

# TOWARD A THRIVING AFRICA? PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

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Theology, understood as *theos* (God) + *logos* (word, knowledge), refers to “knowledge of God”. A theology that is public thinks about how the knowledge of God, primarily revealed in the Scriptures, impacts on matters of public concern at a specific time and in a specific context. This theological reflection is done and communicated in a way that is publicly understood and has the potential to affect public life.

Economics, understood as *oikos* (home) + *nomos* (law) or *oikonomia*, refers to “study of the law or rules of a household”. This “household” may be a family, a country, or the world, and so what economics studies may be the budget of a family, the economics of a country, or the global financial system. Economics in its modern sense is a social science that studies the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services.

National economic systems can be classified on a continuum. At the one end are those that are centrally controlled by the state (socialism) and those where all the means of production are owned by the state (communism). At the other end are systems that largely rely on the free market to steer the economy and where the means of production and capital are held in private hands (capitalism).

After experimenting with African socialism just after the end of the colonial era, most countries in Africa now have a “mixed” economy, with a leaning toward central control. This means that some sectors of the economy (education, electricity generation, water provision) are controlled by the state while others (mining, banking, trading in consumer goods) are open to free market competition or are held jointly by the state (public) and entrepreneurs (private) (e.g. telecommunications, transport).

For theology, matters of public concern certainly include questions about economics issues, for example, (un)employment, national debt, wealth creation, technological innovation, poverty, and inequality. These matters can be housed under the umbrella of “the economy” and makes the link between public theology and economics a natural and very important one.

## Why Theology Should Interact with Economics

A key reason why theologians need to know something economics is that economics provides them with technical knowledge of and empirical data about “household affairs”. For example, theologians are rightly concerned about “the poor”, but without economics, theologians would not know how many people in a country live on less than, say, \$2 a day and so can be classified as “poor”, and how this proportion changes over time to show either progress or regression. To give another example, theologians are right to make prophetic calls against inequality. Economics helps us to distinguish between income and capital inequality and is able to measure the inequality in a given society, expressed in the Gini coefficient. This measurement runs from zero (complete equality) to one (complete inequality). The higher the figure as a proportion of 1, the higher the inequality in a given country. Examples of African countries that are very unequal are South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, while Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia are more equal.

Some Christians argue that paying workers a high minimum wage is a good thing. Economists can provide data to help determine the optimum level of a minimum wage, taking into account the amounts paid by state social grants and the ability of a specific business sector to absorb a rise in the minimum wage without an overtly negative effect on their liquidity or ability to expand employment to others.

On the other hand, economists also need theologians who can expose and question the moral assumptions of economic systems. For example: Is the idea that human beings are rational agents striving to maximize their self-interest an acceptable understanding of the human person? Does a free market really move “freely” when the evidence demonstrates that the collective decisions and emotions of investors actually drive prices? Is communism the best system to allow individuals the freedom to improve their welfare via entrepreneurship?

Theology with its normative (ethical) view of society can also critically examine economic policies and their outcomes. Examples: Is it good and fair that companies use natural resources but do not pay for them and leave it to society to pick up the costs? Mining companies may pollute groundwater, affecting boreholes and rivers, but often by the time the damage emerges, the companies no longer operate in that area or have ceased to exist. Oil companies may pollute water resources and destroy the agricultural potential of land that local communities rely on for food. Taxpayers then have to pay to clean up their pollution. Is it fair that all goods are subject to value added tax or sales tax, or should there be exemptions for food and other products that poorer people normally buy?

Finally, theology reminds economics that its promises of happiness and purpose through increasing personal or collective wealth exclude the important spiritual dimension of human nature. Neither the capitalist dream of becoming a wealthy self-made person nor the communist dream of an equal society ruled by the proletariat reflects ultimate realities. The purpose of human life is not to accumulate wealth for its own sake (always shifting the boundaries to “more” consumption), but to love others as God loves us and to use wealth to bless others.

## **Africa’s Economic Challenges and Opportunities**

Africa is a huge and diverse continent with fifty-four countries in which 1.2 billion people live. Each of these countries has its own challenges and opportunities. So what is said below is inevitably something of a generalization.

