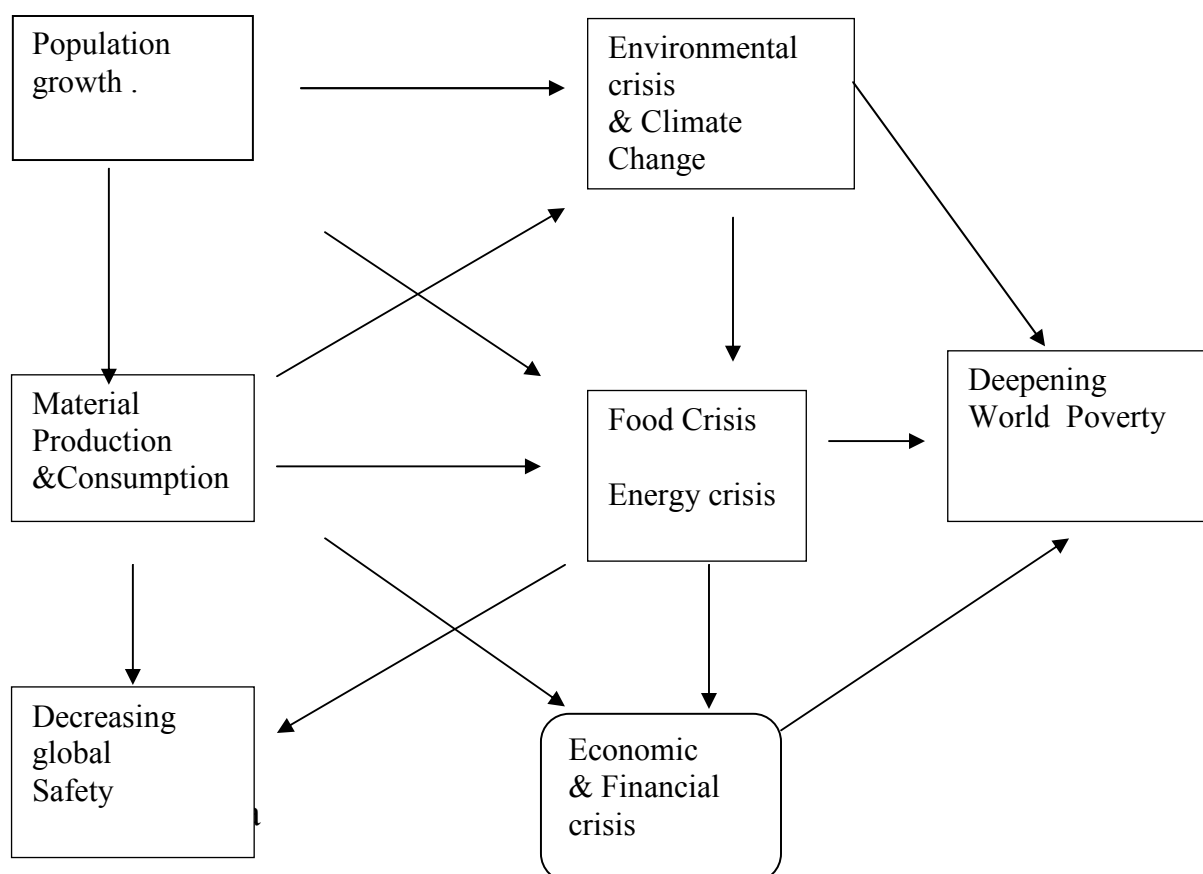


*Dr. Bob Goudzwaard: A christian-social perspective on the global economy  
Lecture for the annual meeting of the ECPM, Bern 2009.*

A christian social perspective on the global economy: that is the challenging title of my contribution. It is challenging because it tries to connect the christian-social worldview with a concrete reality. But it is also challenging because now especially every effort to approach the global economy looks like shooting at a moving target. And that is not easy, as everyone can tell you in this country of William Tell!

The global economy, as we all know, is itself subject to constant and rapid change. But obviously the context of the global economy is also changing now. Its dynamics are being hampered with—indeed, it is undergoing a deep crisis. The crisis is aggravated by a number of more or less inter-related, specific global crises. Here I have in mind the food-crisis, the energy-crisis, the poverty-crisis, the environmental crisis and the security crisis. Not only do these separate crises worsen the worldwide economic crisis, but they also give it a specific, unique feature which was not present before. For each of these crises is interconnected with the others.

