Ulrich Duchrow

GOD OR MAMMON: ECONOMIES IN CONFLICT

Dear friends,

How can we help each other to become co-workers, better co-workers of the loving God in a world dominated by cruel Mammon? This is the question which makes our conference important. Because this is the life- and death-question at present for most people on this planet and the planet itself.

We all know that the content of the question has to do with the globalisation of the formal economy. It is, therefore, a great opportunity for us to be gathered here from all parts of the world. In this way we can pool our competence at all levels, ranging from our different localities and cultures to global realities. Each of our perspectives is important in approaching the whole.

My own perspective is shaped by three fields of experience:

* Local work on mission and ecumenism with congregations, pastors and synods of a national church in a country which, as a whole, belongs to one of the three centres of wealth and power - Europe, North America and Japan. This experience shows mainly that churches can be part of the problem rather than of the solutions. Yet there are also some signs of hope.

* University work on theology and economics with students and faculty from various disciplines. This experience shows that the academic majority in my country is completely neglecting or ideologically misinterpreting reality and biblical faith. Yet a minority of particularly exegetical scholars have caught up with so-called Third-World theologies, providing more and more evidence for the relevance of the Bible to our question in excellent publications. At the same time alternatives are being developed in economics.

* Finally I am part of KAIROS EUROPA - Towards a Europe for Justice. It does networking among the organisations of the marginalised and those groups and congregations in solidarity with them. Through the WCC Unit on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) we are linked to similar networks in the other continents. Though we are only moving forward by millimetres we gain important theological and strategic insights from this experience. I shall come back to this.

We here are also from different theological and ecclesial traditions. It seems to me that most of these have to be re-read and reshaped in the light of the new biblical insights and challenges God places before us, given the devastating effects of economic globalisation.

This becomes quite clear from the excellent preparatory materials for this conference in Mission Studies. There is a clear convergence of analysis and biblical-theological reflection, and possible alternatives. Following the pattern of seeing, judging, acting, I shall organise my contribution in three parts:

I. The present structures of Mammon economy
II. Biblical light on political economies and ideologies
III. Emerging alternatives and strategies for faithful action.

I. The Present Structures of Mammon Economy

There are three dimensions in which our analysis has to take place: the economic, the political and the ideological-theological.

1. The Economic Dimension: Absolute Capitalist Market for the Rich

Franz Hinkelammert in his preparatory article starts from the well-known fact that the downfall of "really existing socialism" in 1989/90 has made capitalism the only one-world system. Against this background his first thesis is: without that challenge of an alternative - however this alternative may be judged in itself - capitalism has not only become total, the "one Lord," but also wild, i.e. without a human face. In his second and third thesis he draws the particular conclusions for the "Third World": the first world still needs the resources of the "Third World," but not the people. Therefore, these are no longer seen as objects of development, but rather of security policy. An additional feature is to use the territories of the South for experimenting with ecologically dangerous industrial and military processes, and dumping waste.

For our purposes these correct observations need to be elaborated in two directions: exploring the effects on the other regions of the world, on the one hand, and analysing the globalised market system, on the other.

There is already an argument about the South. Can it still be seen as one disadvantaged region? What about the Asian Tigers, showing that development is possible in dependent capitalist societies? What is not said in the argument is that South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore were frontline states which got a lot of extra resources from the West in