and of mutual cooperation, ***before*** it is able to grow in a more fertile, meaning-giving direction. Here the real alternative becomes visible. Instead of just hunting after more ‘external’ BNP (Dutch: "Bruto nationaal product" = GNP) growth it is also possible to orient national economies and the world-economy towards an ‘inner’ economic growth, a growth which is more directed to real needs than to luxuries, so to a less consumeristic, but also less demanding , less polluting and more creative in various forms of human and social development. That type of growth is needed now, as much in the South as in the North. For if a tree is not rooted at the waterside it will simply fade away.

The practical side of this alternative can be seen in the fact that elements of self-restraint are needed just as much at the micro level as at the macro-level, when combined with mutual consultation and, where living cooperation possible between most or all economic actors. These then have to some extent decide together what could be done in the common interest of all, and they should also be willing to discuss each other’s possible inputs or the use of instruments to reach that goal together. This will be the case even if their own private interests appear to be an antagonistic impediment to co-operation (which is never entirely true).

This ‘*power of inclusion*” has already proved itself to be a working possibility on the *micro-level*. There is the heart-warming example of the poor black church community of John Perkins in Alabama, where it was possible by a fruitful sharing of time and whatever money was available to reduce unemployment in the region from 40% to almost 5%. Jobs were created by mutual cooperation and consultation inside and outside the community. It has also proven itself in the *national* economy of the Netherlands, where in really critical situations the organisations of employers, of employees and the government always come together to see if an agreement is possible to overcome an economic crisis and they consult on the basis of a willingness to co-operatively endorse joint instruments - including the instruments of self-restraint in wage- and income-claims. It could also work on the *regional* Latin American level, if a sincere cooperation between states orients itself primarily to the development of healthy home markets in the context of human rights and ecological care, and if possible on the base of a joint Latin-American currency. And it could also work on a *global* level; especially if the rich countries come finally to their senses and return to the peoples and countries of the South the freedoms which they acquisitively took from them. For the South needs those freedoms before it can be expected to cooperate with the countries of the North in building a blossoming world-economy.

But how to prevent those perspectives from remain a dream? For the forces of economic and political resistance are very strong and will no doubt also remain strong in coming years. There are two remarks I want to make at this point, which are also directed to my own contribution.

Firstly we should open our eyes, pure and simple, to the powers which prevent the emergence of a new world overflowing with justice, are more than ever before powers of exclusion. But exclusions will always express themselves in concrete forms which can be challenged and tackled. Many constructive civil movements of our day are proving this truth, and should therefore be seen by the churches as their natural allies. Porte Allegre (World Social Forum Jan 23-28, 2003) was a promising signal for all of us, regardless of whether we live in Buenos Aires, Manila, Kitwe, Geneva, Washington or Amsterdam.

See http://www2.wcc-coe.org/ccdocuments2003.nsf/index/gen-6-en.htm

So let us look to the three forms of exclusion which were discussed and see where openings are present to tackle and break these:

The exclusion of the poor from *new property-creation* is, as we saw, not only a deep shame, but also a cause of deep economic and financial instability in the world as a whole. This way of creating new international money has therefore to be brought back, as soon as possible, to the international agenda. The countries of the South should learn to fight together for a direct share in this creation, which is now the undeserved privilege of the West. For let us not forget: the access to the sources of wealth and well-being is a right of all. It was also the heart of the year of Jubilee: that poor people were allowed to return to their land, and with that to the roots of their own economic existence. Next to land we see that now capital also has to return to those who really need it.

The still existing *barriers of entry* of western markets should be attacked and broken since they are a clear sign of utmost hypocrisy. The united attack of the civil movements has already made it possible to prevent the MAI treaty (Multilateral Agreement on Investment). Breaking through the protective barriers of the markets of the rich countries looks like a feasible next step.

The fact that *new desires or* needs are now increasingly 'produced' by the producers themselves is severely underestimated in its far-reaching psychical, social and ecological consequences. For there lies the sources by which peoples are misled and eventually become enslaved to consumerism, by which new scarcities crowd out existing scarcities. The battle over the control and the use of the media should therefore be re-opened. Churches should confront the growing consumerism as a matter of deepest concern and action, and try to engage civil movements and also other religions in this battle of spirits.

Secondly there is a firm base which lies in Christian hope itself. It is not just an abstract hope, and it flames up into life particularly when the utmost darkness seems to rule. It has its foundation in what Philip Potter once called “God's own globalization” - his firm plan to re-capture the world (Ephesians 1:10) under the Lordship of Jesus, who as Good Shepherd prefers always the survival of the weak above the survival of the fittest. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote about our life and times as living in ‘das Vorletzte’, and he indicated by that that Christians should be willing to be living *out of* the future, and thus not only *towards* the future. If we expect a Reign in which the poor survive, where nature can breathe again, and where the wounds of the inflicted are healed, then it should already colour our life- styles here and now. Then we should break the bread with the poor today, as Bonhoeffer once wrote in his Ethics.

Joseph Widyatmadja from Indonesia once used in our conference the metaphor of the deep darkness which comes just before the morning light. It is a inspiring image. Especially if we also remember the last words of Jesus which are bequeathed to us in the last texts of the Bible: ***I am the morning star***. For it is indeed the morning star which shines in the deepest night. It is the sure token that the darkness, how overwhelming it may be, is already broken.

How nice to see him back in this way,…