Recent Economic Positions of the Protestant Churches

What the major Protestant denominations are saying about economics is important. What the world knows about the positions of Christians on economic issues is likely to come from the statements of these church bodies. As much as we might wish otherwise, it is much less likely to come directly from us as Christian economists.

This review article expands and updates a similar piece published in the Fall 1984 issue of the ACE Bulletin.¹ The statements used then had been collected primarily by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research for a July 1981 meeting on “Recent Church Teachings on the Economy.” This time simply collecting the relevant documents has been daunting. Writing to the correct person has often proved crucial. For example, in 1989 the New York office of the World Council of Churches sent a publications catalog, which did not include anything from individual Protestant denominations;² in 1990 the World Council of Churches office in Geneva said that they had so many relevant documents that I should come to Geneva to consult their files.³

In 1989 and again in 1993 letters were sent to all North American Protestant denominations with memberships of one million or more requesting official church pronouncements on economics or study documents leading to such position statements.⁴ Denominations with extensive paid headquarters staffs are more heavily represented among the statements received. Some denominations may not be represented in this review because they have no formal position statements on economic issues. Furthermore, the amount of time spent reviewing such documents could not equal the “over six months” that a World Council of Churches intern was reported to have spent doing a similar task for them.⁵ While this review is more comprehensive than the last one, the results are probably still incomplete.

Author
Lee E. Erickson is Professor of Economics at Taylor University (IN).
World Council of Churches

Of course, the World Council of Churches (WCC) is not a Protestant denomination. Neither is it strictly Protestant in representation; Orthodox churches have been active members since its founding. Furthermore, the role of the WCC Conferences is “to speak to the Churches because, in the structure of the WCC, they can not speak for the Churches.” However, in speaking to the churches the WCC exerts substantial influence on the positions taken by the various member churches. Indeed, the causation seems to run primarily from WCC positions to individual church positions rather than the other way around.

So this review of economic positions of Protestant churches starts with the World Council of Churches. A good summary of the work of the WCC on economic issues is contained in a 1987 article in *Transformation* by Rob van Drimmelen, Secretary for Socio-Economic Issues of the WCC. The following paragraphs rely heavily on this article.

The story starts with the Anglican Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship in 1924 and the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work in 1925. These Conferences encouraged Christians to replace the profit motive with a service motive, argued that unemployment is morally unacceptable, and claimed that a Christian social order requires a just (read more equal) division of income. The World Conference on Church, Community and State in Oxford in 1937 extended this thinking toward government action. According to the Conference Report charity should not be allowed to be a “substitute for justice.” Justice was seen as requiring changes in institutional arrangements.

The first WCC Assembly in 1948 recognized that neither laissez-faire capitalism nor communism is perfect. Communism was praised for emphasizing justice and capitalism was praised for stressing freedom. Christians were urged to seek an economic system that combines justice and freedom. Concern for economic development in the world’s poorer countries became a major issue after the World Conference on Church and Society in 1966. This lead to the Fourth WCC Assembly in 1968 where “paternalistic programs of charity” by the churches in richer countries were criticized. In their view “the amount received as aid is often neutralized by inequitable patterns of trade, excessive returns on private investment and the burdens of repayment.”

International justice was seen as requiring changes in international economic institutions and relationships. Racism was linked with political and economic exploitation.

The Fifth WCC Assembly in 1975 escalated the call for justice by espousing economic rights “including the right to work, to adequate food, to guaranteed health care, to decent housing, and to education for the full development of the human potential.” The basic goal was that “nobody should increase his affluence until everybody has his essentials.” A “just, participatory and sustainable society” was identified as a major program emphasis by the WCC Central Committee in 1976. This language was adopted by the Sixth WCC Assembly in 1983 as the goal of a “new economic paradigm.” The Sixth WCC Assembly called for a “participatory society which will be both ecologically responsible and economically just.”

