

Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire

**REPORT TO THE 39TH
GENERAL COUNCIL 2006**



Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire
Report to the 39th General Council 2006



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Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire

Summary

The 37th General Council 2000 of The United Church of Canada approved the report *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil: Towards a Global Economy for All God's People*. The report described, analyzed, and denounced “the global reality of systemic economic injustice” (neo-liberal economic globalization) and called the church “to seek justice and resist evil so that together in mission we can build a global economy for all God's people.” It was both critical of the global economic status quo and its exclusionary tendencies, and filled with hope for the fulfillment of God's promise of justice for all people and creation.

Tragically, in this world of extraordinary abundance and potential, the pain and misery experienced by the vast majority of God's people is worsening. Year after year reports by major global institutions, like UNICEF¹ and the United Nations Development Programme,² tell dreadful statistical tales of growing poverty, rising rates of mortality, and escalating environmental destruction. One of the most alarming barometers of this deepening crisis is UNICEF's annual report on the state of the world's children. In announcing the 2005 report³ David Agnew, president and CEO of UNICEF Canada, made these sobering comments:

More than half of all children in the world are suffering extreme deprivations from poverty, armed conflict and AIDS...For every child enjoying what we [in the developed world] consider to be a normal childhood, there is a child going to bed hungry, watching a parent die from AIDS, or living in a refugee camp after being forced to flee from home by war and violence...we are continuing to deny one billion girls and boys the opportunity to grow up healthy and safe.⁴

United Church partners in Africa, Asia, Canada, Latin America, and the Middle East confirm this appalling situation and put a vivid human face on the numerical data with stories of intensifying suffering among their peoples and increasing environmental ruin.

To Seek Justice and Resist Evil described how neo-liberal economic globalization and unlimited market capitalism lie at the root of this crisis. Increasingly, however, we are realizing how complex the injustice of systemic economic globalization really is. More and more the term “empire” is being coined to characterize this complexity. It is a system that is causing creation to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Romans 8:22).

At its General Assembly in 2004, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) said that neo-liberal economic globalization is no longer an adequate term to describe the appalling plight befalling God's creation (Accra Statement). “As we look at the negative consequences of globalization for the most vulnerable and for the earth community as a whole,” WARC said, “we have begun to rediscover the evangelical significance of the Biblical teaching about Empire.”⁵

1 “UNICEF” is the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

2 For example, see the United Nations Human Development Report 2005, “International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world,” <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>

3 The State of the World's Children 2005: Childhood Under Threat, UNICEF, December 2004.

4 “UNICEF releases The State of the World's Children 2005,” media release, UNICEF Canada, Dec 09, 2004.

5 “Mission Section Plenary Report,” 24th General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Accra, Ghana, October 2004.

Similar concerns were expressed by the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) project, a process initiated by the World Council of Churches in 1998. AGAPE asks the question, “How do we live our faith in the context of globalization” and in a time of “empire”? Like WARC, AGAPE calls empire “...a system of global domination directed by powerful nations and organizations”⁶ that are the Caesars of our time. AGAPE calls the worldwide church to commit itself “to reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective, and take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers because all power is accountable to God.”⁷

The Executive of the General Council affirmed the Accra Statement and its concern about empire at its autumn 2004 meeting. It also urged the Permanent Committee, Programs for Mission and Ministry, “to develop a process to engage the United Church, including the courts of the church, in study and action.”⁸ Also, the draft Statement of Faith, placed before the 39th General Council 2006 by the Theology and Faith Committee, acknowledges empire as a complex system to which all God’s people are captive. The statement makes reference to “the domination of economic, political, and military empires; rampant consumerism and unchecked accumulation of wealth; limitless growth and damage to creation.”

In response to these concerns, the Empire Task Group was formed to begin to reflect upon “empire” and to make a preliminary report to the 39th General Council 2006. This report offers glimpses of the experiences named as “empire” and foresees a follow-up report on the subject for the Executive of the General Council by March 2009, following a three-year period of engagement and consultation with United Church members. Members of the task group include The Very Rev. Dr. Robert Smith, the Rev. Dr. Martin Rumscheidt, the Rev. Nanette McKay, Geegee Mills, the Rev. Brian Perkins-McIntosh, and Melissa Creasy.⁹

Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire follows a liturgical movement of Witness, Confession, Call, and Commitment.

“Witness: Empire in Jesus’ Time and Ours” is divided into three sub-sections:

- “Understanding Empire” defines the complex idea of “empire” as a system of global domination. “Empire” is directed by powerful nations, global economic institutions, and transnational corporations. We participate, knowingly and unknowingly, in “empire” primarily through our role as consumers in the global capitalist market system.
- “Stories of Empire as a Threat to Life and Creation” consists of testimonies from United Church global and Canadian partners. The stories help put a human face on the experiences of empire. The powerful observations and insights they contain leave no doubt as to empire’s devastating impact on God’s wondrous creation.
- “Theological Reflection on Empire” is a summary based on three theological reflections written especially for the report by the Rev. Dr. Douglas John Hall, Professor Emeritus, McGill University; the Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega, Principal, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Matanzas, Cuba; and the Rev. Dr. Néstor O. Míguez, Professor of New Testament Studies, Instituto Universitario ISEDET,

6 “AGAPE, A Background Document,” World Council of Churches. Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth, or AGAPE, is a process initiated at the 8th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The process examines “the project of economic globalization that is led by the ideology of unfettered market forces and serves the dominant political and economic interests.”

7 Assembly Documents, 9th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006.

8 Minutes, Executive of the General Council, October 29–November 1, 2004, Toronto.

9 Staff members who provided support for the Empire Task Group were Omega Bula, Bern Jagunos, Gary Kenny, Jim Marshall, Christie Neufeldt, and Choice Okoro.

Buenos Aires, Argentina. It analyzes the context of empire in Jesus' day and its impact on his ministry and the early church. It discusses how the life-threatening and oppressive dynamics of empire in the first and 21st centuries are essentially the same. The expanding threat to life that contemporary empire represents means we are at a critical time, a *kairos*¹⁰ time, for the discernment of the gospel.

“Confession: Church and World in the Midst of Empire” acknowledges and analyzes the church’s complicity in empire. “Complicity” refers to our participation as individuals, institutions, and nations in empire’s systems of domination and control. We are only able to begin to name our complicity and to begin to turn around (to repent) through honest and faithful confession.

“Call: Living God’s Reign in the Midst of Empire” encourages all United Church members to take up the challenge of our collective confession by seeking to be a responsive and transformed people of faith, hope, and love at every level of our being and of the church. This section calls the church to recognize signs of hope and transformation, and gives some examples.

“Commitment: Actions and Recommendations” calls the church and its members to support specific actions for the next three years, including learning more about empire and our complicity in it through engagement and consultation. It envisions the development of an “empire lens,” an animation, education, and action tool to assist all courts of the church to discern more about empire and their place within it. It also calls the whole church to engage in acting with renewed vigour upon past resolutions that challenge imperial forms and forces, especially in the program areas of economic justice, human rights, peace, and the environment.

Drawing on the theme of the World Social Forum, “another world is possible,” this report lifts up sources of hope. The theme of the World Council of Churches (WCC) 2006 Assembly in Porto Alegre earlier this year is also key to this report: “God, in your grace, transform the world.”¹¹

Transformation for the sake of abundant life for all peoples and the earth means making difficult choices. In the 21st century world of empire, Caesar commands, God calls. Whom will we serve?

10 The New Testament offers several but similar perspectives on *kairos*, which translated from the Greek means “the right or opportune time.” For example: Luke 12:54–56—*Kairos* is extraordinary time, requiring interpretation. The capacity to read the signs of the times—the *kairos*—and respond is an issue of faith; Romans 13:11–13—*Kairos* time is here. It calls for action, conversion and transformation—a change of life; 11 Corinthians 6:1–2—*Kairos* is not just crisis but opportunity and favour. God assists us in discerning the *kairos*—a moment of grace. (Source: www.kairoscanada.org/e/network/KairosBibleStudy.pdf)

11 “God, in your grace, transform the world” was the theme of the World Council of Churches’ 9th Assembly held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January/February 2006.

WITNESS: Empire in Jesus' Time and Ours

Understanding Empire

The context of the Roman Empire defined much of the life and ministry of some of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and the early church, as the theological reflections in this report and other sources show.¹² Similarly, contemporary empire frames much of the experience, struggle, and witness of many United Church global partners and the United Church's own life and ministry. In first-century Palestine (Galilee, Samaria, and Judea), the imperial power was clearly Rome and its local rulers and allies. At its territorial peak, the Roman Empire controlled nearly six million square kilometres of land in the greater Mediterranean region. It was the largest of all empires during classical antiquity. The context of Jesus' time was the brutal oppression of occupied Palestine under the Roman Empire.¹³

What makes up empire in the early 21st century? How does it shape our world and how we live our lives? Since the events of September 11, 2001, "empire" is increasingly being used to describe global systemic injustice. It is the subject of articles, books, and events, including major global ecumenical conferences. Emerging from these discussions has been a growing understanding of contemporary empire with striking similarities to the empire of Jesus' day.

While empire in Jesus' time consisted of distinct forms of oppression including military occupation, violence, unjust taxation, and slavery, in 2006 we have to look deeper and wider to put a recognizable face on empire. Some, especially after September 11 and the United States government's declaration of the War on Terror, point to the U.S., the most powerful economic and military power in the world, as the principal power of modern-day imperialism. The U.S. doctrine of preventive war,¹⁴ aggressive unilateralism,¹⁵ violations of international law, and maintenance of hundreds of military bases around the world have prompted comparisons to Imperial Rome. But while the U.S. may have much to answer for—and indeed, millions of Americans are holding their government accountable—empire has more than one location. As stated in *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil*, contemporary "empire is not dominated by any single state but by a network of powerful economic interests held together by the ideology of neoliberalism,"¹⁶ and furthermore, is a system in which most of us play some role, wittingly or unwittingly.

To Seek Justice and Resist Evil defined neo-liberalism largely in economic terms. Neo-liberalism, it said, upholds and promotes the market as the judge of the common good. It is a market that enshrines competition as the supreme good. In the marketplace of neo-liberalism, everything is viewed as a commodity that can be bought or sold.¹⁷

12 For a clear and powerful discussion of empire in Jesus' time see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God in the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2002).

