

MESA: Forum on Faith and a Sustainable Economy

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Abridged Notes for Translation

Present: Derek Duncan (UCC-USA), West Cosgrove (Projet Puento), Jim Hodgson (UCC-Canada), Peter Noteboom (CCC), Javier Ulloa (Seminario Bautista), Franklin Canelos (CLAI), Lourdes Villagomez (CEE), Suzanne Rumsey (PWRDF), Alfredo Barahona (KAİROS), Marty Shupack (CWS), Greg Smith (PWRDF), Rev. Lee Junsam (Presbyterian Church – South Korea), Yi Kilo (Kanji University - South Korea), Stephen Allen (PCC)

Saturday Morning Panel: Churches addressing pastoral and systemic challenges in the Americas

Moderated and introduced by Peter Noteboom

Questions for panel:

1. From your location, what are the pastoral and systemic challenges facing the churches?
2. What opportunities are there for the churches to collaborate in addressing those challenges?
3. Where do we want to be in 18 months

Franklin Canelos, CLAI, Ecuador (power point available)

Introduction. Some countries pay 35-40% of national budget to service debt, which takes away from public services, infrastructure. Debt is an issue for the church, yet not addressed much outside of Jubilee Campaign. To what extent is illegitimate foreign debt part of the mission of church? Debt is an essential part of Lord's Prayer. The question should not be "why should it be a priority?", but "how could it not be?" Basic rights and access are being lost by whole sectors of communities as marginalization and exclusion increase.

Ethical and moral commitments. International financing and loan structures make mockery of national sovereignty, democracy and transparency. Whole societies are held hostage and made to pay for the (bad) decisions of leaders and lenders. Churches should be righteously indignant. Not just forgiveness or cancellation, but justice should be applied. We have the right to oppose a system that exploits and abuses. Debt cancellation is the key to fair and mutually responsible foreign relations: equitable and mutual relationships, use of resources, trade, legal framework and peace. Churches must advocate for these just and mutual relationships, as the common body of Christ. We should promote audits of external debt. Negotiations on behalf of people require clear assessment of national debts. We should retake the spirit of Jubilee.

We all know current structures benefit northern countries. Capacity of northern countries to veto economic strategies is still very strong. Many of these issues and decisions have been taken away from the UN, which is more democratic, and put into specialized spaces (G8, G20) which don't include most countries. We have supported the proposals of UN GA President Father Escoto, who has proposed bringing these functions back into the UN.

Further description in South America of the attempt to re-create a regional financial architecture:

1. Recreate Bank of the South, to replace other development credit from IMF and IADB. There is agreement already to do it and how much each will contribute. Decide every country would have one vote no matter how much money to put in. Ecuador=Brazil
2. Fund of the South. This is a regional monetary fund, which would give short-term credit to ensure a country's financial stability, to resolve balance of payments, etc. This can call upon financial reserves of each country, rather than putting equity into banks in the North, believing that they would be safer. But we have all witnessed the insecurity of northern banks amid rampant speculation. For every dollar invested from the South in production, \$3 invested in speculation.
3. There is consideration to move toward a regional currency in S. America. This would start by recognizing each others' local currency, rather than exchanging to USD every time. Brazil and Argentina already recognize each others. Can be electronically tracked and periodically resolved. The Union of the Countries of the South (UNASUR) is already behind this new financial architecture. Columbia and Peru so far have stayed out.
4. The idea is not just to be rid of the World Bank, but to replace it with something different and more local. The logic and objective would be the integration of people, and not just money and financial power.

In 18 months, hopefully we'll see more countries conduct debt audits.

Marty Shupack, CWS, USA

Jubilee debt campaign started out only in the church, quickly widened and included supporters from the Pope to Billy Graham. Even though most US public opposed it, it did eventually garner even Republican Congressional sponsors. Concern about debt was eventually largely replaced by HIV concerns, and today by climate change, health care and immigration. Despite this, advocates are pushing for the Jubilee Act, elimination of structural adjustment programs, and calling for odious debt audits.

Lourdes Villagomes, Ecumenical Study Center, Mexico

1. Challenges:

Neoliberal economic system creates poverty, violence, militarization, and damage to environment.

Preoccupation to evangelize and grow churches.

Churches have hierarchical structures that don't permit all to participate.

Lack of theological training for everyone.

Failure to integrate faith with everyday life.

Ecumenical divisions.

Need to think globally but act locally.

How can we live with responsibility to all and give dignity to all?