The next step was linking peace and justice in the declaration that “peace is not just the absence of war.... The ecumenical approach to peace and justice is based on the belief that without justice for all everywhere, we shall never have peace anywhere.” The World Convocation of the WCC in 1990 developed the language further by its title “justice, peace and the integrity of creation.” This language was officially adopted at the WCC Seventh Assembly in 1991. The 1990 Convocation called on rich economies to “accept a limit to growth so that resources can be made available for production aimed at fulfilling the basic needs of all.” They favored “international trade policies based on just reward for labour and a just price for all.
In the WCC signposts, world government rather than the charity of individual Christians has been increasingly emphasized.

commodities.” They supported “Year of Jubilee” initiatives calling for cancellation of third world debts, and opposed “all conditions on debt cancellation initiated by outsiders (read non-debtors).”

Future policies of the WCC and their member churches will be influenced by the 1992 WCC study document Christian Faith and the World Economy Today. This document established four “signposts” to use in judging economic policies and systems. The first of these signposts was “the essential goodness of the created order, and the responsibility for it entrusted to humanity.” Their explication of this started with God’s statement before the Fall that: His creation was good. It then claimed that the creation “is basically right and good.”

This shift of verb tense from Scripture to the WCC position may seem insignificant, but actually it represents a serious theological error. It would be more correct to say that the present creation is as fallen as humans are due to the same original sin. People were created in God’s image and were part of the creation God said was good, but we all need to become “a new creation” in Christ. Similarly the rest of creation needs to be “liberated from its bondage to decay.” Neither people nor other living things are “basically right and good” in this present fallen world.

The second 1992 WCC signpost was “the innate value and freedom of each human being and of all humanity.” This was extended to mean that local (read poor) people should make decisions about economic development even if it means making “mistakes” in the eyes of those who presently control or own the resources used. Without this kind of “participation” the WCC claimed that there would not be “genuinely ‘democratic’ systems.”

Starting with the level ground at the foot of the Cross, the WCC used their third 1992 signpost as a platform for promoting a world government. “In Christ there is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female...: God’s concern is with all humankind, breaking through whatever barriers we build between us.” To the WCC this meant that “ways must be found...to begin) some form of international taxation for the good of all.” Also, a proposal that “the Economic and Social Council of the UN should be given powers of initiative and intervention in economic matters comparable to those of the Security Council in matters affecting world peace” was cited as an example of the type of reforms in the international monetary system that should be considered.

The fourth 1992 WCC signpost reaffirmed the WCC commitment to “justice” (read redistribution). “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to walk humbly with your God?” The overarching standard for interhuman relationships and behavior is God’s justice, to be discovered through a preferential option for the poor.” For the WCC implementation of this began with government action rather than individual charity. The WCC saw government action as being required because, for example, “poverty is both a cause and a consequence of ecological deterioration.” And the WCC has increasingly emphasized international aspects of both poverty and environmental problems, so they saw some worldwide authority, such as the UN, as being needed. They wanted such a body to do a “world poverty audit” whereby any decision by governments and transnational corporations would be required to delineate the consequences of their actions on the “poorest 50% of the populations involved.”

These 1992 WCC signposts further encouraged the role of government as a “change agent” for worldwide redistribution. World government rather than the charity of individual Christians has been increasingly emphasized. Social action has replaced individual evangelism as the method of causing God’s Kingdom to come on earth. If history is a guide to the future, we should expect that these 1992 signposts will be adopted by future WCC Assemblies and by the leading liberal Protestant denominations.

The remainder of this review summa-
rizes the statements by various Protestant denominations in alphabetical order.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

There are no “official positions” of this denomination; resolutions adopted at the General Assemblies are considered the “sense of those attending the Assembly.” Furthermore, there have been very few of these resolutions on economic issues since 1968 when the denomination was restructured.35 The most significant one is a 1988 study document on “Economic Systems—Their Impact on the Third World.”36 Here they affirmed the position of the Sixth WCC Assembly in 1983 that “...without justice for all everywhere we shall never have peace anywhere.”37 “Economic rights—freedom from hunger, from poverty, from lack of medical care, from homelessness, from joblessness” were asserted as a matter of “doing justice” as demanded by Scripture.38 And there was the associated alignment with the “social gospel” found in the denomination’s founding father Alexander Campbell.39 However, there was the explicit recognition that all economic systems are flawed due to human sin. “Christians will be critical of all economic systems and will join with others to take responsibility for their improvement.”40 Following the lead of the WCC they asserted that “justice is more basic than any theory of economic relations.”41