Let me offer three illustrations of this statement: (\*\*\*)



As soon as we refer to the present global problem of accelerated climate change (see the top right of the diagram), we also realize that climate change is as connected to worldwide population growth as to the increase of production and consumption per capita. In turn, the climate crisis aggravates the food crisis due to falling crop yields in many countries, especially in the Sahel. At the same time, the world's expanding population and rising consumption-levels increase the global demand for food and so also in their own way deepen the food crisis. The energy problem enters the picture by way of the need for alternative energy sources like bio-energy. The production of bio-energy requires fertile soil and so competes with food-production. Meanwhile, together the food crisis and the environmental crisis entrench deeper levels of global poverty. In other words, the interaction between these crises today has profoundly negative impacts on the well-being of the globe as a whole.

A *second* illustration is the well-known statement by Solana that Europe must increase its armament levels because of the problem of climate change. His argument is two-fold. First he states that in the near future climate-change will increase the numbers of economic migrants to unacceptably high levels. But secondly he also expects an increasing rivalry between economic regions. Each of them seeks to preserve its current standard of living, and thus feels compelled to guarantee its future access to food, water and fossil fuels, if needed even by military force. In Solana's view, the climate-problem, the security-problem and the migrant-problem are thus interconnected.

*Thirdly* there are the interconnections related to the present financial and economic crisis. No doubt the crisis has its own inherent sources, but increasingly commentators identify one of its main causes as an excessive desire for material goods and higher personal consumption. There are also clear indications that the poor in the world are the most hurt. They suffer, for example, from the loss of their export markets and the denial of credit from Western banks and governments. Also here the interconnection is evident.

Of course this is a very rough and possibly one-sided selection from the large number of problematic interconnections in the present global economy. The diagram is even missing the feedback loops. But I think that the examples are sufficient to convince even the most critical listener that the level of interdependence between global problems is, at minimum, not decreasing but increasing. Precisely at this time of global crisis, the concept of a global village appears thus to be more real than ever before. If one continent sneezes, the others get the flu—and not just in the case of the possible Mexican flu pandemic.

But if we search for possible solutions to the bundle of these multiple, interconnected crises, and if we examine the way in which politicians and economists approach these crises, then two elements strike us almost immediately. First, no matter how interconnected these multiple problems may be, most decision-makers still deal with them as separate problems. Each crisis receives its own package of solutions. Very seldom are the proposed solutions interconnected. Secondly the vast majority of the solutions proposed and implemented continue to be far less effective than they should be. Some solutions are continually adjusted to a longer time range, so shifting from 2015 to 2020, 2050 and even a more distant future. In that way they have little impact on behaviours and patterns today. Finally, the solutions offered usually restrict themselves to what can be done in terms of a financial, fiscal, organisational or technological approach. The standard political tools are the input of more money and more effective technologies or the creation of new markets. The basic assumption is obviously that each problem, each kind of crisis, can be cured by the available types of pro-active solutions.

But is that really always the case? It would appear that something is missing in the currently accepted political and economic remedies. Are not the proposed solutions too one-sided, too lopsided, especially when viewed from the christian-social perspective?

It is not by accident that I add the element of our own *christian-social view* or perspective. The christian-social view no doubt has deep roots in our history and civilization. These roots also have a religious nature, linked as they are to both Catholic and Protestant social teachings. Perhaps now more than ever before we need a renewed awareness of these roots. People around us voice profound concerns about our world and our deeply endangered future. These voices and concerns compel us in my view to go to deeper levels, to also more spiritual levels of analysis than is usually done. Perhaps some kinds of shortsightedness are preventing us from missing some of the desperately needed, realistic ways-out of today's crisis.

Let me offer you a metaphor. Consider the way in which young palm trees have been planted for centuries in the middle of the desert in Northern Africa. Thus in a far different environment than places like on the slide, where a lot of water remains available (\*). Planting a tree in the middle of the desert seems like an impossible task in and of itself. But it becomes truly unbelievable when one sees what actually happens. The tree planters dig a deep hole in the sand, sometimes ten meters or more, and they push the young tree down into the hole. Then they fully cover the tree with sand, and finally they carefully position and secure a large usually flat rock on top of the young tree. By all appearances, the

planters have systematically eliminated every possibility of growth for the young tree!