13 Christopher Ferguson, *The Reign of God and Empire: The covenant community in the midst of the kingdom of death* (London Colney, February 8–11, 2004).

14 A "preventive war" is the term given to a kind of war whose public justification is proclaimed as "self-defence." The concepts of preventive war and pre-emptive war differ only in the certainty of an attack—the latter concerns an imminent attack, while the former requires no military provocation. The rationale for preventive war is the claimed prevention of a possible future attack, which international law considers to be indistinguishable from a forbidden war of aggression.

15 "Unilateralism," in a foreign policy context, refers to the practice of a single country acting alone outside of the parameters of international law to which that country is obligated.

16 The United Church of Canada, *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil: Towards a Global Economy for All God's People* (2001), page 24.

17 For a more extensive discussion of neo-liberal ideology and economic globalization, see *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil: Towards a Global Economy for All God's People*, The United Church of Canada, 2001.

At its General Assembly in 2004, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) reflected with alarm on the signs of the times. “We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all,” WARC said.¹⁸ The annual income of the richest 1 percent is equal to that of the poorest 57 percent. Some 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. The debt of poor countries continues to increase despite having repaid the principal on their loans several times over. Wars over resources such as oil and gold are on the rise and claim the lives of millions, while millions more die of preventable diseases. The HIV/AIDS pandemic afflicts life in all parts of the world but especially in the impoverished global South where anti-retroviral drugs are too expensive to buy. The majority of those living in poverty are women and children, and the number of people living in absolute poverty (less than US\$1/day) continues to increase.¹⁹

WARC also asserted that policies of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit among transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the natural environment. In 1989, one species disappeared each day, and by 2000 it was one every hour. Climate change, the depletion of fish stocks, deforestation, soil erosion, and threats to fresh water are also among neo-liberal economic globalization’s devastating consequences. Communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost, coastal regions and Pacific islands are threatened with inundation, and cataclysmic storms increase. Life forms and cultural knowledge, part of the global commons, are being patented for financial gain.²⁰

Neo-liberal economic globalization, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) said, is no longer an adequate term to describe the scope and inherent characteristics of this appalling plight befalling God’s creation. A more accurate term is “empire.” Recognizing that there is no easy definition of empire, WARC offered the following:

[Empire is] the convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic and military imperial interests, systems and networks that seek to dominate political power and economic wealth. It typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities and countries to the more powerful. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states and either marginalizes or co-opts religious communities.²¹

Using WARC’s definition as a point of reference, the Empire Task Group sought to understand early 21st century empire in a more contextual and identifiable manner. In addition to the WARC statement, the World Council of Churches’ AGAPE initiative,²² theological scholars, United Church elected members and others have helped us in this process. The assistance of United Church global partners has been immeasurable. In early 2005 the Empire Task Group conducted a survey of partners asking for their views on empire. Significantly, 35 partners from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as some ecumenical partners based in the North, responded. All spoke of the imperial nature of neo-liberal economic globalization, calling it a significant threat to life. For example, The Caribbean Council of Churches said:

As third world peoples, ours is the constant plight and recurring experience of standing helplessly in

18 Covenanted for Justice in the Economy and the Earth, 24th General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Accra, Ghana, October 2004.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 “AGAPE, A Background Document,” World Council of Churches. Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth, or AGAPE, is a process initiated at the 8th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The process examines “the project of economic globalization that is led by the ideology of unfettered market forces and serves the dominant political and economic interests.”

various “Praetoria”²³ (John 18:28) of the powerful contemporary Pontius Pilates—be it the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, or otherwise—and being reminded who has “power to release” us and “power to condemn” us (John 19:10).²⁴

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, adopting a similar point of view, also affirmed the obligation of Christians to resist empire:

Empire has been sustained by the unbridled capitalist system backed by military force. Therefore the most effective way to resist it is to render the production base of Empire impotent. When we resist the consumptive lifestyle of Empire, the production base will gradually lose ground to a non-capitalist lifestyle (or economic system) based on the spirit of justice, sharing and cooperation which can be termed a “divine economy.”²⁵

Partners in Canada, Aboriginal peoples in particular, have also provided compelling testimony on the subject of empire. For example George Erasmus, former Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, has described the naming by Europeans of landmarks, communities, and even people in terms foreign to their understanding. Aboriginal peoples became the acted upon, not the actors, named from the outside as “Indian,” “status or non-status Indian,” or “Métis.”²⁶

It is through the eyes and experience of partners, global and Canadian, that we can best gain insight into the empire phenomenon and its destructive impact on God’s people and the earth.

Through the survey, partners helped the task group break down “empire” into seven forms or forces that are united in their will to control and dominate: political, economic, military, cultural, religious, environmental, and patriarchal. The stories from or about partners contained in this report exemplify these inter-connected forces. The following section is a commentary on the stories that demonstrates how these forces converge to create a dynamic that negates other forms of power and alternatives to empire. It is intended to assist readers to derive the most from the stories that follow.

Commentary on the Stories from Global and Canadian Partners

The stories “Empire and the Privatization of Water Is ‘Killing My People’” and “Empire, Militarism, and Human Rights in the Philippines” demonstrate how governments in the global South, already weak from crushing external debts, are forced to acquiesce to Western political influence and development schemes shaped by neo-liberal economic policies. The results are often damaging social cost-cutting and the cynical exploitation of their natural resources, water in the case of Lesotho and minerals including gold in the Philippines. Creditors like the World Bank use the debts as leverage to force these countries to cede public ownership, operation, distribution, and management of their most valuable resources and social services and place them into private, often foreign, hands. Once privatized, water, health care, education, and other vital services are made unaffordable for millions of people.

The result of such stringent economic policies and political pressure to adopt them has created a host of life-threatening socio-economic and health-related problems. Governments in countries like Lesotho and the Philippines have become almost powerless to change a global trade system that

23 “Praetoria” was the name given to the elite bodyguard of a Roman emperor, approximately the size of a legion, or to a member of this bodyguard. The term is sometimes applied to the inner circle of advisers to a major political figure.

24 A Partner Perspective on Empire: Synthesis Report of United Church of Canada Partners Survey, Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit, 2005.

25 *Ibid.*

26 George Erasmus in “We the Dene” in *Dene Nation: The Colony Within*, Toronto University Press 1977.

treats them unfairly, creates unrestrained rights for foreign capital investment within their borders, and increases and perpetuates their external debts. While elites in these countries stand to benefit, the majority of people, although promised prosperity, are left in deeper poverty.

“Empire, Militarism, and Human Rights in the Philippines” illustrates how militarization, employed as a strategy to advance a political and economic agenda, can impair a nation’s ability to exercise its sovereignty in a manner that has not only life-threatening, but mortal, consequences for its citizens. In the last four years more than 500 civilians, including church workers, lawyers, and human rights advocates, have been summarily executed by military death squads in the Philippines. Their “crime” has been speaking out against systemic injustice including unfair wages, inequitable access to land, and the adverse impacts of economic globalization. As the story explains, the victims “[were] killed because their activities threaten the economic and political interests of the elite.”

But who are the elite? The presence on Filipino soil of foreign mining interests and U.S. military bases underscores the reality that those who commit or are complicit in such crimes are not only Filipino. They also originate among transnational corporations and other powerful nation states.

The Philippines has become a regional staging point in the War on Terror, and U.S. military aid to the Philippines has increased ten-fold since September 11. The War on Terror and U.S. military support, the story asserts, has given the Filipino military licence to target social justice advocates as “terrorists” and “enemies of the state.” It has exacerbated the culture of violence in the country. As the story states, economic globalization, global geo-politics and empire “ensures that political, economic and military power...penetrates the internal political, cultural and social structures of a particular country...” as it has in the Philippines.

Empire also carries with it beliefs and value systems, usually Western in origin, which countries weakened by external political, economic, and military policies are forced to accept or do so willingly. These include materialism, consumerism, and individualism. Often the main vehicle for transmission of these beliefs and values is Western technology and popular culture.

“*Baywatch* and Cell Phone Cameras: Middle Eastern Youth and the Culture of Empire” is a story that demonstrates the impact Western culture can have especially on youth. Frustrated by poverty, unemployment, and other adverse social conditions caused or exacerbated by economic globalization, youth, in both the global South and North, sometimes resort to anti-social and violent forms of behaviour to bring into their lives a false sense of meaning and purpose. But as the story attests, governments wary of the potential of youth to rise up and challenge their authority and power “want people’s minds driven away from the horrific hazards of politics and economics.” Western TV, movies, music, and other forms of entertainment, and their pervasive promotion of materialism and consumerism, provide just the right balm. They can “anaesthetize an increasingly restless and angry generation of youth” and, for a time anyway, remove the threat of civil disobedience or worse.

Canada is complicit in empire in various ways. For example, our support of neo-liberal economic globalization, through participation in free trade agreements and global financial institutions like the World Bank, links us with contemporary empire, at least in the minds of many United Church global partners. The story “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Looking into the Eyes of Empire” provides another glimpse of how Canada has engaged in imperial behaviour in the past, but on the home front. As one writer quoted in the story says, while Canadian imperial treatment of Aboriginal peoples may have “lacked the pomp and ceremony of the British Raj, or the status-enhancing experience of a handful of officials ruling over millions in tropical Africa, Ceylon, or the Dutch East Indies,” it was nonetheless connected to the global phenomenon of empire at that time.

First Nations peoples in Canada today continue to struggle with the effects of this imperial legacy, fighting in the courts to regain land that was unjustly taken, demanding compensation for what some call “cultural genocide,” and battling alcohol and substance abuse in their communities, a tragic consequence of loss of identity and the impoverished conditions in which many Aboriginal communities live. The United Church is confronting its own complicity in the imperial subjugation of First Nations peoples by addressing its role in the former residential schools system.

As the story “Empire and Environmental Destruction in Haiti” shows, in some countries in the global South, 19th-century colonialism has evolved into a form of unchecked global capitalism that exploits, and in the case of Haiti, decimates, what was once a paradise of natural riches. To supply the industrialized North with raw materials to meet the ever-growing demands of large commodity markets, crops are monocultured and mineral resources mined with little regard for the impact these activities have on the natural environment. As the story narrates, monoculture of sisal and rubber, bankrolled by foreign companies with the collusion of Haitian elites, has rendered much of Haiti’s soil infertile. Mining activities undertaken in similar circumstances have created veritable deserts through large-scale excavation and failure to replant vast tracts of deforested land. These predatory practices have caused massive erosion and loss of soil, leaving much of the country a wasteland.