The Episcopal Church

Resolutions establishing policy directions for this denomination are adopted at their General Convention every three years. In the last four General Conventions (1982-1991) several short resolutions dealing with economic issues have been adopted. The Executive Council, acting on behalf of the Episcopal Church between General Conventions, also adopts policy resolutions.42

In 1982 and 1985 there were resolutions advocating that Federal government spending to help the poor in specific ways be increased and military spending be reduced. In 1988 a “Ministry of Community Development and Economic Justice” was established to finance “community-controlled economic development programs...including housing cooperatives, worker-owned businesses and community development credit unions.” They also asserted that the “...relief of human suffering cannot be left to the private and voluntary sector or to existing social policies...” Changes in Federal welfare policy were urged in 1991. While high implicit marginal tax rates were not discussed by name, there was concern that removing welfare benefits too fast as recipients begin to earn income tends to discourage people from working their way out of poverty. Action by both the Federal government and the Episcopal Church itself to develop more “affordable housing for those of low- and moderate-income” were encouraged.

Also in 1991 the National Council of Churches policy of “Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value” was affirmed. The concern was that “women and racial persons” work in “many historically undervalued job categories.” For example, nursing assistants’ work was asserted to be of equal value with plumbers’ even if labor markets do not result in equal pay; how one could demonstrate this was not discussed.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

This denomination was formed in 1988 by a merger between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America. A social statement on “Inequality and the Search for Justice” was being developed by the staff of this new denomination in 1990.43 Two statements on economic issues were adopted by each of the parent denominations before the merger.

The American Lutheran Church adopted a 1978 statement on “Christian Social Responsibility” which affirmed the Christians’ role to be salt and light in a fallen world.44 This general goal of helping our neighbors was developed further in a study paper on “Community Economic

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been the most active in producing lengthy committee reports and adopting resolutions advocating government action to solve economic problems.
Development as Mission.\textsuperscript{45} It urged support for "community economic development in the impoverished areas of the United States,"\textsuperscript{46} but appropriate sources of this support were not specified. This paper cited a 1976 American Lutheran Church "Manifesto" calling for Christians to be "our Lord's advocates for the poor and oppressed."\textsuperscript{47} The thrust of these statements was to promote private individual and Church efforts to help the poor.

In 1966 the Lutheran Church in America adopted a statement on "Poverty."\textsuperscript{48} In contrast to the American Lutheran Church emphasis on Church responsibility to help the poor, the Lutheran Church in America said that "...the establishment of social justice is primarily the responsibility of governing authority..."\textsuperscript{49} And justice was seen as requiring "reduction of the disparity between rich and poor nations."\textsuperscript{50}

The Lutheran Church in America's 1980 statement on Economic Justice: Stewardship of Creation in Human Community is the most significant piece by either parent denomination of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.\textsuperscript{51} They saw justice as "distributive love."\textsuperscript{52} They thought that "neither personal nor corporate benevolence can accomplish what a society is required to do for its members under justice."\textsuperscript{53} Therefore they concluded that "in a sinful world God intends the institutions of government to be the means of enforcing the claims of economic justice."\textsuperscript{54} While "economic justice" as used here meant equity or fairness, it did "not mean economic equality."\textsuperscript{55} However, they wanted charity to carry redistribution beyond the government enforced extent that "justice demanded."\textsuperscript{56}

**Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**

Several short resolutions on economic issues were adopted by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the 1981-1992 period. They focused on the role of the Church in alleviating human suffering as manifest in issues such as world hunger, fair housing, the homeless, refugees, widows and poverty. Church members, congregations and various church boards were encouraged to be compassionate in assisting those in need. However, no specific role for governments in solving these problems was advocated.\textsuperscript{57}

**Presbyterian Church (USA)**

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been especially active in writing reports and adopting resolutions on economic issues. In the fall of 1993 they expected to complete a report on "Sustainable Development, Reformed Faith and U.S. International Economic Policy" in the spring of 1995.\textsuperscript{58} Their Social Policy Compilation organizes by topic the resolutions adopted during the 1946-91 period; Chapter 7 on economic issues runs more than thirty pages.