But the opposite is true. A young tree wants to grow by all means. If it is not possible to grow in an upward direction then it takes a downward direction instead, until finally it somehow reaches the groundwater deep underneath the soil. If it reaches that level, the young tree drinks and absorbs so much energy that it is able to grow upwards and even to push the stone aside! *Palma sub ponder crescit*, says the old Latin proverb, *a palm grows under pressure*.

I hope you understand this metaphor. When we find ourselves in times of great pressure and huge concerns, we may have no other real choice but first to go down to the depths to find the real living water. Sometimes, also in politics, we need to return to the deepest origins of faith, life and meaning to find real ways out of seemingly insolvable misery, where even the essence of life itself is at stake. This may be the hour to do precisely that!

But how ought we to do it? Should we make an urgent plea, in line with the best christian social traditions for a growing recognition of a living, organic civil society, far beyond what the mechanisms of state or the market both offer? Surely this would help—and it is badly needed. But I do not think that in and of itself this will be enough. It does not bore down deep enough. What we need most, is to find a path to the cultural and spiritual depth layers of our society, a path that would help us also to understand more clearly the possible flaw in the commonly accepted ways of approaching today's realities. Then we might also be able to see if and where elements of shortsightedness and blindness have possibly crept in. But this effort also requires a self-critical element. We should not exclude a priori the possibility that perhaps we too have been entrapped in a closed, too restricted way of understanding today's reality.

Let me use a famous painting (las Memimas of Velasquez) as an illustration (\*). Do you see something strange about this painting? At first glance everyone, - including the painter himself, you see him at the left side of the painting- seems to be looking at you as an observer of this remarkable scene, with the Spanish crown-princess, the *infanta*, in the middle. In his book *Archeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault points however not first to her but to the presence of a small mirror on the wall, which clearly shows the entrance of the Spanish royal couple. The several looks in the painting are thus not meant for us, the observers of the painting, but for the king and the queen! You and me, the observers, have even become entirely irrelevant in this painting.

Foucault uses this painting to illustrate that sometimes we need to correct our own simplistic way of observing reality. We then need a new and different view.

He calls this the view from the outside, *la pensée du dehors*, which transcends the “normal” and “self-evident” way of observing.

Is there some shortsightedness present in the usual way of looking at global realities today, and consequently in the usual way of trying to solve our economic or political problems? Let me provide three indications that this might indeed be the case.

The *first* I take from the well-known British Stern report about climate change. The report, whose policy conclusions were affirmed by Prime Ministers Tony Blair and JP Balkenende, contains a famous equation, the so-called Kaya identity. (\*)

Stern Review, part III, p 177v; period 1992 -2002).

$$\text{CO2 emissions} = \text{population} \times \frac{\text{GDP}}{\text{population}} \times \frac{\text{energy-use}}{\text{GDP}} \times \frac{\text{CO2 emissions}}{\text{energy-use}}$$

*or, by estimation:*

$$\% \text{CO2 growth} = \% \text{pop.growth} + \% \text{GDP per capita} + \frac{\% \text{energy-use}}{\text{per unit GDP}} + \frac{\% \text{carbon-use}}{\text{per unit energy}}$$

US:	1.4%	=	+ 1.2%	+	1.8%	-	1.5%	+	0 %
China:	3.7%	=	+0.9%	+	8.5%	-	6.4%	+	0.5%
EU:	0,2%	=	+0,3%	+	1,8%	-	1,2%	-	0,7%
<hr/>									
World:	1,4%	=	1,4%	+	1,9%	-	1,7%	-	0,1%

I like this identity because it clearly explains the causes of today’s excessively high CO2 emissions. As we can see, the level of emissions is created by a combination of a) the level of carbon-efficiency per unit of used energy; b) the energy-efficiency per product; c) the material production and consumption level per capita; and d) the size of the population itself. One can see, for instance, that between 1992 and 2002 China used more fossil-fuel energy (coal) and therefore underwent a decline in its carbon-efficiency. At the same time, it used less energy per product. Yet this was not enough to compensate for the enormous impact of its industrial growth (8,5%) and (moderate) population growth. As a result, the CO2 emission level still rose 3,7%.

In my view, the Stern report clearly and correctly emphasizes the need for more or less radical technological and fiscal improvements in the areas of both carbon-efficiency and energy-efficiency per product. It is excellent on this score. But the report takes a remarkably different approach to the influence of

the first two factors in creating emissions levels—population growth and industrial growth. The report explicitly states that there is no reason to cap the growth aspirations of both the poor and the rich countries (\*). It even concludes that tackling climate change is a *pro-growth strategy*:

Tackling Climate Change is the pro-growth strategy for the longer term. And it can be done in a way that does not cap the aspirations for growth of rich or poor countries.