In the process of “development,” indigenous farmers were displaced and forced into poorly paid jobs for foreign companies, and a sustainable, communal way of life that thrived for generations was reduced to ruin. Today, in a tragic twist, impoverished farmers are forced to participate in the ruination of their own local natural environments through the over-cutting of trees to make charcoal for income and energy purposes. Relegated to living on barren land, they and their families are often the first victims of flash floods and landslides. They are blamed for Haiti’s environmental degradation when the real cause is “a historical process that flows from the venality of Western powers in concert with local dominant classes.”

Massive human displacement and migration, within and beyond borders, especially from rural to urban areas, is a major and tragic consequence of economic globalization and empire. “Empire and Environmental Destruction in Haiti,” “Empire and Privatization of Water Is ‘Killing My People,’” “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Looking into the Eyes of Empire,” and “Empire and Patriarchy: Violence against Women in Guatemala” are all stories that involve displacement or migration as a result of national or international policies that are imperial in nature. Aboriginal peoples in Canada were uprooted from their traditional lands by Europeans who placed their own rapacious desire for land above the rights of the people who had settled it first. Mining and deforestation have ruined land traditionally cultivated by Haitian farmers, forcing them to migrate to cities where they can’t find jobs. Mega-dams in Lesotho have flooded the traditional lands of thousands of people who, displaced to urban areas, have seen few of the dividends promised from the sale of their water to South Africa. Families in Guatemala have been forced to relocate to urban areas in search of work because international trade rules have rendered their traditional farming practices, around which their lives and culture were built, redundant. In each of these cases, and so many more like them, human beings have been effectively re-conceptualized as commodities—objects considered superfluous or valued only for their potential to help the world’s imperial principalities and powers to turn a profit.

Some partners surveyed on the subject of empire said empire and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing. As the story “Empire and Patriarchy: Violence against Women in Guatemala” attests, patterns of imperial, patriarchal power and violence, a partial consequence of decades of civil war and poverty that has left men in particular frustrated and angry, undergird the brutal violence against women that is endemic in Guatemala today. Over the past five years some 2,000 women have been murdered,

most of the cases involving firearms, torture, and rape. Women of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry are particularly targeted, suggesting that ethnic discrimination and racism are coinciding motives. That bodies are often mutilated suggests virulent misogynous resentment. This “femicide,” as it is called in the story, “is carried out largely because of the simple fact of the victim being a woman and as a demonstration of power and domination.”

Economic globalization and the negative impact of free trade agreements have aggravated the crisis, the story asserts. Families have been forced to migrate to urban areas in search of work because free trade has made farm-based production no longer viable. Families that are displaced into social conditions that create insecurity and even deeper poverty face growing tensions, eventual domestic conflict, and finally, family disintegration. A society already stoked and smouldering with “machismo” culture bursts into flames of misogynous violence when fanned with the systemic economic exploitation of empire.

“Empire, For or Against: Make Every Dollar Count” reminds us what empire seeks to eradicate: the creation of alternative ways of living that are rooted in enduring hope and assert gospel values of community, interdependence, love, generosity, and stewardship of the earth. The “story within the story” of farmer Stuart Dermott’s unhurried day of cultivation is in poignant contrast to our fast-paced consumer culture that is fixated on the bottom line: “It’s a great day,” Stuart replied to a passing neighbour curious about his slow-moving tractor. “I enjoy cultivating, and I just want to make it last.” For Stuart, and many United Church people, “life is about stewardship, in every sense of the word, something to be enjoyed and treasured, not a competition for individual gain.”

Partners surveyed on the topic of empire identified religion as playing a sometimes central role. The linkage between religion and empire in the early church, in the form of Christendom, is well known and discussed elsewhere in this report. What about contemporary empire? Some partners associate religion with cultural hegemony, saying religion is used to promote neo-liberal economic ideology and to inculcate, especially among impoverished and vulnerable people in the global South, a so-called “gospel of prosperity.” By adopting the culture of consumerism, these religions teach, you can be “saved.” So-called fundamentalist Christian churches based in Northern countries and increasingly in countries in the global South preach this “gospel.”

Religion can also play a positive role in challenging the power of empire as illustrated in all the stories from or about partners contained in this report. The Middle East Council of Churches, Christian Council of Lesotho, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and others are resisting empire in a variety of thoughtful and courageous ways and offering alternatives that accord, not with Caesar’s, but with God’s reign in the world. The story of the Dermotts is a shining testament to how unadulterated gospel values can be rooted deeper in the soil of our selves, families, communities, institutions, and nations.

As theologian Néstor O. Míguez says, empire reduces the rich diversity of the world to a question of economic management. All peoples, expectations, cultures, and nations are required by empire to submit to this logic.²⁷ Others have followed another path, as the stories will show.

The definition of empire offered by WARC, and the testimony of partners, highlight the notion that empire is a particular arrangement of power characterized by the joining together of economic forces, government structures, some political organizations, and some classes of society. In an empire, writes Míguez, these forces join to meet a single objective: the elimination of other forms of power and

27 “Jesus and Empire: Then and Now” by the Rev. Dr. Néstor O. Míguez, 2006. See Appendix C.

social and economic alternatives, such as those we might obtain from the life and teachings of Jesus. Says Míguez, “We are now witnessing a time of imperial consolidation...The whole world is under pressure to mould itself [into] a single economic system and way of conceiving politics and managing power...”²⁸ and it will only bring death. But there is hope, which lies in the creation of life-giving alternatives.

28 *Ibid.*

Stories of Empire as a Threat to Life and Creation

Following is a series of stories written by or about United Church global partners on their experience of empire, and stories that comment on empire and resistance to empire in the Canadian context. They witness both to the impact of empire, in its various but inter-connected manifestations, but also to what resisting empire or living more fully into God's reign might look like.

Empire and the Privatization of Water Is “Killing My People”

Christian Council of Lesotho, Maseru, Lesotho/JGER Empire Task Group

“How can anyone own the earth's water?” Mamosa Nts'aba asks, adding, “Water belongs to God.” But in Nts'aba's country of Lesotho, water appears God's no longer. Increasingly it is being privatized and turned into a commodity for sale and profit. “My people used to collect clean water for free at communal water sources,” Nts'aba says. “Now they must pay for it.”

Lesotho is known as the “rooftop of Africa” and is a small, mountainous, landlocked country completely surrounded by South Africa. Of its 1.8 million people, 90 percent are subsistence farmers and livestock herders who dwell and toil in the country's fertile mountain valleys. Most Basotho²⁹ are poor and live on less than US\$2/day.

Water is Lesotho's greatest natural resource. Runoff from two mountain ranges, the Maluti and Thaba Putsoa, feeds many rivers, streams, and aquifers. But Nts'aba, who works on gender and women's programming at the Christian Council of Lesotho, says, “Water and its sale for profit is killing my people.”

Over the past 20 years, Basotho have seen their country's rich heritage in water increasingly sold off to private interests and to South Africa, a regional economic colossus. The shift from public ownership and management of water and water services to private ownership is increasing throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and the global South. The key actors are the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. They are able to impose these changes on indebted countries like Lesotho by using their leverage as creditors. These international financial institutions, sometimes called modern-day brokers of empire, argue that private management of natural resources will be more cost-effective and efficient, and will reduce poverty and conserve the environment. They view water not as a communal resource for sharing, Nts'aba says, but as “a commodity and an economic good to generate profit.” She adds, “This is what the World Bank calls ‘people-centred’ development.”

In 1986, the government of South Africa made a deal with Lesotho government officials for a multi-billion-dollar water diversion project. The World Bank initiated and financed the scheme to provide water to apartheid-era industries while avoiding international sanctions. The agreement allows South Africa to redirect more than 2 million cubic metres of water from Lesotho's Orange River system annually. When complete, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project will consist of five major dams, 200 kilometres of mountain tunnels, and a 72-megawatt hydroelectric power plant. It is Sub-Saharan Africa's biggest ever infrastructure initiative. In return for water, the Lesotho government receives royalties and hydroelectric power.

29 “Basotho,” in Lesotho's Sesotho language, means “people of Lesotho.”

Ordinary Basotho, however, get mostly broken promises and misery. Some 27,000 Basotho were displaced when the new Mohale Dam and Reservoir flooded 22,000 acres of their traditional lands. Their houses, fields, graveyards, grazing lands, and other private and communal resources disappeared under water. Gone forever is a modest but dignified and sustainable way of life that had flourished for generations. The uprooted were relocated to urban areas and were promised clean water, new housing, job training, and financial compensation. But standards for applying for compensation are impossibly high, resulting in long bureaucratic delays and inadequate payment. Most of the schools, clinics, and clean water sources that were pledged are yet to materialize. The “trickle-down” of wealth from the highlands water project to grassroots Basotho, promised by the World Bank and the Lesotho government, hasn’t significantly happened.

Safe, adequate, and sustainable access to water for all peoples is one of the main social goals named at the global level in recent years. Privatization of water has the opposite effect. Many Basotho are unable to pay for water and are forced to rely on unsafe sources such as unprotected wells and open streams. Water-borne diseases such as cholera have increased as a result. With no access to affordable health care, more and more poor people, especially children, are dying needlessly. Maternal mortality has increased from 282 per 100,000 live births in the 1990s to 550 in 2003.³⁰ Reasons include poverty and poor nutrition, but also lack of access to clean water. Women are perilously affected by water privatization. Traditionally the gatherers of water, many women in rural areas have to walk vast distances, 10 kilometres or more, and often in the dark, to a spring or stream to collect free water. Along the way they are vulnerable to theft and rape.

Lesotho’s water woes are exacerbated by HIV/AIDS. The rate of prevalence among adults in Lesotho is 29 percent, making it one of the countries most affected by the AIDS pandemic.³¹ Some 320,000 Basotho are HIV positive.³² Inadequate water and sanitation service exacerbate the condition of people suffering from immune deficiencies such as HIV/AIDS and severely limits Lesotho’s capacity to fight the disease.

People-centred? Not so, Nts’aba says of privatization. Farmland has disappeared, people are poorer, children more easily succumb to preventable diseases, and the fabric of family life is fraying under increasing social and economic pressures. The water that God has given Basotho is being sold from under them, Nts’aba tells us. “How in God’s name is that ‘people-centred’ development?” she asks.