### ***Economic challenges***

*Many African countries rely for their income on one commodity only.* If, for example, the sale of oil makes up 90% of state income, and the price of oil drops from \$120 per barrel to \$40 (as recently happened), the country will soon find that it cannot balance its books because its expenditure far exceeds its income. It will have to borrow to make up the shortfall. This is how countries fall into a debt-trap, which reduces their ability to diversify their economies and create other forms of income.

*Africa has weak infrastructure.* Economic growth cannot happen without infrastructure that allows the easy transport of goods and people. Countries need a proper road network, a good spread of railway lines, and strategically positioned airports and harbours. Other important forms of infrastructure include relatively affordable and reliable electricity supplies – but only 24% of Sub-Saharan Africans have access to electricity. Infrastructure also include a well-functioning communication system, including mobile and Internet services; a legal system that protects contracts and is transparent and fair; a financial system that can process payment and move money easily in and out of the country, subject to exchange controls.

*Too many African countries are politically unstable.* There are regions in Africa with perpetual conflicts and wars. There are autocratic rulers who enrich themselves and stay in power for life or until they are challenged or toppled through a violent overthrow of government (see the thirty-five military coups between 1991 and 1996). These unstable countries or parts of countries are the source of political and economic migrants who flee to

safer spaces, with the result that Africa's economic development lags far behind its actual potential. The UN Refugee Agency states that Sub-Saharan Africa hosts about 26% of the world's refugee population, adding up to more than 18 million people in regions like Sudan, the Central African Republic and parts of Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> What we need to work for on this continent is "an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law".<sup>2</sup>

*Rampant corruption results in the loss of billions of dollars that could have been spent on basic services like education, housing or health.* The annual Corruption Perception Index, compiled by Transparency International, defines corruption as the misuse of public power for private gain. By 2017, a total of twelve African countries were on the list of the twenty-five most corrupt countries in the world.<sup>3</sup> Corruption pushes up the cost of goods and services and leads to a system in which companies that operate honestly do not get business. A few connected individuals walk away with unethical and inflated profits, and ordinary people suffer. Furthermore, all of Africa's economies need foreign investment if they are to grow. But investors will only commit to projects if they are sure there will be a safe and stable business environment with trustworthy business partners, and that they will be able to repatriate profits after paying their taxes. The tenth principle of the UN Global Compact, a broad agreement for global business, reads: "Business should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery."<sup>4</sup>

*Africa's main trading partners lie outside the continent in China, the EU and the USA.*

Where trade agreements are fair and in some cases even allow African countries preferential treatment, this is good for the economy. But there is very little trade within Africa because of poor cross-Africa infrastructure (see above). In other words, African countries do not trade enough with other African countries that are in close proximity and so they miss out on the benefits of economies of scale. There are not enough economic unions or strong trading blocs across Africa to allow the continent to speak with one voice in international trade. This means that Africa is easily marginalized and does not optimize its economic potential.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/africa.html>

<sup>2</sup> Agenda 2063: The Africa we want, aspiration 3.  
<https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/most-corrupt-countries/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

*Africa is very vulnerable to the effects of climate change.* Although the continent uses less than 5% of the world's fossil fuel (a major cause of global warming), changing rainfall and weather patterns greatly affect the continent because of carbon emissions from already developed countries like the USA, the UK, Germany and now also China. The reason for this impact is twofold: 1) Millions of people rely for their food on subsistence agriculture, and drier seasons or floods have a direct impact on food production. 2) Africa is poorly prepared to deal with natural disasters because of inadequate transport links and rapid urbanization that leads to overcrowding in townships and informal settlements which lack the infrastructure of streets, stormwater drainage and sewage systems. Floods as a result of warmer surface water affecting Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi have become much stronger and more frequent due to the Indian Ocean's warmer surface water. And droughts in West Africa and Southern Africa have become longer with higher temperatures and lower access to groundwater.