Even from a purely analytical point of view this conclusion seems strange. Why would one expect that improvements in the last two factors of the Kaya equation will be always enough to cancel out the influence of even the highest material growth aspirations in the North, even apart from the issue of population growth? William Corson, in a special edition of “Future” magazine, calculated that between 1950 and 1990 the world’s population doubled, the use of natural resources increased three-fold per capita, energy use rose by a factor of five and industrial production grew by a factor of seven. Can such processes simply be repeated every forty years? Can the earth endure that? We may of course have different opinions on this score. But what strikes me here is that the report puts continuously higher economic growth by the world’s rich countries entirely in a favourable light—even though this factor is perhaps the most crucial factor for the future of climate change. Why? Might this reflect a political preoccupation on the part of the report’s authors, seeking to gain the agreement and signature of the British Prime Minister? I do not think so. The authors were all highly qualified academicians. But in my view this leaves only one other possibility open, namely that the authors somehow reflected in their conclusions a certain technological and scientific one-sidedness, and this possibly in the context of a highly dynamic worldview.

I take my *second* illustration (\*) from a recent book by George Akerlof and Robert Shiller. This remarkable study identifies “animal spirits” as the possible cause of the financial crisis of our time. The term “animal spirits” comes from Lord Keynes. It refers to those irrational factors or noneconomic motives that heavily influence people in their decision-making. The authors mention as examples: an unlimited confidence in what markets can do; money illusion; and several forms of bad faith. These kinds of instincts, they argue, caused people to seriously believe that for instance house prices would always go up, and heightened their faith in the possibility that they would get richer and richer. Akerlof and Shiller conclude that their theory of animal spirits answers the conundrum of “why most of us utterly failed to foresee the economic crisis”.

Their analysis is interesting because it provides a hint as to which forms of shortsightedness, even of blindness, can creep into the public mind. But a serious question pops up here. Is the sole root of the entire crisis indeed some

kind of irrationality, like the fact that people are driven by their instincts? I doubt that. Could it be that aspects of a collective illusion or even hypnosis played a role? As we all know, illusions and hypnosis are often related to some kind of idolatry, which occurs if people set their hope on something which they follow blindly. In the last decade some people may have elevated and enthroned Money and the rules of Money-making into an infallible guide, in the expectation that these would by definition lead them to a better future. Indeed, it appears as if in recent years the financial perspective has become the ultimate and decisive standard for many types of policy and management. Perhaps we encounter here an element of faith—in this case of false faith—as one of the deepest layers of our deeply shaken economic reality.

My third and final illustration that certain blinders may be at work today is the presence of a series of concrete paradoxes at the heart of our global village. These paradoxes may stem from an overly narrow or one-sided view of our global economy and its present problems. Consider the paradox that poverty is rising in the midst of even the most wealthy societies. Reports from the USA suggest that one in eight children there experiences hunger. This process of worsening poverty in the midst of rising wealth has occurred unabated regardless of whether the Democratic or Republican Party has been in power. Or take the painful European experience that even the richest member-states now experience a continual erosion of public care. Paradoxically, opportunities for extending care are steadily decreasing in societies even where average per capita income continues to rise. Organizations providing nursing and other care for the elderly, for the handicapped, and for children struggle under the burden of serious financial problems, and their waiting lists become longer. Yet every economics textbook still states that a general rise in the standard of living implies that the supply of services for people will also increase. Or take the paradox of the increasing scarcity of time. Almost all economics textbooks claim that more prosperity brings more free time with it, along with an ability to work less intensively at fewer hours. In actuality, however, the opposite appears to be true. Not only has our pace accelerated, but more and more workplaces now confront the effects of stress and burnout among employees, due to the elevated time pressure on them.

This represents only a small selection of a whole series of contemporary paradoxes, including the health paradox of Illich, the environmental paradox (the decreasing quality of the environment even as our possibilities to improve it continue to increase), the budget paradox (structurally growing public deficits in the midst of rising economic growth) and the so-called industrial paradox (the increasing industrialization of the economy at a time of unprecedented saturation of industrial products).