30 World Health Organization.

31 UNAIDS 2004 Report on the global AIDS pandemic.

32 “Summary Country Profile for HIV/AIDS Treatment Scale-Up,” World Health Organization, June 2005.

Empire, Militarism, and Human Rights in the Philippines

From the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Manila, Philippines

In the spring of 2005 in Central Luzon (north of Manila), hardly a week passed without the sight of mourners in a funeral procession to bury someone. On March 13, 2005, that someone was Fr. William Tadena, a priest of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Philippine Independent Church). Two days later, it was 67-year-old Victor Concepcion. Ten days earlier, it was Aberlardo Ladera, a member of the city council of Tarlac. All three were brutally murdered. All three had supported the strike of the farm workers at Hacienda Luisita where security forces violently broke up their rally and massacred seven striking farm workers on November 16, 2004.

Across the country, a similar pattern and practice of killings have been taking place. In the islands of Eastern Visayas, the Rev. Edison Lapuz was brutally killed on May 11, 2005. He was the Conference Minister of Northeastern Leyte Conference of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), a United Church partner. As chair of a regional human rights group called Karapatan and an active member of the ecumenical advocacy group Promotion of Church People's Response, he spearheaded a campaign for the prosecution of those responsible for the murder of Attorney Felidido Dacut, a human rights lawyer, on March 10, 2005.

In Northern Luzon, Jose Manegdeg was shot dead on November 28, 2005. He was a lay member of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines and past coordinator of the Regional Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Cordilleras, also a United Church partner, which led the Save the Abra River Movement, a campaign to save the river from destruction caused by corporate mining and large-scale commercial activities. A week before, in the province of Leyte, seven farmers, two of them women, were massacred. They were preparing to return to their farms on disputed land granted them by the Department of Agrarian Reform, when military troops attacked them with guns and grenade bombs.

The dead are not victims of ordinary crimes. They are killed for demanding fair wages or a small piece of land to farm, for protesting human rights violations, for speaking about the negative impacts of economic globalization policies, for supporting community resistance to mining companies, or for opposing the continuing war games between government and U.S. forces that have displaced hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. They are killed because their activities threaten the economic and political interests of the elite. The victims include church people, human rights advocates, lawyers, leaders and members of social movements, and organizers and members of grassroots political parties.

A document of the Philippine Armed Forces, "Knowing the Enemy: Are We Missing the Point?" released in April 2005 named several progressive organizations, including the UCCP and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, as "terrorists" that should be neutralized. In military terms, "neutralize" means to silence or, if this does not work, to physically eliminate them. Under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, more than 500 civilians have been executed in four years by suspected state security forces and paramilitary elements. Over 150 people were murdered in 2005.

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo launched the "war on terror" immediately after the Bush administration declared the Philippines as the second front in the U.S.-led "war on terror." The U.S. sent 1,200 troops to Basilan in the island of Mindanao to eradicate a small group of terrorists, Abu Sayyaf. In exchange for Macapagal-Arroyo's support of the U.S. "war on terror," the Bush administration has increased military aid to the Philippine government ten-fold. It has committed at least US\$356 million in military aid to the Philippines, up from pre-9/11 annual military assistance of US\$30-\$40 million.

The “War on Terror” opened the opportunity for the U.S. to re-assert its military presence and intervention in the Philippines. The U.S. had to withdraw its troops in 1992 after the Philippine senate decided to end the Military Bases Agreement. However, since 9/11, American special operation forces have been allowed entry to provide special warfare training to the armed forces of the Philippines. The U.S. and the Philippines conduct annually at least 18 joint war exercises involving a rotating presence of around 2,000 troops. The military trainings have now focused on counter-insurgency.

The people of Mindanao, where the Moro people (Muslim Filipinos) have waged the oldest and longest self-determination struggle in Asia, have borne the heaviest cost of this war. President Macapagal-Arroyo abandoned the ongoing peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Indiscriminate bombings and strafing operations in civilian areas have resulted in massive forced evacuations, brutal killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, and destruction of property and religious sites. Since 2002, there have been 33 bombing incidents in Mindanao that killed 85 people and injured more than 450 others.

It is no coincidence that the targeted killing of activists that has been going on since 2001 started in Mindoro where local officials, non-governmental organizations, workers, farmers, professionals, church people, and ordinary citizens joined together in broad and strong opposition to a mining project of a Canadian company. In the Moro province of Sulu, weeks after the government declared that the war against the MNLF was “over,” a subsidiary of U.S.-based energy company UNOCAL led a consortium to conduct an oil and gas exploration project in nearby Sulu Sea. Mindanao provides strategic access and control over the South China Sea, a critical trade route for oil. Eastern Visayas has abundant marine resources, which are controlled by foreign and local fishing companies, and mineral deposits that are a major interest and attraction to foreign mining corporations.

The church leaders who visited Eastern Visayas in July as a part of the Pastoral Ecumenical Delegation of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia made this observation in their report: “The military protects ‘economic investments’ and not the people of the land. It is critical for our analysis to name the ideology behind this market-focused economic development as rooted in the neo-liberal economic thinking, which claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and from creation. We see here...the impact of economic globalization and its global geo-politics backed by the dominant ideology of globalization. This ideology also referred to as Empire ensures that political, economic and military is power vested in one center and that this power penetrates the internal political, cultural and social structures of a particular country such as the Philippines. Today’s dominant leaders will not hesitate to use whatever power and force to suppress the people and the world when their objectives of economic exploitation are threatened and hindered.”

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Looking into the Eyes of Empire

JGER Empire Task Group

The Mi'Kmaq First Nations peoples of Canada's Maritime region have fished in Miramichi Bay, in what is now New Brunswick, for centuries and long before the arrival of European colonizers and immigrants. Despite the constraints of colonization, the Mi'Kmaq were allowed to continue their traditions of hunting and fishing, an important source of livelihood. These rights were enshrined in a Treaty signed in 1760 by the King of England and the Mi'Kmaq bands in present-day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. In the early 1950s, however, the Treaty was violated by British colonial authorities when they introduced a new law prohibiting fishing outside regulated seasons.

In 1999 Donald Marshall Jr., an activist Mi'Kmaq, disagreed with the new law and decided to honour the old Treaty (thereby breaking the new law) by fishing out of season. He was arrested for his efforts. Marshall filed a legal claim with the Supreme Court of Canada arguing that the 1760 Treaty was still in force. The Court ruled in Marshall's favour. It interpreted the Treaty in practical, contemporary terms and ruled that Aboriginal bands who are party to the Treaty have a right to hunt and fish out of season but only for consumption and not for profit.

In view of the ruling, the First Nations of Esqenoopetitj (Burnt Church) resumed their traditional lobster fishing activities in Miramichi Bay. But regional non-Aboriginal fishers disagreed with the Supreme Court ruling, saying out-of-season lobster trapping by Aboriginals was a direct threat to their own livelihoods. Violence erupted and attacks were launched on Aboriginals when they tried to resume lobster fishing. In an effort to address the concerns of both communities, the Supreme Court has since adjusted the Marshall ruling. The hunting and fishing activities of the Mi'Kmaq will now be regulated by the provincial government.

The Cross Lake First Nation in Northern Manitoba is also currently struggling with the legacy of "empire." Located about 600 kilometres north of Winnipeg, it has grappled with the effects of flooding caused by a hydroelectric generation mega-project in the early 1970s. Only after 10 years of long and arduous negotiations was compensation provided to the affected First Nations.

The experiences of the Mi'Kmaq and Cross Lake First Nations illustrate the realities of Aboriginal communities that are currently negotiating their autonomy, rights to self-determination, and access to land and natural resources. There are hundreds of First Nations groups like these struggling to find practical solutions to the problems associated with the imperial colonization of the past.

Many Aboriginal activists, writers, and researchers who contributed to the 1995 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples used the word "colonial" frequently in reference to the historical and present-day treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Alan C. Cairns, in *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State*, observes that the usage of this term is in contrast to the majority of non-Aboriginal Canadians who did not in the past and do not now regard Canada as ruling imperially over the Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Until very recently, Cairns explains, Aboriginal peoples, in a typical colonial fashion, were the subjects of policy. "Status Indians, the only Aboriginal people to have a separate branch of government to their affairs, were an administered people. They were in a colonial situation. Indeed, the very language used to describe them for the first century after Confederation could equally have

been used in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). They were described as wards, likened to children, and assumed to be unready for full citizenship.”³³

When Canadians speak about their experience of “empire,” some are referring to the perceived threat of living next door to the “American Empire.” For other Canadians, “empire” was and is something associated with Canada’s British heritage. But in linking empire at home (Canada) and abroad, Cairns explains that while Canadian imperial treatment of Aboriginal peoples may have “lacked the pomp and ceremony of the British Raj, or the status-enhancing experience of a handful of officials ruling over millions in tropical Africa, Ceylon, or the Dutch East Indies,” it was nonetheless connected to the global phenomenon of empire at that time.³⁴

Canada, Cairns writes:

...sent missionaries to Christianize, anthropologists to analyze, and Indian agents—our version of district officers—to administer. Indian children were taught wounding versions of history; sacred practices and revered customs were forbidden or mocked; the use of Aboriginal languages was discouraged; customary forms of governance were bypassed; traditional healing arts were displaced; and treaties were accorded lesser significance by governments than by the descendants of the Indian leaders who had signed them. In general, Aboriginal ways of life, and thus their bearers, were stigmatized.³⁵

The ideology that supported the spread of the British Empire was and is the same that drives empire in Canada today. The difference is that in Canada, the majority non-Aboriginal population cannot “go home” or simply give up their colonial power like Britain, France, Portugal, and other colonial powers did in Africa, Asia, and other regions of the world. As Cairns explains, “This crucial fact that the Aboriginal nations will be in the minority in Canada even after the maximum degree of self-government has been realized, differentiates the Canadian—and the New Zealand, Australian, and American—and the situations of many Latin American countries—from the decolonization process in most of Africa and Asia. In no case does the relationship between the formerly imperialist and the formerly colonized completely end with independence.”³⁶

Many Aboriginal communities in Canada know this. The process and strategy for negotiating the rights and self-determination of First Nations in Canada is proving to be a long and onerous task.