2. Opportunities:

We need to prepare and professionalize the preparation of laypeople.

We need to find other ways of being church, especially home churches. We should look to the experience of the first church. We should compare and learn from Pentecostal and evangelical churches that do small group ministry and church formation.

Christians should participate in social movements, avowedly as Christians.

We need new ecumenical paradigms. We need new ecumenical experiences and ways to systematize them. Re-launch new ways to live political and social commitment as Christians, not how it was done in 60s and 70s. We should work with other actors from broad ecumenical perspectives.

We need to strengthen education and transformational experiences. We should increase encounters with the poor and allow ourselves to be evangelized by them.

3. In 18 months...

How can the church monitor these suggestions? We need common reference point. We need to monitor global military activity.

We need to be visible, to express solidarity and denounce injustice together.

We want to be moving toward an economy of solidarity in the Americas, in production and consumption, but also in how we relate to one another.

Jim Hodgson, United Church of Canada

We started to see neoliberal hegemony 25-30 years ago, which took advantage of certain crises through the 80s gradually to control what would occur in the global south. Economic structures are used to control. Trade agreements have been used to control the freedom of people to shape their own future. How can we change the banking system to help local communities choose own futures. Lately the Bank of the South and others have become new options; can they help wrest control away from IMF? In the current financial crisis, what is Big Finance doing to restructure the economy now to their advantage? One way is that Big Finance is looking to supply greater public services, and to do public-private partnerships, supply the arms industry, etc.

Challenges:

All churches have similar capacity issues, which is especially affecting ecumenicity in justice work. We must work creatively with what we have: like CLAI Faith, Justice and the Economy, EAA, etc.

How do we untie what binds people? In UCCanada, how do we tie our global partnership program more tightly to justice programs?

Dr. Yi Kiho, Hansen University, South Korea

This is not just an Americas dialogue, but is also global.

1. Next year 100 anniversary of Japanese colonization of Korea. Also, anniversary of WW2 and Korean War, a Cold War proxy. History of conflicts between Japan and China, Korea and Japan in the 60s. For almost 100 year, very divided nations.
2. Korea, Japan and China have been in great competition for economic and political dominance. North Korea and Taiwan are also competing. Who will be the great power?
3. There's also an Olympic timeline. 1964 Games in Tokyo, 1988 Seoul, 2008 Beijing. Each year was the occasion for that nation to gain prominence. 2012 is a goal year for North Korea; it wants to be a great power, but politically it can't. Nuclear power is seen as its only way (2012 is 100 years after Kim il-Sung).
4. Next year is 60 year after Korean War. Resources depleted after war. Main exports were labor intensive products. States would drive companies in 70s and 80s. Then light

industry transformed into heavy industries. In 1990s and 2000s private companies took over and gained economic power. But a few elite families have maintained control.

5. Since 2000 the main focus changed to unification rather than privatization. S Korea's interested in free trade agreement rather than protectionism. Farms and small businesses have opposed FTA.

New Poverty issue: absolute poverty existed after Korean War, but it was universal, so there was no societal shame and the poverty was faced as a national challenge. Since 1997, the last financial IMF crisis, there arose substantial relative poverty, a "New Poverty". It is marked by desperation rather than Hope. The working poor (avg salary 20-30k USD) cannot afford housing. They are politically excluded, socially isolated and economically exploited.

It has resulted in dehumanization and destruction of community. The socially weak now includes the young generation, migrants (1 mil) and North Korean refugees (almost 20,000 people). [S. Korean population is 50 million.] Includes trafficked women from China, Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (mail-order brides). 20-30% of rural marriages are between Chinese and South Korean brides. Before 2004 most migrants were undocumented. In 2004 there was a law to regulate migrant workers.

Signs of Globalization: McDonald's and Starbucks set the labor wage very low. Irregular (contract) workers' condition is biggest issue in Korea. (7.5 million regular workers, 8.5 irregular workers) 2500 USD vs 1500/month for irregular. "808 USD Generation" lower than living wage.

"E-mart-ization" E-mart has put Wal-mart out of business in S Korea since 1993. E-mart usually owned by Samsung, LG, and put all small shops out of business. Discount stores have irregular workers and low wages. Families increasingly have to then buy a car to get wares home from more distant stores, then have to get a new refrigerator to store food. "Capitalized kindness" is name give to false, impersonal shopping relationships. Stores try to create "family time" in the stores. They have become super-monsters that can observe everything people do. In 1997 there were already 7 E-marts in Shanghai; by 2010 they want to be in top 10 in China. There are three mega-store brands: E-Mart (Samsung), Lote-Mart, Home Plus (Samsung).