Where do these paradoxes come from? How they are caused? Remarkably, all of them share one thing in common. They each display an increasing tension between the most dynamic and the most static parts of modern society. Poor people and poor countries are for instance stimulated to achieve more; and if they fail they are seen as lagging behind and in “arrears”, as it were. In the care sector, the only widely accepted answer to its problems is that it must increase its efficiency. Yet the care sector is structurally characterized by a lower annual rise of labour productivity, lower than the directly productive sectors of the economy. Finally, time, like nature, are givens, and so cannot be enlarged or produced at all. Paradoxes are therefore signs of a lack of balance between the dynamic side of each modern society and all that cannot move forward as easily and therefore seems to us as lagging behind.

But is not more happening here? This question unavoidably confronts us with how we ourselves view and value the powerfully dynamic features of our global and national economies.

Here I would like to use my last metaphor. The metaphor is meant to show that two entirely different views about central dynamic developments can exist side-by-side within today’s society. It is the metaphor of a high-speed train, like the TGV, the train of grande vitesse, which travels at fantastic speeds across the countryside.

The first perspective I would like to call the view *from the inside*. Imagine that you are travelling on a high-speed train, sitting in a comfortable chair. From that position everything looks quite stable and under control, your coffee cup included. You have no thought that the train may need to make an emergency stop; the journey continues without interruption. If you look outside the window, you see movement, but it is a virtual movement of the landscape itself. The landscape appears to be moving backwards, as if it is falling *behind*. This is of course an illusion, created by the fact that your own speed is your frame of reference. What is actually at a standstill looks as if it is moving backwards.

The second possible position is that you are standing outside the same high-speed train, a short distance from the tracks. This is the view *from the outside* (or, in the terminology of Foucault, the look into the mirror). What is your impression from this vantage point? It is of course that this train is travelling extremely fast, perhaps too fast. You may look ahead anxiously, fearing that the train may be threatening some cattle or even some children who are trying to cross the tracks farther ahead.

Let us now remember the three indications I just gave – the one-sidedness of the Stern report, the animal spirits, and the paradoxes. In their own way, each



suggests that we are inclined to easily identify ourselves with our own dynamic patterns. As modern people, we see ourselves primarily as an intrinsic part of that dynamic world. We then may tend to judge the outside world primarily from what we could call a “dynamist” point of view. But this implies at least two things. First, we will see and appreciate powerfully dynamic patterns in our societies as completely normal, as a datum, a given for everyone. We do not wonder about our progress, we only wonder about shocks or stops to our progress. We will then also be inclined to lean towards farther-reaching innovative technological approaches or dynamic (market) solutions. But judging the world from the viewpoint of our own internal dynamism and capabilities has also a second consequence. We will tend to observe what is not moving as rapidly as us as lagging behind and therefore, to some extent, as abnormal. We may even begin to feel irritated about what or who is straggling behind.

This does appear to be an accurate description of the current dominant attitude. How easily, for example, do we perceive poor countries with cultures older than ours as under-developed, less-developed. From the dynamist point of view, we tend to view poor men and women in the midst of wealthy societies as mainly under-performing. In relation to nature, from the perspective of the dominant view we will not bother with the inherent vulnerability of our environment. Instead, nature and the environment need to adapt to our wishes and desires. If nature poses limits on what we want to achieve, then we become irritated. We will even be inclined to view such restraints as merely temporary barriers which our own technology or scientific achievements will overcome.

Indeed, it appears that the classical Enlightenment belief in our own technological, economic and scientific progress lurks underneath today’s dominant view from the inside. In my view, only this explains the deep reluctance by so many people to even consider taking a step back on occasion, rather than insisting on always speeding ahead. But let us not exclude ourselves. As contemporary people almost all of us have been brought up and educated in a rational universe of self-created, largely progress-oriented institutions. We therefore have a natural tendency to prefer the modern view from the inside, even to the extent that we are in danger of identifying our own dynamist world with the real world. That can easily lead us to put our faith primarily in the dynamic operation of well-functioning mechanisms, such as the market, planning, or democratic mechanisms, and choose them as the ultimate orientation point in our moving universe.

But is there any alternative? Should we simply try to stop the present dynamic process of globalisation, to prevent painful paradoxes from appearing or the unleashing of wrong spirits? No, that is neither possible or desirable. Nor is

my plea or intention. After all, we are speaking about different ways of *viewing* reality. And we are looking for openings or ways-out of our problems, including our political problems, that may emerge from such a different way of viewing.