The Presbyterian Church has been calling for public policies to deal with economic issues for at least 80 years. In 1912 they called for "an end to child labor, a minimum wage, and a shorter working day."\textsuperscript{59} In 1968, 1972 and 1977 the General Assemblies called on governments to become "the employer of last resort."\textsuperscript{60} In 1976 and 1977 they advocated "the right of all legal resident Americans able, willing, and seeking to work, to opportunities for useful and paid employment at fair wages."\textsuperscript{61} Also in 1976 they recommended "policies that would promote full employment, i.e., reduce unemployment below 3 percent."\textsuperscript{62} In 1968, 1971 and 1977 a national guaranteed minimum income was advocated.\textsuperscript{63} "Inequitable (i.e. regressive)" tax systems were criticized in 1973 and reducing the progressivity of the tax system was opposed in 1986.\textsuperscript{64}

The Presbyterians have favored government programs on housing and urban renewal not only to help the poor but because "for the church, housing is not only a matter of shelter, but also of community..."\textsuperscript{65} They have also advocated consumer "boycotts to address specific social problems." Targets have included apartheid in South Africa, labor practices of the J.P. Stevens Company and states which had not ratified the "Equal Rights Amendment."\textsuperscript{66}
Policies of the U.S. government aimed at reducing world-wide poverty and creating a “just economic order” have also been advocated by the Presbyterians. In 1977 they wanted the U.S. government to “work toward stabilizing world commodities prices at just levels.”67 Also in 1977 they called for U.S. foreign aid to be increased to 1.0% of its GNP.68 In 1980 the Presbyterians sought a “reordering of the international economic system.”69

In addition to the policy resolutions summarized above, in the last decade committees of the Presbyterian Church (USA) have produced at least three major reports on economic issues totaling nearly 200 pages.70 Space permits only an overview of these extensive efforts. Christian Faith and Economic Justice (1984) describes three kinds of justice: retributive justice (injury for injury), distributive justice (paying people what is owed to them) and restorative justice (special concern for those in need).71 The last of these was emphasized. They argued that “equal love demands unequal concern according to unequal need.”72 Capitalism and socialism were compared on criteria including liberty, equality, sustainability, community and concern for the poor; no conclusions were drawn as to which system is better.73 They saw God wanting Christians to “do justice” by seeking “just economic arrangements.” None of the existing economic systems were seen as being optimal, but Christians were encouraged to work toward (an unspecified) one that is.74 Christian Faith and Economic Justice was seen as providing “the biblical mandate for economic justice.”75

Much of Toward a Just, Caring, and Dynamic Political Economy (1985) rehearsed the facts and options for lay readers, but in doing this the committee claimed as fact some things that were untrue. The most glaring example was the repeated assertion that “Social Security was never designed as an insurance policy...(in which) one will get back what she or he pays in.”76 While it does not, has not and probably will never function in this way, the founders of the system most certainly did intend for it to do so. It is a rewriting of history to claim otherwise. The committee’s preferred approach to reducing the Federal budget deficit involves raising taxes and reducing military spending.77 In arguing that equity requires a progressive tax structure, the committee claims that “progressive taxation is predicated on the notion that those who benefit most...(that is those with higher incomes)...should pay proportionately more...”78 This confuses the ability to pay and benefit principles of taxation. The alternative tax system the committee favored was a consumption tax with a progressive rate structure.79

Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice (1990) began in 1987 partly as a response to a “communication on the environment from the World Council of Churches” with the formation of the Eco-Justice Working Group “by the Presbyterian delegation to the National Council of Churches.”80 (The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group had been formed in 1985.)81 However, Presbyterian concern about the environment goes back at least to the 1971 United Presbyterian Church’s adoption of a statement on “Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal.”82 Another thread of the thinking reflected here came from the earlier concerns about justice and public policies to help the poor.