### ***Economic opportunities***

We should not only consider the negatives when looking at Africa, for it is also a continent with huge economic opportunities. Economists look at the following positive potential contributors to socio-economic development:

*Africa does not have to follow the long road toward technology development.* It has the ability to benefit from technological advances without the pre-development phase. For example, mobile phones are now widely used for communication in Africa, which eliminates the need to set up fixed line telephone infrastructure. Mobile phones are also now widely used in the taxi industry, for banking, health care, farming and education. There is no reason why Africa cannot benefit greatly from the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution and contribute to it with innovations as regards the virtual economy.

*Africa has the youngest population of all continents.* Africa's median age was just below 20 years in 2010, and is projected to be around 22.7 years by 2030, compared to the 2010 figures for Japan (45), Germany (44) and the UK (40 years). This means that half of Africa's population will be below 23 years of age by 2030. Economists speak about the "demographic dividend" that still lies in the future: that is, when the proportion of people in the age group 15–60 (working age) is the greatest with those below 15 at less than 30% and those above 60 at less than 15% of the total population. Africa has youth on its side. This creates the potential for innovation, a locally available workforce (on condition that education functions well) and a relatively low burden of an ageing population to carry in the economy.

*Africa has the potential to contribute significantly towards a lower carbon economy.* The continent has abundant sun, wind and rivers to generate green energy in the form of solar, wind and hydro-electricity. Technology has already brought the price for “green” production within the range of fossil-based energy. Africa will be able to mitigate the current low proportion of people with electricity while at the same time reducing the unit price and increasing the stability of supply to households and businesses.

*Africa has high growth potential to create and expand a new middle class.* Unlike mature economies with a stagnant middle class, the youth dividend means that more people will be entering the middle class, which is defined as people with the ability to spend between \$10 and \$100 per day. These are the people who buy consumer goods (appliances, televisions, cars) and invest more in the education of their children. They grow businesses, increase employment and generally contribute to a vibrant economy.

*Africa’s wealth of commodities (e.g. minerals) that the world needs creates huge potential for beneficiation (enrichment).* For example, instead of Botswana simply mining diamonds and sending the rough stones to be sorted, cut and polished in Brussels, this could be done in Gaborone. The economic value of rough diamonds is far below that of polished diamonds, and the country can earn much needed foreign currency for itself by increasing the value of the raw product. The same thing is starting to happen in agriculture (coffee and tea production and packaging) and for other mining products like iron ore, aluminium and gold.

*There are few continents with such high and unique tourism potential.* Countries from the North (Egypt, Morocco) to the East (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda) to the West (Ghana), Central Africa (Rwanda) and the South (Namibia, Botswana, South Africa) as well as islands like Mauritius have become choice tourist destinations. Economists tell us that tourism is the most effective job creator, with up to seven local jobs created for each arriving foreign tourist.

With wise leaders, hard work, and good policy execution, Africa is a continent that can flourish in the 21st century.

## **Christian Confessions and Economics**

Although the Nicene and Apostles’ creeds do not refer to economic matters directly, they can be interpreted in a way that helps us to understand God’s will for the economy. If, for example, we confess that God is the “maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen” (Nicaea) and take up our task to rule over the earth (Gen 1:28), we have a

responsibility to care for the integrity of creation. If we confess that we believe in Jesus Christ, then we are called to imitate him in not advancing only our own interests but also those of others (Phil 2:1–4). If we, with both the Nicene and the Apostles' creeds, confess that the church is "catholic" (meaning universal), we accept global solidarity with one another. If we confess that the church is "holy", we acknowledge that we must strive through sanctification to be like God (Lev 11:44, 1 Pet 1:15). And because God is love, we must live an economic life that embodies love for our neighbour and our enemies (I John 4:7–21).<sup>5</sup> The seemingly "old" words of the confessions are in fact revolutionary if translated in terms of economic life.<sup>6</sup>

More recent confessional documents stemming from the Reformed tradition are much more explicit about economic matters. This is because we have come to understand the huge impact economic systems, policies and practices have on individual people, broader society, and the environment. The most prominent of these newer documents are the Belhar Confession (1986) and the Accra Confession (2004).