33 These excerpts are reprinted with permission of the Publisher from *Citizen Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* by Alan Cairns © University of British Columbia Press, 2000. All rights reserved by the Publisher.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

Empire and Environmental Destruction in Haiti

By Marc-Arthur Fils-Aimé, Karl Lévêque Cultural Institute, Haiti

Haiti means “High Ground” or “Mountainous Land” in the language of the two aboriginal nations that lived here prior to the arrival of the European invaders in 1492. At that time, Haiti was covered with forests. The two indigenous groups lived together peaceably—contrary to all the allegations of cannibalism promoted by Western racists—and in their cosmological vision believed that the zone of Abricot (apricot) in Grand-Anse (part of Haiti’s south-west peninsula) sheltered their paradise. Christopher Columbus and his crew were so enchanted by this green island that they called it Hispaniola, or little Spain.

Today, only 2 percent of the national soil is still covered by vegetation that could be called a forest. The country is so deforested that in regions such as the North-West, the people scratch the earth to remove what remains of the roots of trees to satisfy their energy needs. How is it that Haiti, once called “the Pearl of the Antilles,” has come to be like this?

Generally, small farmers are accused of being the origin of this destruction. This accusation ignores the demands of globalization, which are effectively responsible for their behaviour. The great majority of these producers possess less than a hectare of land, often unsuitable for agriculture, or no land at all. For their domestic needs, they gather twigs and branches. The unjust land tenure system forces them to practices such as the cutting of trees, for survival. First of all, such cutting allows them to survive by making wood charcoal and, though less frequently now, quicklime. In turn, this charcoal is used by people selling goods in small markets and by the working masses in the urban areas who use the charcoal for energy. The small farmers end up having to cut down fruit trees that might have brought some income with each harvest, in order to survive in the immediate future. Can they really be held responsible for their own destruction?

Environmental destruction in Haiti began with colonization. The colonists destroyed vast green surfaces for the sake of profits from cane sugar, indigo, cotton, and other products. By 1770, they were attacking the mountainous zones to make coffee plantations, since the value of the coffee bean was increasing in the international market. After our first Independence in 1804, the new leaders did not divorce themselves from the colonial modes of production, and continued to strip the soil. In 1887, log wood (campeachy) was Haiti’s most valuable export, ahead even of coffee exports. Log wood, wood for carpentry (mahogany), and wood for construction (pine) became increasingly large parts of export production. But to whom did these ships belong? They did not belong to the small farmers. Who was exporting these varieties to Europe and the United States? Not the small farmers.

During the American occupation that began in 1915, U.S. capitalists took thousands of hectares, expelling small farmers in collaboration with some Haitian leaders. By 1929, 266,600 acres were in the hands of American capitalists. In the North-East and elsewhere, these new investors introduced the growth of sisal and rubber plants in large areas. These two plants suck the moisture from the earth and render it infertile. By the 1980s, the Haitian subsidiary of the U.S.-based Reynolds mining company that extracted bauxite in the Miragoâne region, and a Canada–U.S. company called SEDREN that extracted copper outside Gonaïves, withdrew from Haiti and left behind deserts. With the complicity of different Haitian governments, these companies (like many others) did not respect clauses in their contracts that required reforestation of damaged surfaces.

Government policies go against the welfare of small farmers. Economic globalization has also demanded policies that go against the welfare of small farmers. Small growers are often forced to

grow “cash crops” of cereal, in order to survive. Growing cereal crops means uprooting coffee trees—trees that had prevented erosion of hills and bluffs.

In spite of the fragility of this situation, the rich continue to build their castles in areas around the capital city, while the peasants have been forced to migrate to the cities. But the peasants do not find a better life. They live in subhuman conditions. They build their homes on the hillsides and even within the ravines and thus they are the first victims of the floods and slides that happen regularly after a few millimetres of rain. A good part of national and international public opinion blames them for environmental degradation instead of seeking the causes in the anti-social distribution of goods that is an element of capitalism and empire.

In Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital, the rich draw extraordinary volumes of water that is sold throughout the capital. This region once contained some of Haiti’s largest underground water reserves. It is now threatened with contamination by seawater.

Water contamination, drought, and flood all threaten the poorest citizens of Haiti. Once fertile, Haiti has become a mostly arid country with a few oases. Those who have the least security feel the effects of environmental destruction the most. The threat to small farmers and to the environment is a result of a long historical process, begun with colonization, and continuing today with economic globalization and imperialism.

Empire, For or Against: Make Every Dollar Count

JGER Empire Task Group

Stuart and Luella Dermott had a farm outside Alliston, Ontario. It was a mixed farm of cattle, pigs, and chickens. They grew various grains. Children of the Depression, they knew what poverty and lack of economic security meant, but their farm prospered through the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s, partially because they remembered the Dirty Thirties, and knew how to make every dollar count. Faithful members of Burns United Church, they knew that community was more important than individual gain. They also knew that farming was about interdependence, not the domination of creation, and that the very security of our children and the planet are at stake in how we use every dollar.

Of course Stuart and Luella never actually said much about these things, though their actions spoke volumes. They never spent lavishly or bought into a consumer lifestyle. Neighbours recount stories of the Dermotts putting community and love of the land first. Once a neighbour pulled over to inquire if Stuart’s slow-moving pace on a tractor meant there was some type of problem in the field. “No,” he replied, “It’s a great day, I enjoy cultivating, and I just want to make it last.” No race to the financial bottom line for the Dermotts. Life was about stewardship, in every sense of the word, something to be enjoyed and treasured, not a competition for individual gain. Unfortunately others have embraced industrial agriculture, contributing to larger farms and rural depopulation. When Stuart and Luella died childless in the late 1990s they left almost one million dollars to their local United Church congregation in part to keep rural communities strong.

Here and there many United Church congregations have seen an increase in the number of financial gifts being left to them in bequests and wills of longstanding members born before the Second World War. David Foote, University of Toronto demographer and author of the best-selling book *Boom*,

Bust and Echo, describes those born in the first half of the 20th century as builders, and the postwar babies have come to be known as boomers. Foote notes that we are now in the midst of the biggest transfer of intergenerational personal wealth between builders and boomers that Canada has ever known or is likely to see for some time. Many United Church congregations receive these financial gifts. The question of how to use these gifts is a question of how we live out our faith. Do we see building projects or investment in mission as our first priority? How do we use the money to benefit the wider community, and communities around the world? The faithful congregation that inherited the Dermott's gift has established a community foundation. The congregation resisted the neo-liberal cultural command to invest without thought as to who benefits or who is harmed. Rather, the congregation chose to take social and environmental well-being seriously. Today the Dermott's love of the land and community has found new expression and new life in United Church camps, the local hospital, and education initiatives in Africa and Canada.

Whether as individuals or institutions, managing our daily finances, RRSP contributions, or a new gift, the financial choices we make have social consequences. Church organizations in Canada have been among the leaders of the socially responsible or "ethical" investment movement that promotes the integration of social criteria in financial decision-making. As noted in the 2002 book *Mission and Investing: A Guide for The United Church of Canada Congregations and Organizations*, many of the characteristics of the socially responsible investment movement can be seen in the activities of people working to alleviate poverty, in the field of international development assistance, and in the co-operative movement, all of which also have strong ties to Canadian churches. Now, more than ever, as we experience a global intersection of neo-liberal economic interests and military might for the benefit of a few, we are called to seek out alternative economic choices, ones that will uphold the common good.

Empire and Patriarchy: Violence against Women in Guatemala³⁷

By Nora Coloma, Ecumenical Network of Women, Guatemala

Violence against women and children, together with the increase of youth gangs linked to organized crime, are the results of family disintegration and youth alienation in civil society in past and present decades. These in turn cause a crisis of frustration and social and domestic violence where the moral values and ethical norms of our common lives as human beings are being lost. Inevitably, these phenomena have an impact on religious culture.

The problem of violence affects all of Guatemala. In this context, murders of women have grown substantially. This reality calls into question the capability of the government institutions to guarantee the right to security for all people, and especially those who are most vulnerable, including women. This concern is expressed even from within official agencies, including a pamphlet published by the office of the government's prosecutor for human rights entitled "Violent Deaths of Women during 2004."

Violent deaths of women in Guatemala are another form of social discrimination and intimidation. Generalized violence has a negative effect on participation in social movements, and aids in the development of a culture of fear.

Over the past five years, about 2,000 women have been brutally murdered in Guatemala. Year-to-year, this represents between 12 and 18 percent of all the murders in Guatemala. The numbers are not entirely precise, as government authorities do not provide exact statistics.

Forms of murder vary and include use of firearms, torture, and rape. Many women are found having been tied hand and foot, or placed in canvas or plastic bags; they are often mutilated and appear to have been thrown from automobiles. The victims usually range in age from 14 to 35 years of age. Among the most dangerous places are the capital city and surrounding municipalities, as well as the cities along the southern coast.

An important element to note is that in these statistics, it is very difficult to discern the ethnicity of the women. Most of the murdered women are described as *mestiza* (mixed Indigenous and European ancestry); few are described as Indigenous. But it is necessary to point out that because of racism, many Indigenous women have abandoned the use of traditional clothing.

Various groups of women and social movements call these murders "femicide"—the misogynist murder of women. The Mexican activist Ester Chávez (of Casa Amiga in Ciudad Juárez in northern Mexico) speaks of the extermination of women. Femicide, together with rape, torture, and other violence, is carried out largely because the victim is a woman; violence is a demonstration of power and domination. The results of various studies indicate patterns in the ways and locations that bodies are placed. The authorities allege that the women were involved in the street gangs known as "*maras*." These allegations fail to respect what the murdered women have suffered. In this way, the authorities seem to justify the ways that the women have been murdered. The allegations also hide the inability of the authorities to fully investigate the murders.

37 Sources: Adrian Reyes, "Brutal Killings of Women Recall Counter-insurgency Techniques," IPS News Service, June 22, 2005: <http://www.ipsnews.org/news.asp?idnews=29187>
"Report on Violent Deaths of Women during 2004," Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos.
"Some Reflections on Femicide in Guatemala", Centro de Acción Legal de los Derechos Humanos (CALDH), October 2005.

In lively debates and analysis among women's organizations and movements, many ideas about the causes of and responses to violence against women and patriarchal systems and structures are discussed. One hypothesis that is debated, with many reservations, is the idea that the economic empowerment of women has placed men at an economic disadvantage, because women have proven that they can generate their own incomes and no longer need to depend on men.