Then he shared the story of an interview with Vietnamese Migrant woman, who has little hope for the future or to escape poverty.

Rev. Lee Hun-Sam, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), South Korea

Globalization has created bi-polarization, gap among workers. Companies prefer irregular workers because of cheap wages and no insurance. The official rate is 25% but reality is more than 50% of workers are irregular. Unionization is difficult; women working at E-mart and on KTS trains have found it hard to organize. Most irregular workers cannot. Also unions often divide over disputes and don't support each other in negotiations. New poverty includes the urban poor and fosters violence. Almost half of population is in Capital Area around Seoul. Agriculture, development, infrastructure all hurting in rural areas, while increasing numbers of new poor crowd capital. Yesterday was a holiday, like Thanksgiving, although nowadays farmers often just plow up crops when they can't get good price for their crops.

Efforts of the Church: The PROK works for irregular workers and migrants. The church supports demonstrations and advocacy efforts, helps provide service outlets. Provides legal issues to help with rights, back wages, hospital (about 200 patients/day). For farmers, the Church helps network farmland churches, help buy local produce at fair prices. Support urban-rural church exchanges and bible studies.

Saturday Afternoon

MESA Business Meeting

This is a session designed to return to what we said we've going to do, what we've done, and where we are going.

USA

Face-to-face meetings: We want to maintain this ecumenical alliance and focus on the effects of NAFTA in regard to climate change and the environment. We need to look at the work we've done with respect to free trade agreements, educating churches, and strengthen our position against NAFTA. The MESA structure so far has not made that possible.

Conference Calls: Conference calls from time to time are enriching, we need to move beyond the business to learning with presentations like Raoul did. Can we consider the possibilities that Skype provides, grow more slowly and organically, not big steps? We need to change structures and get more funds to make anymore drastic changes.

Representation: We wanted to expand representation from Mexico and El Salvador, then establish alliances with other groups that work on free trade agreements and globalization. El Salvador participants proposed a strategy to respond to the killing of women, right to land, labour conditions in maquiladoras, name the actors and actresses who would be involved and could positively impact our joint actions. These would complement our strategies with concrete actions and tactics to pressure governments. What about developing a pedagogical document that would evaluate the negative impacts of free trade agreements and the lives of people?

Mexico

MESA helps us relate our local context with the global reality, or put another way we are a local expression of the global reality. We want to generate hope of an ecumenical character that would support people of faith: make pronouncements together, take our testimony and witness to communities, evaluate 15 years of free trade of NAFTA that would include theological reflection and testimonials, continue the group coordination. Perhaps we could establish groups that would work on specific themes?

Canada

Last year we said that we would transition support and membership from The Canadian Council of Churches to KAIROS. KAIROS may continue to provide some support, the CCC has stepped in on an interim basis. We are still in favour of a meeting of the Americas: an ecumenical conference of 12-15 people. We need concrete actions that are simple and feasible, our agenda should be achievable and modest. We can continue the conference calls, maintain face-to-face meetings every 12-18 months.

We organized this meeting in Windsor, and have sent letters about the situation of Lomas de Poleo as well as the women's issues to the governor of Chihuahua. Incorporate more Central America, The Carribean, and perhaps Latin America.

Sharing about resources:

Previous mode of operation, especially annual face-to-face meetings is unsustainable as currently configured. The following ideas were flagged for further development and proposals.

Ideas to follow up on:

Americas Initiative

Meeting of the Councils of Churches of the Americas, and how do we include agencies? (Peter) – probably Church World Service too. With the theme of economic solidarity in the Americas.

Continued collaboration through other relationships

Relationships among KAIROS, CLAI, CEE, Real Ecumenica de Columbia (Alfredo)

AGAPE process of WCC, Covenanting for Justice-North America of WARC, and Covenanting for Justice-CANAAC of WARC. (Peter, Andrew)

Leadership Development

Another meeting in Mexico / Central America, tie that up with some youth initiatives, shift from advocacy toward leadership development. (Derek, Suzanne, Javier, Lourdes)

Kim Erno can also be included as part of an exposure trip possibility; also West Cosgrove, Project Puente. Primates' Fund

We value these relationships, so how can we in a creative way continue to meet as we've done and do these proposals provide the opportunity?