In my view, that different way of viewing is indeed offered by the view from the outside. To give you a sense of the validity of such a view I propose that we turn now to a final quotation. It truly comes from the outside, because it was written by the churches of Asia during the Asia crisis, confronted as these churches were by the bitter consequences of a too rapid globalisation. Their declaration was published in Bangkok in 1999 as a public letter addressed to the churches and the societies of the North—to us, in other words. They wrote:

*Is there not in the western view of human beings and society a delusion, which always looks to the future and wants to improve it, even when it implies an increase of suffering in your own societies and in the South? Have you not forgotten the richness which is related to sufficiency? If, according to Ephesians 1, God is preparing in human history to bring everyone and everything under the lordship of Jesus Christ, his shepherding – God's own globalization! – shouldn't caring for and sharing with each other be the main characteristic of our lifestyle, instead of giving fully in to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?*

Do you see how naturally their faith perspective now enters into the picture? It is a perspective written from their christian heart; and, in my estimation, a perspective which stands not far from the classical roots of the christian- social and democratic movements in Europe. If we read carefully, then we cannot see this letter as a rejection of all kinds of dynamic change in our present reality. The letter does not condemn globalisation as such; on the contrary, it exhibits an awareness of some good fruits of globalization. But the letter starts from a deep awareness of the vulnerability of poor people and of the cultures and the environments in which they live. A deep conviction lies underneath their words that a rapid economic dynamism is capable of enslaving both themselves and us. And that a sense of *sufficiency* might lead to a deeper shalom for a human society than always longing for more. Instead of absolutizing the value of self-made economic progress they relativize it. From their view from the outside, the train can indeed travel too fast. And in their view its speed should not be only be judged by its own criteria but also by what life, culture, humanity and the earth can endure.

It is therefore no wonder that precisely churches of the South wrote this letter. Many people in the South feel forced into a kind of economic adaptation and modernization which they would never choose for themselves. Often they ask:

won't this new type of dynamism demolish our culture and history? And won't it enslave us all to unending consumerism?

Let us consider whether this view from the outside can actually help us. In my opinion, this view is vividly concrete for all of us. Our own high-speed train—the train of globalisation—is now encountering obstacles or shocks on the track and has come partially to a kind of stop. People fully devoted to constantly maintaining and increasing our speed are now able to see the outside as it really is, rather than as something which is moving backward. Perhaps then this crisis might lead, could lead, to some general concern about our modern, often too secularized western attitudes. But there is more. It may sound strange, but today's crisis may also bring with it an element of hope, a sense of relief. The letter from the South uses the word “sufficiency” in relation to their concern about our always rising consumption-levels. But it is wonderful to see that in the view of the churches from the South sufficiency, or “enough”, is related not to pain and misery but rather to richness, to the joy of saturation!

In my view the pieces of the puzzle come together here. We started by describing the various crises which plague our present world, our own societies included. But when exploring the deeper causes of these different crises we could not set aside the impression, that somehow these causes are related to prevailing attitudes in Western society. These attitudes are on the one hand the expression of the dynamist, materialist course which has become a main characteristic of the global economy. But on the other hand they are also related to the way in which contemporary people like us view, value and appreciate this dynamist course and consequently promote it. This leads to the risky question, if perhaps we ourselves have also sometimes identified too easily with the view from the inside, and preferred our own speed and rapid progress to care for people and for the environment.

Let me return to the image of planting a palm tree in the desert. When we move down to our own spiritual roots, we learn that some essential elements of the view from the outside have always been present in the history of the christian social movement. The primary objective of our spiritual forebears was not to guarantee the most rapid material progress possible. Their concerns were about justice, dignity, charity and care. Their courage lay in continually confronting an overly isolated, progress-oriented society with the demands that the families of labourers should be able to live in dignity; that children be able to go to school; and that the life-conditions of the broader environment be healthy. All this is much more related to the view from the outside than the view from the inside.

But you may ask: how does this help here and now? Does broadening our perspective with elements of the “view from the outside” help us in the present predicament? Does it help us in relation to today’s deep crisis and to the alarming interconnections between global crises? I now gladly turn to these fundamental questions in the last part of my contribution, and I condense my response into three remarks.