Baywatch and Cell Phone Cameras: Middle Eastern Youth and the Culture of Empire

Middle East Council of Churches, Beirut, Lebanon/ JGER Empire Task Group

It's not the sort of thing that the Western media would lead us to believe possible, yet in March 2005, twenty-five Muslim and Christian youth gathered in Teheran, Iran, for a three-day seminar, one of a series sponsored by the Middle East Council of Churches, with the theme "Christian and Muslim Youth: Toward Developing Their Common Future." One of the key issues to emerge from the series of seminars concerned the impact of modern media, and the Western-dominated global culture of empire on the lives of young people, Christian and Muslim, in the Middle East.

Young people under 30 make up about 60 percent of the population of the Arab world, with youth unemployment running at 30 percent. Such symbols of modern life as satellite TV, Internet, cell phones, consumer electronics, and music videos are connecting them to a world their parents never knew. In many parts of the region, they are the first generation to live through the era of oil-generated wealth and rapid social change. Rather than accepting and absorbing the cultural identity of their community, they are being influenced by Western media to define their own *individual* identity.

"Tens of millions of young men and women, constrained by lack of employment opportunities, are constantly and increasingly exposed to the lavish lifestyles portrayed by music video clips—huge houses, beautiful gardens, posh cars, cool clothes, and seductive semi-naked girls jumping about everywhere," says one Christian participant. This is viewed as "a product of the Christian West," she continues. "We Arab Christians want to say, no, it is not Christian. We are Christian and we are appalled by this onslaught just like you!"

Other participants were open about the ambivalence within Arab society toward the mass culture of empire. One young Egyptian man recalls breaking the fast with Muslim friends during Ramadan recently. "After the meal the television came on, with a popular music program. The singer appeared singing on top of an open bus, wearing leather trousers and a skin-tight tube shirt. Her movements, her song, and her interview following her set all proclaimed sex. I learned she was Lebanese. I was embarrassed, and yet my friend's sisters were eagerly singing along, while dressed very conservatively, their heads veiled." The pressure of the culture of empire on changing gender roles in the region was a source of much animated conversation over meals.

One of the presenters at the seminar quotes the South African liberation leader Steve Biko to sustained applause: "The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." Yes, several participants energetically agree. "We even begin to absorb the negative stereotypes in Western media about Arabs, Iranians, Middle Easterners, and Muslims, and we forget the rich diversity of Arab cultures." As a representative of the Middle East Council of Churches remarks, "We have been seduced into letting the West tell our story, shape our identity."

A Muslim Lebanese university student notes that in many countries in the region, power is wielded in authoritarian ways, without accountability. People are restricted from expressing their social, ethnic, and political identities, and wealth is frequently distributed in grossly unjust ways. “The resulting tensions that build up are released, or postponed, through consumerism and materialism—enjoying *Baywatch*, or a Batman movie on TV, while denouncing American and British imperialism. This lasts for a while, but one day the human spirit snaps. *Baywatch* and Batman and cell phones with cameras and MP3 music players no longer compensate for the deep frustrations, disappointments, and fears that haunt young people in our societies.”

At the same time, some participants wonder if governments in countries throughout the Middle East are not quietly grateful for the “superficial, empty, distractions of the culture of empire.” A young Armenian Christian participant from Iran suggests, “governments want people’s minds driven away from the horrific hazards of politics and economics.” As a result, young people—both Christian and Muslim—are forced to find ways of claiming their identity in the face not only of the culture of empire, but with the complicity of governments “wanting to anaesthetize an increasingly restless and angry generation of youth.”

Is there a good side to the culture of empire, its commodification³⁸ of youth and beauty and its consumer technology, for the tens of millions of educated, unemployed young urban men and women across the Middle East? Yes, says a 24-year-old Lebanese woman. “After the murder of Lebanon’s Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, we mobilized mass protests in Beirut through cell phones and text messaging, and sent digital pictures and video out around the world to swing global opinion over this outrage—and it worked!” Another participant observes ironically that of all the issues facing young Christians and Muslims in the Middle East, the toxic encroachment of the culture and media of empire have proved to be the most effective at building common cause across faith communities toward building a common future.

38 “Commodification” is a process that renders something, for example a material good or an idea, into an object for sale and profit.

Theological Reflection

(When references to Douglas John Hall, Ofelia Ortega, and Néstor Míguez are made in this reflection, see Appendix A, B, and C respectively.)

Our study of empire, in particular through how empire is experienced by our global ecumenical partners, has led to the conclusion that empire—what theologian Ofelia Ortega and others have called a “civilization of inequality”—threatens and destroys the faith we confess and profess as followers of Jesus. The destruction of, and continuing threat to, all life means that we are at a critical time for the discernment of the gospel. At issue is the liberating good news the church professes. Empire has lured and co-opted the church into theologies contrary to the gospel alternative, which is centred on freedom *for* God, *for* the world, *for* the neighbour (see Mark 12:28–34). Yet through the gift of the Spirit we may again be made free to be the church, to risk living a life for and with the other and for this world God created and recreates (see John 8:31–36; Galatians 5:13–14; etc.).

To explore how empire has captured our loyalty, we survey scripture, concentrating on the New Testament and its imperial context. The imperium, and imperial theology, historically belongs to Rome and its political organization at the time of the Caesars—though the Jews had suffered under Egyptian and Babylonian domination throughout their history. Emperors were considered divine beings and given the titles of Lord, Saviour, and Son of God. They were honoured and celebrated as bringers of a salvation that had peace and security, the *Pax Romana*, as its cornerstone. This so-called peace, namely the security of protection from enemies, was grounded in war and victory with the sword, and since there was no distinction between politics and religion, victorious rulers were considered to have divine approval and status. For faithful Jews this meant worship of a false god (Exodus 20:3–5a).

It is in the context of the Roman Empire of the first century C.E. that Jesus was born, lived, taught, healed, and was crucified. The brutal oppression of occupied Palestine under Roman rule was his and his people’s daily experience. Scholar Richard Horsley puts the importance of understanding Jesus’ historical context in perspective: “Trying to understand Jesus’ speech and action without knowing how Roman imperialism determined the conditions of life in Galilee and Jerusalem would be like trying to understand Martin Luther King without knowing how slavery, reconstruction, and segregation determined the lives of African Americans in the United States.”³⁹ Theologian Néstor Míguez also speaks of empire as “the historical backdrop for Jesus’ ministry.”

In story and parable, in healing and exorcism, in meal and miracle, Jesus provided an alternative to the reality of empire in his time, an alternative grounded in the covenantal and prophetic traditions of Israel. Jesus reminded those who bore the oppression of Rome and who were his primary audience that God sought their liberation by calling them to covenant for the communal living of the justice and righteousness portrayed in the Torah (see, for example, Matthew 5–7; Luke 6:17–49). To be bound to God through the Torah was for Jews a matter of ultimate allegiance that ruled out loyalty to the Emperor as a divinity, that is, a false god (see Matthew 22:15–22; Luke 20:20–26). Jesus the Jew and a child of Judaism drew upon the prophetic and apocalyptic tradition (see Isaiah 14:4–20; Micah 4:1–4; Daniel 3; Revelation 18; etc.) and its criticism of the kind of injustice and exploitation that marked imperial Rome and also announced God’s promised future of inclusive freedom (see Luke 7:36–50; Mark 5:1–20; etc.) and an “economy of grace” (see Mark 8:1–10). He also drew upon the Jubilee and Sabbath traditions, calling those once enslaved to create a society where liberation from slavery (see Luke 4:16–21; etc.), debt (see Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:1–4), and other inequities was the divine order of the day.

39 Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, p. 13.

Jesus drew on the metaphor of the “realm of God,” taken from the Hebrew prophets. He proclaimed God’s covenantal reign of peace, compassion, justice, healing, reconciliation, and non-violence as being opposite to empire. According to Jesus, God’s reign was freely and graciously given to all, especially to the poor, marginalized, and diseased (see Luke 14:12–14; Matthew 11:2–5; etc.), to women and children (see Mark 1:29–31; Mark 5:21–43; Matthew 18:1–5; etc.). Such proclamation led to his crucifixion, which was imperial Rome’s way of dealing with those whom it regarded as a threat to its absolute rule. The cross, the central symbol of our faith, is full of historically tragic and terrible irony, as his Jewish brothers and sisters have, over the intervening centuries of imperial Christendom, suffered pain, pogroms, and holocaust from those who called themselves Christians, wearing crosses and wielding swords and guns in their hands to crucify his fellow Jews.

After his experience of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, the Apostle Paul spent his days visiting, establishing, sustaining, and teaching communities where the alternative that Jesus proclaimed was lived out as much as possible. Paul too knew the oppression of empire. In his letter to the church in Rome (7:24) he cries out: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” “Body of death” means living under the coercion of this world’s imperial principalities and powers, and not being able to fulfill the Torah, to do God’s will. The slavery he speaks of is such that even when we will to do God’s commandments, we cannot. But when in the next verse he cries out, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” he rejoices in the Christ-given gift of freedom for God, for the neighbour and for the world, the freedom to fulfill the Torah. When those early church communities called Jesus “Lord” they made it plain that Caesar was not to be worshiped and that ultimate loyalty belonged to God and to God alone.

Using provocative and political language, such as that of slavery and freedom (see Romans 7:24; Galatians 5:1; etc.) and clearly building on the gospel of Jesus, Paul laid the foundations of the church as local communities, initially house churches where social, spiritual, and economic mutuality was to reign. It was this agenda of congregational development that was a key factor in the spread and growth of the early Christian movement, since equality (women were leaders—see Galatians 3:26–28; Acts 16:14–15; etc.), inclusivity (Gentiles and Jews together—see Galatians 3:26–28; Acts 17:26; etc.), sustenance (goods, resources, Eucharist were shared—see Acts 2:42–47; Acts 4:32–35; etc.), and healing (liberation—see Acts 16:16–34; etc.) were hope-filled and life-altering. Conversion and baptism then meant incorporation into this body’s healthy and holistic way of living, which was contrary to empire. A Jew like Jesus, but also a Roman citizen, Paul too was executed by Rome as a politically dangerous figure.