Justice was defined in Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice as “eco-justice”83 or “ecological health and wholeness together with social and economic justice.”84 Four things were deemed necessary for eco-justice: sustainability, participation, sufficiency and community. Sustainability was defined as “...the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together...” which was taken to mean “simply the capacity to continue indefinitely.”85 There was no attempt to reconcile this “continuing forever” with the inevitable increase in entropy known as the second law of thermodynamics, but a shift from depletable to renewable resources was encouraged.86 Participation meant that “there would be some kind of
Evangelism has been twisted to mean preaching eco-justice rather than saving souls.

useful, fulfilling work” for everyone. Sufficiency meant “enough for a reasonably secure and fulfilling life.” Everyone everywhere on earth was to have this. Toward a Just, Caring and Dynamic Political Economy (1985) said that “economic justice is progrowth.” But in Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice (1990) the emphasis was on redistribution and “appropriate lifestyle changes.” Finally, the 1990 committee report said that the Presbyterian Church should “lead in developing international ecumenical partnerships on issues of environmental stewardship... (including the World Council of Churches’) focus on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.”

Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice contains hints of pantheism and New Age thinking that are common in the secular environmental movement. First, following a quote of 1 Peter 4:10 the document asserts that “today, all are stewards with gifts to employ for creation’s sake.” It is pantheism to do “for creation’s sake” the same things that we should do for the Creator God’s sake. Secondly, in adopting this report the General Assembly adopted the view that “evangelism is inseparably connected to social responsibility and justice.” The source for this thinking was page 21 of “The Underlying Principles of New Age Dawning Evangelism Emphasis” which was cited as “New Day Dawning” in the lengthy resolution adopted by the General Assembly. The taskforce report that gave this citation explicitly recognized that “by this definition, eco-justice is part of evangelism...working to save our rich natural resources and securing a more just distribution of those resources is a work of evangelism as defined in the New Age Dawning materials.” Evangelism has been twisted to mean preaching eco-justice rather than saving souls.

Southern Baptist Convention

Official position statements of the Southern Baptists are in the form of resolutions adopted at their annual meetings. According to information received from the Convention in 1993, there have been no such resolutions on economic issues in the previous decade; there were five short resolutions between 1972 and 1982. In general these resolutions reflected the conservative political view that the role of government should be limited. Also the Southern Baptists’ positions do not seem to be based in lengthy study papers done by paid professional staffs as has been true especially for the Presbyterians and the WCC.

In 1972 concern for the poor led to support for “job training for those able to work” and other government programs to assist those who are unable to work. In 1978 the Southern Baptists called on the Congress and the President to “bring spending into a responsible and reasonable relationship to tax revenues.” Also in 1978 they opposed a tuition tax credit for private schools because of a concern that this would violate the First Amendment by encouraging elite private schools which “exist to serve the religious mission of the sponsoring churches,” and would hurt the public schools.

Their most significant resolution expressed concern for the impact of double digit inflation on the poor in 1979. In this resolution the Southern Baptists said “among the underlying causes of inflation are human greed and irresponsible spending.” Private sector greed was probably intended because the resolution asks “both business and labor to lower their demands for unreasonable price and wage increases.” Southern Baptist churches were encouraged “to give renewed emphasis to Christian stewardship as a powerful anti-inflationary force in the world.” Specifically, they resolve to “shun a life style of conspicuous consumption...” Nowhere was there a call for contractionary fiscal or monetary policies—or indeed any action—by the government. Inflation was seen as a private sector problem demanding private and individual solutions. How very different from the Presbyterian and WCC positions.

The United Church of Canada

A major economic statement on The
Church and the Economic Crisis was adopted in 1984. This was the “latest in an historic series of initiatives... (on topics such as)... full participation and equality of women, public health care, the extension of social services and the restructuring of our economy according to principles derived from our faith... (which) goes back beyond the formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925.” The focus of this 1984 statement was on the domestic situation in Canada; there may be other policy statements on issues of global economic justice and environmental stewardship.

In The Church and the Economic Crisis the United Church of Canada affirmed the “priority of justice, participation and sustainability as proclaimed by the World Council of Churches.” They reaffirmed the position taken in a “Report on the Environment of the 27th General Council (in 1978) that ‘in order to love each other, we have to love the garden; in order to love the garden, we have to love each other.’” They proclaimed that “the needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich...” They expressed support for a “guaranteed adequate annual income for Canadians” and for “a national programme for full employment in Canada” through specific public policies. The United Church of Canada advocated higher income tax rates for those with high income and “placing a greater share of the tax load on corporations.” They called for the “reduction of interest rates to levels close to the rate of inflation.” This implied—but did not specify—a real rate of interest near zero. The United Church of Canada also supported policies which “provide equal compensation for work of equal value” and which result in “greater equality and increased security of income for the poor.” They resisted plant closings by putting “the needs for employment... and sustainability of communities ahead of the free movement of capital.”