*First*, the most important need is to reach the level of living waters. In my view, that amounts to striving for a general acceptance in our societies that the meaning of life is much deeper than what money and material consumption offer, sometimes even in an hypnotic way. Christians do not enjoy a position of privilege in emphasizing this. Think of words like shalom, salaam in the Jewish and Islamic traditions. These too fit more in the perspective of peace, sufficiency and sustainability than does the tradition of a never-ending march towards higher levels of material consumption. In my view, we need that awareness of shalom, salaam, more than ever before, not just spiritually but also economically. The earth and its climate simply cannot bear the burden of an unlimited rise of production-and consumption levels in the rich countries. The second factor of the Kaya equation must somehow be reduced. But let us try to give this also an actual dimension. Every economic crisis involves a drop in public and private spending, a slackening of demand. Many efforts are then made to restore these to previous levels. In my view we badly need a transformation of our national, European and global economies towards real sustainability and solidarity. This however requires a number of concrete investments in areas that the World Bank describes as human, social and natural capital. To make economic room for these kind of expenditures we simply cannot afford to have the levels of private consumption and income, including wages, continuously climb again, robbing the earth of its forests and last resources, and closing off the future for others, ourselves and our children. A trade-off needs to take place between our level of consumption and the level of these largely labour-intensive investments, in order to gradually transform our materially expanding economies into blossoming economies. Then concrete elements of shalom can enter again.

But how? That is my *second* point. The entire history of the Christian social movement includes a constant emphasis that a society is always more than a set of mechanisms. It is first of all a living, organic entity which can and should be addressed in terms of responsibility. The hand cannot say to the feet, I do not need you, because all the members of society need each other! Indeed, precisely because this is a time of multiple crises, the moment has come to confront our living societies, also in the European context, with what is needed to overcome together the present problems in a joint responsibility. This may include possible restraints and elements of sacrifice. In the Netherlands, for example, a

typical fruit of the christian social movement is the use of the so-called polder-model in critical economic situations. Where these situations occur, representatives from the labour-unions, the entrepreneurs and the government come together to see how, by their joint action - which will include some forms of self-limitation - the problems can be overcome. That model, perhaps enlarged by contributions from environmental, third world and peace organisations, represents a promising institutional model for the future. But it can only function if first the general public is well informed, and if the people also express that they see the negotiations as important for themselves, their children, and the world as a whole. This implies a mental turn to maturity. The idea of a mature responsible society which deserves to be addressed in an adult way needs to be revitalized. Instead, we have often adopted a much more childish concept where in principle each group should be given what they ask.

This brings me to my *third* and final remark. The challenges in today's world are enormous, and they cannot be dealt with in a separate instrumental manner, such as through the input of more money, more technology and more free-functioning markets. As citizens and decision-makers, we especially need to take into account the interconnection of global problems as outlined at the beginning of my contribution. But how to do this? Let me start with a sober observation. If it is true that the world's problems are now deeply interrelated with each other and even reinforce each other –mainly because of the continuous quest by the richest countries to put their wealth, their security and their progress first, with ever-expanding paradoxes as a result – then a complementary statement is possible and true. Namely that also the possible remedies for these problems are more or less interrelated. Why should we exclude the possibility that tackling one problem may contribute to the solution of one or more other problems, and why should we not make use of that? In this respect, the Biblical concept of following a way comes to the fore, a concept which is also present in other world-religions. Going step-by-step on the way of concrete justice and solidarity not only opens up the way further ahead, but it often also opens up a number of other fruitful directions, as a kind of unexpected blessing. Consider this example. The North now suffers under a relatively heavy economic crisis and is looking for avenues to increase global spending. Surely a worthwhile idea in this context is to link this legitimate desire with the fight against the enduring debt-crisis in the poorest countries of the South. Granting them the relief of just kinds of debt-cancellation will imply that their buying power, and thus the global effective demand, is partially restored. That amounts to an effort to solve one problem by way of also trying to solve another problem. The well-known peace-dividend remains another important example of the effort to link diverse problems and solutions together. And what a blessing it would be for both poor African countries and the social stability of Europe if—instead of taking the Solana-solution of increasing military expenditures—we followed a

strategy where, step-by-step, we removed the reasons why poor people choose to become economic migrants, with all of the attendant risks? Is not the oversupply of economic migrants a clear indication of a lopsided pattern within globalisation itself, namely that it tends first to enhance the wealth of the already rich, while it puts at the same time so many others unjustly at a social and economic distance?

Going down to the roots is not always a pleasant thing to do. But it opens up a perspective on regaining life, even in the middle of the desert.