The church was persecuted by imperial powers and martyrdom was widespread in its early life. But over time a theological drift from the core teachings of Jesus and Paul, particularly on the question of economic equality and the rejection of violence, paved the way for the greatest upheaval in Christian history—the conversion of Emperor Constantine! United Church theologian Douglas John Hall states that the emperor “invited the Christians to become...chaplain to his imperium,” as Constantine (and emperors since!) saw the potential for religion to lend unifying force, triumphalist power, personalizing morality, and authoritative deference to his imperial regime. This meant that the church that became triumphant and dominant alongside the state had in fact become empire itself in the form of Christendom. The militant globalizing mission of the church followed, including the devastation of the crusades, the dramatic expansion of wealth and property ownership of the church, the conflicting realignment of church and various states in the Reformation period, and the horror of the Holocaust in Germany and elsewhere during World War II.

Without going further into the history, we see a series of short steps to move from the dominance and power of the Roman Empire to the dominance and power of Christendom to the contemporary dominance and power of the neo-liberal capitalist empire. While it is true, as Douglas Hall states, that “western Christendom is in its final stages of decay”—thus providing us with a providential opportunity to recapture the original modesty of the gospel through the use of such metaphors for the church as salt, light, seed, yeast (see Matthew 5:13–16; Matthew 13:31–33; etc.)—empire itself continues in full force. Over the centuries, empire has co-opted religion and divorced itself from its explicit religious roots. Néstor Míguez identifies global imperial consolidation as a very real likelihood. Empire will be grounded in an economic axis in which “Mammon is God” and “everything must be adapted to the framework of capitalist commerce and consumerist society,” with a drive toward privatization in which “individual satisfaction dissolves...solidarity...(and) generate(s) an imperialized subjectivity.” Ofelia Ortega has named nine characteristics, while we have named seven factors in our understanding of contemporary empire—political, economic, military, cultural, religious, environmental, patriarchal—which join in such interconnected ways that they form a unified system of oppression, destruction, and threat of death to marginalized people and the planet’s ecosystems as a whole.

We are thus called anew to a prophetic faith that is oriented to real truth, holds ultimate hope and trust in God, and yet remains close to the negations of history, and is aware of the people and places where contemporary suffering is most acutely known (Douglas Hall). It is this prophetic faith that has led South African Christians, after the devastation of decades of apartheid, to build goodwill for the future—through the inspiring process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by Desmond Tutu and others—upon an understanding of “ubuntu” theology, which asserts that “I am human when you also are human.”

It is also this prophetic faith that leads Ofelia Ortega to write: “We are called to be nonconformist and transformative communities, because life is not possible unless we do transformation that addresses the roots of injustice. We are called to be transformed by the renewing of our minds from the dominating and egoistic imperial mindset, thus doing the will of God which is fulfilled in love, solidarity, and grace.... We as churches are called to create spaces for, and become agents of, transformation, even as we are entangled in and complicit with the very system we are called to change.” In offering a prophetic affirmation of “the creative power of God,” that another world and another resurrected church is possible, Néstor Míguez states: “To locate ourselves in spaces of hope is to begin working beyond Empire. It is to create life-giving alternatives for everyone.... But for this faith to become reality we cannot wait for time to pass and for the governing powers to fall by themselves. It is necessary to begin to demonstrate in our perceptions, relationships, and communities that another world is possible; that other ways of living bring dignity and plenitude... through the extension of alternate symbols and lifeways, of which we are heirs.”

It seems clear that God calls us to a bold confession and renewed profession and practice of our faith—God’s gospel alternative to empire—in word and deed with our various ecumenical and interfaith partners. Ofelia Ortega says, “the conflict with...empire is the theological place that makes us know who our God is.” With her and others, it is our conviction that nothing less than the contemporary theological integrity of the church is at stake. We therefore remind the church of God’s call to be the church of Jesus Christ, to be set free by grace, at all levels and in all ways, to reclaim our loyalty to the gospel rather than to be enslaved by the continuing imperial theology of our day.

CONFESSION: Church and World in the Midst of Empire

The understanding of empire expressed in this report is primarily based upon the witness of our ecumenical, interfaith, and societal partners, both overseas and in Canada. It is also deeply informed by the witness of scripture, in both Old and New Testaments, and by the reflections of theologians and members of the Empire Task Group. The imperial threats to life in various dimensions in our current global context lead us to acknowledge the divided loyalties and deep involvement, or complicity, of The United Church of Canada and the larger worldwide Christian church with the forces and forms of empire in both church and world. Our acknowledgment of such complicity leads us to new and bold confession.

Acts of confession are absolutely critical to the integrity of our faith. Confessing our complicity with empire is a crucial first step, in order to turn in another direction (to repent). Our unique and oft-quoted Affirmation of Faith (“A New Creed”)—that we are not alone, that we live in God’s world, and that we are called to be the church—is deeply compromised if we fail to take into account the breadth and depth of our complicity in imperial violence. All subjects of empire are indoctrinated by falsehoods, lies, distortions, and misrepresentations that give rise to both overt and covert forms of violent power over ourselves, others, and God’s creation. Empire challenges faith communities such as ours to examine the very truth of their confession. Remaining silent in the face of our acknowledged complicity is not an option for a church such as ours who profess Jesus Christ as Lord of our time and our history. We understand confession to be an act of acknowledging wrongs and injustices. Confession thus also becomes a way for the church to imagine and discern a new future, a new way of being church, as a faithful response to God’s grace and call to new life.

The need to acknowledge our complicity with the imperial powers, and to confess the same, is shared by other reports. The draft Statement of Faith, which the Theology and Faith Committee has placed before the 39th General Council 2006, states in its preamble that “separated as we now are from the centre of power, the United Church has become aware of its complicity with historic oppressions and abuses,” and it notes the pervasive economic worldview of contemporary people, such that “our spiritual hunger is co-opted by the culture of consumption.” The statement itself notes that “by the tragic subversion of our potential, we are in bondage to and complacent within a matrix of false desires and wrong choices. In these are manifest the tragic outcomes of sin—the evil that is hatred, violence, greed, and selfishness; the domination of economic, political, and military empires; rampant consumerism and unchecked accumulation of wealth; limitless growth and damage to creation.” Finally the statement says that the church after Constantine “grew in number and power, allying with great cities and empires, silencing by force diverse expressions of faith, harming rather than caring for God’s children.... We carry sorrow, grief, and shame for our wounding actions across this whole beloved and beleaguered world.... We have often failed to be the church.”

We also acknowledge previous sincere attempts to confess our collective complicity in imperial forces, not the least of which has been the United Church’s 1986 Apology to Native Peoples, and our 1998 Statement of Repentance. We are also more aware, in part because the above apology and statement were received but not accepted, that mere words of sorrow and repentance are not enough. We are called by the Spirit to confess our sins and to live into our repentance, as faithful disciples of Jesus in our time and place.

Another challenge to transformation is what we call our “resolutionary theology.” We have been prolific as the United Church in addressing, over time, major social issues of injustice, greed, exploitation, etc. by passing resolutions, petitions, and reports at various levels (General Council,

Conference, presbytery/district, congregational). Yet such statements have not instilled in us a real change of heart and institution, in which we no longer presume to have all the answers, whether in the forms of doctrine or methods of social action. We are called, at all levels of the church, to live into the complex questions and concerns of our time, in solidarity with ecumenical, interfaith, and societal partners. We suffer widespread hesitancy regarding our needed conversion to new forms of mission and ministry. If newly energized by the Spirit, however, we may undertake a sustained new re-formation of the church, in part by working with renewed vigour in our carrying out of previous resolutions throughout the church and in lives.

Confession can evoke fear, and it seems that we are a fearful people, fearful of dying as individuals and as churches. Such fear, however, merely plays into the hands of empire. We need to confess our emphasis on maintenance rather than mission. We also need to confess our confusion of the authentic evangelism of the gospel (which is the sharing of God's good news as known in the witness, ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus), with church growth, which is a by-product of the gospel rather than the gospel in and of itself!

This confession will require a new degree of humbleness and risk-taking of us all, as we seek to overcome specific sins of imperial complicity with regard to race, class, gender, age, clericalism, ecological destruction, discrimination, and the like. Over the next triennium and beyond we are called to ask ourselves difficult questions about living in the midst of empire, at every level of the church, about our goals and methods, focusing on

- our education and faith formation methods and models
- our mission and social action agendas
- our interfaith assumptions
- our expectations for lay and ordered ministry training
- the emphasis of our youth and children's ministries
- our pension and investment fund portfolios
- our spending, consumption and budgeting habits
- our environmental standards
- our stewardship patterns
- our methods of governance and decision-making
- our means of conflict resolution
- our forms of worship
- and a host of other practices of church life

Continued and renewed advocacy among the principalities and powers, including government and corporations, who are among the primary builders of empire, is important. But we are also called to re-examine our hearts and actions, as the principal architects and purveyors of empire count on our complicity to maintain their dominance. We are only beginning to understand the depth of confession necessary within the church to recapture a dynamic and passionate faithfulness to the vision, gospel, and mission of Jesus. Because we benefit in so many ways from the imperial forces at work in our world (economically, socially, ecclesiastically, individually, and otherwise) we may even resist the call to confession that this report, and its attached proposal, represents. Nonetheless scripture, our various partners, and the Spirit beckon, calling us to a broad analysis of our complicity

in empire, as a first step toward renewed integrity and faithfulness within all levels of The United Church of Canada. We need to examine our collective conscience, to name our sin, to ask ourselves how we are linked with the destructive forms and forces of empire in our time. Then and only then, having confessed in word and deed, can we begin to take up the challenge of God's call to renewed discipleship of Jesus Christ through the transforming and renewing power of God's Spirit of freedom and truth.

CALL: Living God's Reign in the Midst of Empire

In making our confession, we seek to be a responsive and transformed people of faith, hope, and love. God calls us to fresh discernment about the shape of our mission and ministry in the imperial context of our time. This is a critical *kairos* time for the church. We must sharpen our attentiveness to God's call to us, as individuals, families, congregations/pastoral charges, mission units, presbyteries/districts, Conferences, and General Council. We seek to be in solidarity with God's mission in and for this world that God created and loves, and for the creatures of all kinds who have life and breath from God's life and breath. This section of our report, without presuming to speak for all within this diverse church of ours, seeks to express hints and glimpses of what that solidarity might look like in the midst of the destructive imperial forces of our day.

Discernment is an ongoing tradition for those in the church. Fortunately, we have sources of inspiration to guide us in this new context. For instance, our Affirmation of Faith, "A New Creed," reminds us that we are called by the God we trust "to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope." And we know "God is with us. We are not alone."