In 1993 a Task Group was working “to create an alternative vision of economic justice based on a theology of economic sustainability that gives priority to the poor and marginalized.” This work was expected to “continue at least until the spring of 1994.”

The United Church of Christ

The 1989 pronouncement called for an “economic bill of rights” to include: “A guaranteed national minimum income level; adequate food, clothing, and shelter; a national health care program available to all persons; ...(and) a right to employment consistent with each person’s potential.” While a just economic system was their goal “all current economic systems” were seen as being “unjust.” Among the actions urged were “socially responsible investment” of funds and a reorienting of the “interpretation, promotion, funding patterns, and priorities of mission programs to reflect the United Church of Christ’s commitment to economic justice.”

The United Methodist Church
Official positions of the United Methodist Church are adopted by its General Conference, which meets every four years. In 1988 and 1992 there were resolutions on economic issues adopted by the General Conference on topics such as: “Economic Justice,” “World Hunger,” the “Global Debt Crisis,” “Pay Equity in the U.S.A.” and “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.” These position statements were written by the professional staffs of denominational committees such as the General Board of Global Ministries and the General Board on Church and Society. The 1988 resolutions on “World Hunger” and the “Global Debt Crisis” blame many of the problems of the poor in third world countries on “the legacy of colonial-
Most of the economic position statements of the Protestant denominations have been developed by the full-time headquarters staffs of the more politically and theologically liberal denominations.

example of “current wage discrepancies (that) can hardly be attributed to impartial market forces...the fact that secretaries, who are in short supply, are paid less than truck drivers, who are in considerable surplus.” No evidence of such shortages and surpluses was presented.

The “Economic Justice” resolution of 1988 displayed a view of human nature that is unscriptural by blaming the attitude that “more is better” on “sophisticated advertising.” We should “be content whatever the circumstances,” but greed is inherent in the hearts of fallen people and is only encouraged by advertising.

The 1992 resolution on “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” repeated and affirmed the goals established by the World Council of Churches at their Seventh Assembly in 1991. In this resolution the United Methodists repeated the ten affirmations and four covenant statements endorsed at the World Council of Churches Convocation in 1990. One of these covenant statements advocated “a just economic order and liberation from the bondage of foreign debt.”

Conclusions
Most of the economic position statements of the Protestant denominations have been developed by the full-time headquarters staffs of the more politically and theologically liberal denominations. Whether these staffs included professional economists is not generally known, but such influence is not usually evident. These documents do show substantial influence from documents prepared by the WCC staffs and adopted at the WCC Assemblies.

The dominant economic issue addressed by such statements in the twentieth century has been poverty—both domestic and international. In recent years care for the creation has been linked with the more traditional concern about the poor and oppressed. Historically the churches had stressed the role of Christians individually and as churches to alleviate human suffering. Solutions to such problems suggested by the WCC and
most North American mainline Protestant denominations increasingly emphasize action by national or international governments rather than action by churches or individual Christians.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been the most active in producing lengthy committee reports and adopting resolutions advocating government action to solve economic problems. Those denominations which still emphasize individual and church approaches to helping the poor have written much less about their views. Those resolutions on economic issues that were adopted by such churches have not been developed by large professional staffs. The Missouri Synod Lutherans and the Southern Baptists are examples of this more traditional approach.

The World Council of Churches, though not a Protestant denomination, has been an influential advocate of government action to solve economic problems. Concerns about world-wide problems of poverty and the environment have led the World Council of Churches staff to advocate international governmental action. Recent history suggests that this stress on supra-national government action will be adopted next by a World Council of Churches Assembly and then by the more liberal mainline denominations. Such views dominate the news and reviews such as this. This is at least partly because other Protestant denominations have not devoted as much money paying headquarter staffs to prepare similar documents with more traditional views of individual and church responsibilities to help the poor.