In the Belhar Confession, the church is called to unity and reconciliation with a view to establishing justice. In a world full of injustice and enmity, "we believe that God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged". The church as the possession of God "must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged".<sup>7</sup>

The Accra Confession draws attention to the devastating effect of the global economic system (both socialist and capitalist) on the environment and to the increasing inequality within and between countries. According to the confession, a new empire has been created that stands against the will of God and should be resisted. "We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation." It goes on to reject "the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God's creation".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/nicene.htm>

<https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>

<sup>6</sup> For more on this, see World Council of Churches, *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*. Geneva: WCC, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://wccrc.ch/accra/the-accra-confession>

Evolving Catholic social doctrine played and still plays a huge role in bringing economic and labour matters into the fold of Christian theological thinking. The key text in this regard is the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,<sup>9</sup> which includes references to ground-breaking statements like *Rerum Novarum*, *Gaudium et Spes* and many others Catholic encyclicals.<sup>10</sup> In chapter 4 it sets out the seven principles on which the social doctrine stands. The *Compendium* contains subdivisions on human work (chapter 6) and economic life (chapter 7) from a Christian perspective.

## **Christian Criteria for Economic Life**

The sources of our criteria for a good economy are, first, the Bible and, secondly, our confessional tradition. Let us look at five of these criteria and how they – taken together – promote human flourishing globally and in Africa:

### ***Integrity of creation – stewardship***

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it.  
(Ps 24:1)

In the beginning was the Word ... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1–3)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Gen 2:15)

Humans were assigned the task of working in and on the created order. For too long, however, economists understood this “work” as subjugation and exploitation of the earth to satisfy our insatiable human needs. Instead of being good stewards, we were too greedy and have now reached a point where human beings have become a danger to all the earth. Geologists confirm that we live in the *Anthropocene* age, a name which implies that our impact on the environment has become so pervasive that it is recorded as part of the earth's geological record, which was previously restricted to major natural events like earthquakes or volcanos.

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[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

<sup>10</sup> [https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/catholic\\_documents/13/](https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/catholic_documents/13/)

Public theology must be a green (ecological) theology, supporting international agreements on climate change and reminding the human species of its holy responsibility to rule over the earth as good stewards who know that we do not own the earth but work it on behalf of its real owner, God Almighty.

Business corporations should not only comply with minimum environmental legislation but should take all possible measures to mitigate their carbon footprint. There are many different practical strategies for achieving this, including switching to alternative energy sources (solar, wind), recycling waste, limiting water consumption, and using technology to conduct meetings instead of travelling long distances.

Principles 7–9 of the UN Global Compact urge businesses to “support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges; undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility” and to “encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies”.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Human dignity – imago Dei***

The idea that human beings are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and deserve to be treated with dignity is deeply embedded in the Scriptures and Christian tradition. A powerful secular expression of human dignity is contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, originally adopted in 1948 and now acting as a global benchmark for politics and for business.

Here are some suggestions about how we can honour and advance human dignity in a working environment: Provide safe working conditions for employees and access to basic health care; avoid child labour; pay workers a fair wage in line with industry and country standards; set fair working hours, not exceeding 8 hours per day and six days per week; create a welcoming workplace with no discrimination on the basis of race, culture, religion or gender; provide training and up-skilling of employees to optimize their human potential.

The UN Global Compact starts with two principles related to human rights, one positive and the other negative: “Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights, and should make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

### ***Striving for an egalitarian (equal) society***

Many passages in the Old Testament point toward structuring an economy for greater equality. For example, the idea of the Jubilee Year points in this direction: After seven sabbatical year cycles ( $7 \times 7 = 49$ ), the fiftieth year is the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:10–11). This year was a Sabbath year, in which even the fields were to rest. The economic implication of this “year of release” was the setting free of slaves, the writing off of debt, and the return of land to original owners who had lost it in the past fifty years.

The Wisdom books of the Old Testament understand that some will grow rich because of hard work and others who are foolish and lazy will become poor. Those who bury their talents – according to the New Testament parable – will lose even that which was given to them, while those who use their talents are rewarded even more. The labourer is worth his or her wages. Thus, reward for what we can call entrepreneurial activities is accepted as a reality in the Bible. A society of perfect equality where all have the same income and capital is simply impossible (Deut 15:11), and riches are seen as gifts that should be used as a blessing to others, and to relieve their plight (Deut 15:4).

