

THE CHURCHES AND GLOBALIZATION (Document of the Waldensian and Methodist Synod, August, 2001)

We, the members of the Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, meeting in Torre Pellice (Turin) from 26 to 31 August 2001, express our deepest aversion in the face of economic injustice and political violence that limits or excludes the participation of the greater part of humanity and is leading to the destruction of the planet. We, as citizens of one of the more richer countries of the earth, participate and are co-responsible for this situation that dictates rules for life, and for death, to the poorer countries.

Painfully we acknowledge to be among those that consume in an unlimited way the limited energy resources of the world; disdained, we confront ourselves with the powerful pharmaceutical centers that put the criteria of majority profits before that of the dignity of the human being and its right to health; energetically, we refuse to consider migration as an evil from which we must defend ourselves rather than an opportunity for solidarity and the extension of civil rights; horrified, we individualise in the production and in the commerce of arms - that serve to kindle conflicts of every kind and especially ethnic conflicts - the emblem of an economy detached from every moral principle.

We acknowledge that we are not dealing with novelties that appear for the first time on the face of our planet, but in the present situation we encounter a gravity without precedence:

- in the fact that abuse of the environment risks making the degradation irreversible with foreseen irreparable damage;
- in the fact that the violent exercise of economic and political power diminishes out of proportion democracy in our western countries as in the countries of the Third World;
- in the fact that on the global level there are no checks or political controls that up to now have restricted economic power at a national level; this allows for the worst devastation for an unrestrained and uncontrolled economy.

Our aversion to economic injustice and the destruction of the planet is linked with the commitment the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches have assumed already for years, giving voice to the victims of economic injustice and calling the churches to become conscious of and take a stance of resistance within the framework of a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in our time.

We further affirm that today our awareness is also situated in the context of the multiform protest of the civil society that expressed itself lately in the demonstrations of the Genoa Social Forum that saw the adhesion and the participation of groups within our churches (the Federation of Protestant Churches in Liguria and Southern Piedmont, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Protestant Youth Federation in Italy, two District Conferences of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches) together with many brothers and sisters of the Roman Catholic Church.

In this framework we reaffirm the necessity of:

- deepening the analysis and denouncing the effects of economic injustice, of political violence and the destruction of the planet both on a global and on a local level;
- working toward closer connections with those sectors of the alternative movements with whom we feel more in tune as well as within the framework of the Social Forums that are being created in many places, seeking together elements of an alternative to the actual order of the world economy, understanding above all the necessity to create rules and

controls over and above the national levels, efficient and democratic, with the aim of a governable economy;

- elaborating forms of manifestations that adapt themselves to non-violent options that appear today as indispensable not only in principle but also to make sure that violence does not place an impenetrable shield that would make impossible, on the side of public opinion to whom we appeal, the perception of the message and the contents of our denunciation.

On the basis of these considerations and convictions, we invite the churches to tackle these themes without taking any part of the question lightly, neither for the non-violent option nor for the involvement of the churches in problems of economy. Our desire is that the churches plan an in depth study program and commitment along three lines:

- To know. The way to knowledge implies the acquisition - both as individuals and as communities - of instruments to gather differentiated information and counter-information with respect to the means of information that more directly depend on economic power. Equally educational action is necessary to furnish people and communities those elements for understanding the economic mechanisms that consent to the comprehension of the questions involved. For information and education the aid of experts will be essential as well as contacts with local groups already committed to the criticism of the actual global economic system.

Psychological analysis will also be important for the growing sense of anxiety for the lack of a future that characterises our society, from which we are not immune, and that tends to manifest itself at times in violence, more often in indifference with respect to problems that people encounter.

- To confront. For believers the knowledge of the facts and the problems brings about a confrontation with the Word of God, a searching for the vocation that the Lord addresses to his Church in this specific time. Preaching and Bible study - in which concepts such as justice, peace, meekness, love and idolatry - could constitute a starting point for confrontation.

A further stage of the research, that sees many other churches committed, could produce elements for a confession of faith in the context of the world ecumenical community in which to express the conviction that today the economy is a question with which the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ must come to terms.

In everyday community life confrontation with the Gospel message on these themes will necessarily involve informative routes in which the whole community is committed.

- To act. The confession of faith also has a practical-active application that must permit - always in the awareness of human fallibility and inadequacy - the commitment of persons and communities in their or other's initiatives to denounce, resist, demonstrate, in symbolic action and choices of life style. It's important that the practical aspects of action be judged as part of our obedience to the Lord for a common path toward a more equitable economy. It's necessary on the other hand to watch out that personal and community action do not become degraded as useless or superfluous, nor that they become used surreptitiously to make people feel justified and complacent.

In its acting in obedience, the churches could discuss together, among other things:

- the possibility of transferring their funds - on the individual, family, local and central administrative levels - to the Ethic Bank as a choice for excluding investments in the production and commerce of arms;
- the participation in equal opportunity commerce that gives support to alternative economics;
- support campaigns for the quality of consumer goods and the boycotting of products connected with, for example, the abuse of minors or the destruction of local economies;
- the necessity of re-examining the consequences of our life style to reorient this life style on the basis of solidarity, sobriety, forms of periodic and continuous donations even outside the ecclesiastical circles.

In these and in other possible ways, we invite the churches to make use of the help that the newly constituted Commission on “Globalisation and Environment” of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy could give.