What is the world hearing the churches say these days? What the world is hearing, if they are listening at all, is that the churches think that secular governments should solve the most pressing economic problem of our day: poverty. That is, the churches think that poverty is not a problem that the churches can or should address, except to urge action by others. The Church is on the verge of becoming irrelevant concerning the poverty problem in much the same way that the Church abdicated responsibility to secular governments concerning the charging of interest on loans some centuries ago. In the thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas argued that everyone is our neighbor and brother, so no one should charge interest to anyone. The Council of Vienne (1311-1312) decreed that those who did not think that taking usury on loans was sinful were heretics. In sixteenth century England usury was still seen as prohibited by God, and the English Parliament debated the interpretation of Scripture.

But by the seventeenth century "references to 'the great displeasure of God' ...(were) replaced (in the statutes) by considerations as to 'the great abatement in the value of land and merchandise."

The charging of interest, which had for centuries been the economic issue of most concern to the Church, was no longer a moral question. If the poverty issue in its entirety is no longer a moral issue for the individual Christian and for the Church, the Church may become economically irrelevant in North American society. Surely the Church does not intend this inevitable consequence of the current trends.

ENDNOTES

3 Letter from Rob van Drimmelen, Secretary for Socio-Economic Issues, Commission on the Churches’ Participation in Development, Programme Unit on Justice and Service, World Council of Churches, Geneva, May 1, 1990.
4 The following denominations were contacted: African Methodist Episcopal Church; African Methodist.
Episcopal Zion Church; American Baptist Churches in the USA; Assemblies of God; Baptist Bible Fellowship International; Disciples of Christ; The Church of God in Christ; Episcopal Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; National Baptist Convention of America; National Baptist Convention, USA; Presbyterian Church (USA); Southern Baptist Convention; the United Methodist Church; Progressive National Baptist Convention; the United Church of Canada; United Church of Christ.

5 van Drimmelen letter, op. cit.
6 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 66.
13 Ibid., p. 72.
15 Ibid., p. 73.
19 The United Methodist Church, Book of Resolutions, 1992, p. 591.
21 Ibid., p. 20.
22 WCC (1992), Christian Faith and the World Economy Today, WCC Publications, Geneva. This is a “study document,” 59 pages in length including study questions and bibliography.
23 Ibid., p. 13.
24 Ibid., p. 13, emphasis added.
26 2 Corinthians 5:17.
27 Romans 8:21 (NIV).
29 Ibid., p. 33.
30 Ibid., p. 37.
31 Ibid., p. 38.
32 Ibid., p. 39.
33 Ibid., p. 39.
34 Ibid., p. 48.
35 Letter from David I. McWhirter, Director of Library and Archives, Disciples of Christ Historical Society, August 3, 1993.
37 Ibid., p. 285.
38 Ibid., p. 285.
39 Ibid., p. 288; see also sources cited there: Journey in Faith by William E.
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The Development of Social Ideas Among
the Disciples of Christ by James A.
Crain.

40 Ibid., p. 289.
41 Ibid., p. 301.
42 Letter from Scotland Davis, Coordin-
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Second Avenue, New York. Copies of
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letter, but further documentation was
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43 Letter from Karen Bloomquist,
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of Church in Society, The American
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47 Ibid., p. 2.
48 “Poverty,” a social statement of The
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49 Ibid., p. 2.
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51 Economic Justice: Stewardship of
Creation in Human Community, a
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Church in America, adopted by the
Tenth Biennial Convention, Seattle,
Washington, June 24-July 2, 1980,
Division for Mission in North
America, Lutheran Church in
America, 1980, 8 pages.

52 Ibid., p. 3.
53 Ibid., p. 4.
54 Ibid., p. 5.
55 Ibid., p. 6.
56 Ibid., p. 4.
57 1981 Convention Proceedings, pp. 203-
211-213; 1992 Convention Proceedings,
pp. 172-173.
58 Letter from Peter A. Sulyok, Associ-
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terian Church (USA), June 1985, p. 5.
60 Social Policy Compilation, Presbyterian
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