Nevertheless, a highly unequal society where landowners (owners of capital) increase their wealth at the expense of others is not ethically acceptable. Therefore the Scriptures sketch the ideal that the balance between rich and poor should be restored with periodic interventions in the economic system like the actions required in the Jubilee Year.

In our modern economy, measures to keep inequalities within morally acceptable limits are two pronged: 1) empowering those outside or at the bottom of the social system by helping them to acquire the skills to participate meaningfully in the economy (education is a key way out of poverty), and 2) setting up an efficient and progressive tax system that redistributes income from more well-off people to the national treasury, thus enabling the state to assist poor people with a social safety net and basic services like housing, health, water and electricity. The latter remedy assumes the existence of a credible and transparent tax regime coupled with a non-corrupt and competent state. No wonder inequalities in Africa are sometimes so stark!

Where no formal or functioning public social system is in place, Africans have a long and proud ubuntu tradition that places the interests of the community before private gain. If one is able to produce more food than required in the family, the surplus is shared. If I gain business success, ubuntu imposes a moral obligation to share my wealth because my success is based on my being-in-community. Long before formal state structures in the modern sense of the word were instituted, Africans understood the obligation to share goods and spaces.

Modernity has unfortunately led to a distortion of ubuntu that has resulted in a higher degree of individualism, with retention of what is gained for private use only, and a definition of ubuntu in ethnic terms, excluding those who are not from my extended family or ethnic group.

### ***Special care for the weak and marginalized***

The Old Testament makes clear provision for the special treatment of foreigners, widows and the poor in the books of the Law (Deut 24), the Wisdom literature (Ps 146, Proverbs 22), and the Prophets (Isa 1:17; 61:1; Jer 5:28) The idea also receives strong support in the teaching of Jesus (Luke 4:18) and the apostles (Jas 1:27; 1 John 3:17–18).

Given the millions of migrants and displaced peoples in Africa, we in Africa have a special responsibility to treat such people in line with the philosophy of ubuntu: If we are persons through other persons, their suffering is, as 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 says so clearly, also our suffering, and we are called to not only protect our own interests but also to advance theirs (Phil 2:1–4).

It is sometimes said that the civility of a society can be measured by the way it treats the “insane” people living amongst us. This is a way to say a society is measured not by economic growth figures, but by how it treats those who are shunted to the side of society. The Scriptures support this concern. Economic policies should include a social system that provides for orphans, for the ill and for the old. The way we treat foreigners should also reflect our Christian faith. Xenophobia and tribalism send the opposite message to that proclaimed in God’s word.

### ***Assistance in a crisis***

We all know that it is wise to save for a rainy day. What this means is that on a personal level we should spend less than we earn and should save a set proportion of our income so that money is available for an unexpected event or crisis. The same holds true for a country. If a country has to borrow money to pay off its debt, then it is in a very vulnerable position when crises come.

But we should not have to rely only on our own resources; we should also be able to look to our neighbours for help. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in response to the question: Who is my neighbour? In other words, whom should I care for and assist? The parable involves a man in a crisis. He is overpowered by robbers and left for dead along the road. The people who come across him while in this crisis react in very different ways: Those

who might be expected to help (the religious people who go to the temple every week) walk past with “good” excuses. The only one who offers help is a Samaritan, a man who is not Jewish, who provides emergency assistance and pays for the injured man to stay over at the inn and be assisted further.

A crisis on a regional and national scale can emerge from a natural disaster (a drought or flood), wars and uprisings, and highly contagious and often fatal diseases like Ebola, HIV/AIDS and cholera. No matter who is affected, the Bible requires us to assist in a crisis and do what we can to alleviate that nation’s or region’s burden.

In summary: A good economy from a biblical perspective is one in which

- natural resources are used sustainably in line with our calling as stewards of God’s creation.
- the dignity and rights of individuals and groups of people (labourers, employees) are advanced in the workplace and beyond.
- inequalities are within fair limits with structural interventions where necessary to ensure that the gap between rich and poor does not increasingly widen.
- special measures are taken to protect the weakest in society.
- emergency assistance is available to anyone who is in need.