But such faith is in danger of becoming nothing more than pious words if it is separated from the nitty-gritty of worldly engagements and entanglements. To move from confession to call is to move from the ideas, intentions, and actions that we resist as sinful, to those ideas, intentions, and actions to which God leads us. We seek a shift within the broad life of the church from a primary concern about preservation and maintenance toward a fresh vocation of vision, mission engagement, justice seeking, and transformative ministry.

The 39th General Council 2006 offers significant time for discernment about our just-beginning third generation of mission and ministry. Once again, the draft Statement of Faith offers points of convergence, as it states: "With God's help we turn from our sin and seek to be agents of God's healing and reconciliation...We choose to listen to our neighbours in faith...to work together for a whole earth of peace and justice. We participate in God's work of healing and mending creation expressed in both personal and communal dimensions."

Becoming more specific, the statement says: "Christian communal responsibility in our day especially includes: attending to the well-being of our home the earth; repenting of European-Canadian hostility toward Aboriginal peoples; resisting economic exploitation, the idolatry of the market economy, and the marginalization of people because of gender, ethnicity, or sexuality; challenging the misuse of Christian language to promote hatred rather than love, and war rather than peace; fostering a climate of faithful hope in opposition to a culture of covert despair; and constructively recreating our identity and role in the community of the earth." While this is an exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, vocation for us as individuals, it is far less difficult as people of various gifts within diverse communities of faith, at all levels of the church, and among people of conscience everywhere.

Inklings of God's contemporary call to the church have been discerned here and there, among diverse people of faith in various contexts. The United Church has a rich history of prophetic and pastoral involvement, and has over the last few decades addressed numerous specific issues of injustice, exploitation, and greed. Nonetheless, far too few of us have transformed our habits and our patterns of behaviour. Rather, we have conformed ourselves more to imperial practices of efficiency and success, rather than to the radical, alternative, and anti-imperial gospel of good news, which has unselfish love at its heart. Among a host of potential actions we may consider, it is time to revisit, in a systematic fashion, the practical implications for our future church, at all levels, of the various resolutions and petitions that

have guided our policy and program making in the past.

We are invited to return to the core questions of our faith tradition if we are to discern God's will in the midst of the daily lies, deceptions, and lures of empire. This invitation has been extended by various sources and most recently by the World Council of Churches' Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) initiative. It invites member churches "to recommit themselves to reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective, and take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers because all power is accountable to God." The fundamental questions we need to ask are these:

- What is the gospel?
- Is God's mission primarily about this world or the next?
- What is a church for?
- Is faithfulness as much about right practices as it is about right beliefs, and if so, what are they?

A core conviction of many in our church is that it exists for the transformation, mending, and new life of the world. The church is called to live in trust, grace, and risk and to live out the gospel of God's reign of justice, peace, reconciliation, and healing. Of course it is difficult to say what this looks like concretely in the variety of contexts—personal, communal, social, cultural, ecclesial, regional, ecological, etc.—in which we find ourselves.

Nonetheless, some broad hints exist. Clearly we are called to a primary emphasis on mission, rather than on maintenance or survival. That means we are called to personal, congregational, and ecclesiastical transformation. We must tune our hearts, lifestyles, and structures to the profession, in word and deed, of good news in the midst of ever-present imperial bad news. We are called to a deeper discipleship as individuals and as church. That means an emphasis on committed faith formation and re-formation, on learning again who we are as followers of Jesus, rather than as followers of Caesar. We are called to speak gospel truth to the imperial powers, to challenge systemic injustice, exploitation, violence, and death wherever we find it, including in the church! Through it all, we are called to trust God.

We receive inspiration from the World Council of Churches' 2006 Assembly in Porto Alegre, and this thematic affirmation: "God, in your grace, transform the world." How can another world, and a different and transformed church, become possible? We know that solidarity with our various partners—ecumenical, interfaith, and all people of goodwill—is a key component in forging a new future. There are some hopeful church and community models for transformation, which can ground and sustain us. Such stories of God's grace-filled transformation, if shared, will help us live into the gospel in our time and place with integrity and hope. Resources for sharing these models and stories will need to be developed.

Without a doubt, this discernment of God's call to live the gospel in the midst of contemporary imperial powers will require our boldest and most passionate humanity, as God sets before us nothing less than a daily choice between life and death, blessings and curses (Deut. 30:19). The implications of God's call to us for all mission and ministry areas of our church life is staggering and daunting, as we go deep to get in touch once again with the Spirit's risky pentecostal adventure. Our various ecumenical and interfaith partners, in Canada and globally, will be our companions on the way, as we develop tools over the next triennium and beyond to help us. This is a long-term process of discernment, as the imperial powers will not stop luring us, inevitably changing in order to tempt us and to attempt to weaken the gospel. May we all live deeply and joyfully into the call to live God's reign in the midst of empire in our time and place.

COMMITMENT: Actions and Recommendations

PROPOSAL

WHEREAS

We have heard anew the witness of the gospel in theological reflection discerned from the Bible and its various historical contexts, primarily from the first-century context of Jesus and the New Testament;

WHEREAS

We have been called by United Church partners to work with them to speak the truth of the gospel to empire in its various manifestations, and have heard testimony like the following:

As third world peoples, ours is the constant plight and recurring experience of standing helplessly in various “Praetoria” (John 18:28) of the powerful contemporary Pontius Pilates—be it the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, or otherwise—and being reminded who has “power to release” us and “power to condemn” us (John 19:10). (Caribbean Council of Churches)

Empire has been sustained by the unbridled capitalist system backed by military force. Therefore the most effective way to resist it is to render the production base of Empire impotent. When we resist the consumptive lifestyle of Empire, the production base will gradually lose ground to a non-capitalist lifestyle (or economic system) based on the spirit of justice, sharing and cooperation which can be termed a “divine economy.” (Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea)

WHEREAS

We have heard our partners speak of the complexity and threat to life of imperial power in many ways, and have discerned, through theological reflection, a striking similarity between the biblical first century imperial context and our own North American 21st-century imperial context, we have defined empire, for the purposes of this report and proposal, as follows:

The convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic and military imperial interests, systems and networks that seek to dominate political power and economic wealth. It typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities and countries to the more powerful. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states and either marginalizes or co-opts religious communities;

WHEREAS

We are called to confess our complicity in the maintenance of empire as a global system of domination, control, and oppression;

WHEREAS

We have reviewed previous resolutions, related to the following four program areas (economic justice, human rights, peace, environment) which the General Council had previously adopted, and failed to identify major gaps in existing United Church policies, yet discerned also a lack of transformation and concentrated action on the part of the whole church at its various levels as a result of previous resolutions;

WHEREAS

We have heard the call of God anew to be disciples of Jesus and live God’s Reign, in a multitude of ways, in the midst of imperial powers, systems, and networks; and

WHEREAS

We have been encouraged by ecumenical and interfaith partners such as the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and others, to undertake with them, in solidarity and mutual support, a sustained reflection and action process to renew faithful living in the midst of empire in its various forms;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the 39th General Council:

1. Call on all courts, mission units, and related bodies of The United Church of Canada to:
 - a) name our complicity in empire;
 - b) covenant to live faithfully in the midst of empire.

Specifically the General Council shall:

Receive with appreciation the document “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire” and authorize its use to develop resources for study within The United Church of Canada, including:

- the development and application of an “empire lens” (available by early 2007) to assist congregations and other mission units in identifying opportunities to pursue justice and confront, challenge and transform empire; and
 - the development of a proposed covenant, witnessing to empire, confessing our complicity, and calling individuals, congregations and other mission units to commit to living faithfully in the midst of empire;
2. Direct the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry to establish a process of response from the church and further development of the covenant, and report to the 40th General Council with recommendations concerning the proposed covenant and living faithfully in the midst of empire.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

AGAPE

Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth.

Basotho

People of Lesotho in the Sesotho language.

Commodification

The transformation of what is normally a non-commodity into a commodity, to assign economic value to something that traditionally would not be considered in economic terms, for example, an idea, identity, gender.

Complicity

Association or participation in or as if in a wrongful or unjust act or system.

Counter-insurgency

The combating of insurgency, by the government (or allies) of the territory in which the insurgency takes place.

Empire

The convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks that seek to dominate political power and economic wealth. It typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states, and either marginalizes or co-opts religious communities (World Alliance of Reformed Churches).

ICIF

Interchurch Interfaith Advisory Committee

International Monetary Fund

The international organization entrusted with overseeing the global financial system by monitoring exchange rates and balance of payments, as well as offering technical and financial assistance when asked.

Imperium

A Latin term can be translated as power. In Antiquity this concept could apply to people, and mean something like “power status” or “authority,” or could be used with a geographical connotation and mean something like “territory.”

Interdependence

The dynamic of being mutually responsible to and dependent on others.

JGER

Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit

Kairos

A Greek term meaning literally “the right or opportune time.”

Neo-liberalism

In its dominant international use, neo-liberalism refers to a political-economic philosophy that de-emphasizes or rejects government intervention in the domestic economy. It focuses on free-market methods, fewer restrictions on business operations, and property rights. It upholds and promotes the market as the judge of the common good and enshrines competition as the supreme good.

Market capitalism

In common usage, an economic system in which the means of production are overwhelmingly privately owned and operated for profit, decisions regarding investment of capital are made privately, and where production, distribution, and the prices of goods, services, and labour are affected by the forces of supply and demand in a largely free market.

Praetoria

The name given to the elite bodyguard of a Roman emperor (approximately the size of a legion) or to a member of this bodyguard. The term is sometimes applied to the inner circle of advisers to a major political figure.

Preventive war

A kind of war whose public justification is proclaimed as “self-defence.”

Privatization

The process of transferring property from public ownership to private ownership and/or transferring the management of a service or activity from the government to the private sector.

Transnational corporations

Corporations with investments or that operate in more than one country and that regularly transfer capital across national borders.

U.S.

United States of America

UNICEF

United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

Unilateralism

The practice of a single country acting alone outside of the parameters of international law to which that country is obligated.

WARC

World Alliance of Reformed Churches

WCC

World Council of Churches

World Bank

A group of five international organizations responsible for providing finance to countries for purposes of development and poverty reduction, and for encouraging and safeguarding international investment.