## **The Church and Economic Issues**

Let us now turn to the role of the church in economic life. When we talk about “the church”, we refer to three levels of the institutional church: the local congregation and its members; the regional church in different denominational structures; and the ecumenical church as the global people of God. Let us look the role of each in turn.

### ***The local congregation***

The local congregation is closest to the economic realities of its members and the surrounding communities. Its first task is to live out the law of love and care amongst its own members.

The first church in Jerusalem was not admired by outsiders for its smart buildings or academically qualified pastors! They were an amazing example of a sharing community – showing love amongst a huge diversity of languages and cultures, looking after one another with a special care for foreign widows, breaking bread at one another’s homes, and praising God all the way! (Acts 2:42–47).

In modern terms, the local church must run its own finances in a responsible and transparent manner. The practice of pastors getting rich on the contributions from poor

congregants must be stopped, and corruption should never be associated with the local body of Christ.

The local church should also be a blessing to the surrounding communities: it should reach out with the gospel of Jesus Christ and provide pastoral and physical care as far as possible. The church must become known as a place of love with a special heart for the weakest in society, and not – as in recent times – as a place where children and women are sexually abused. Where possible, churches should link up with local non-government and aid organisations – no matter whether they are faith-based or not – as this strengthens the collective ability to serve the communities.<sup>13</sup> And where there are local tribal or state/municipal authorities, the church should use every opportunity to cooperate and support such authority in matters that are fair and just so as to benefit the people of the area.

### ***The regional church***

The regional church within the rich diversity of Christian denominations has a focus on assisting one another as the need arises. The book of Acts tells us that when the Jerusalem church was in trouble due to hunger and drought, the regional churches were called upon to send assistance according to their ability. The power of a regional church lies in its ability to structure socio-economic care on a firmer institutional basis than is possible by a local congregation. When individual churches contribute financial and human resources to the regional church, the means available are much greater. Examples of regional churches' actions are church schools, clinics, hospitals, orphanages, social workers, and emergency assistance abilities.

The power of joint action is one reason why even local churches without a specific denominational affiliation should open their doors and resources to cooperate with other Christian churches. The body of Christ acting in unity is a powerful witness to the love of God and a practical demonstration of that love. The idea of a church “going it alone” is not in line with the image of the church as the one body of Christ.

### ***The global church***

The global church in the widest ecumenical sense of the word has at least two callings with regards to the economy. The first is to participate in shaping economic policies by providing

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of small but effective local interventions to fight poverty and under-development in areas like education and health-care emerge from the work of the 2019 Nobel Prize-winners for Economics, Drs Kremer, Duflo and Banerjee. Churches could imitate their small-scale experiments and make a noticeable difference at a local level.

expert advice from a Christian perspective to international bodies like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Churches are the widest spread of all institutions and understand regional and local conditions. They can therefore provide input on how best to assist African and other developing economies, and provide an alternative to allowing the advancement of global financial interest as to be the sole criterion for interventions.

The second is to be an informed and responsible prophetic voice about global economic matters. As was said above: economics needs the constant ethical reminders provided by theology, which draws its guidelines for a good economy from Scripture. Recent examples of this happening are the Protestant churches in Germany's stance on refugees and on the 2008 banking crisis, as well as the Catholic voice on climate change in *Laudato si* (2015) by Pope Francis.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

The horizon of the church's work and its inspiration is the coming of God's kingdom. The church's resilience in its determination to care and, despite all odds, take a stand against exploitative economic powers stems not from our own commitment but from our reliance on God's promise that his kingdom is coming and that the new earth is a gift to us. There will be a time when all tears are wiped away and the lion and the lamb lie together in the peaceable kingdom of God. This future vision is not a way to escape economic realities, but encourages us to confront those realities in the power of God's transformative Spirit.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the relation between theology and economics important for the public witness of the church?
2. What does economics contribute to the task of public theology?
3. What do you consider to be the most urgent economic challenges in your area, and what potential for economic growth is there in your area?

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<sup>14</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

5. What are the basic biblical requirements for a fair and good economic life, and what can you do to encourage these in your community?.
6. What is your local church doing to bear witness to the love of God in economic terms? What more could it be doing?

## Further Reading

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