



# SCUPE

SEMINARY CONSORTIUM FOR URBAN PASTORAL EDUCATION

## Together Building a Just Economy: A Manifesto for People of Faith

Affirmed at the Congress on Urban Ministry  
Chicago, Illinois, June 23-26, 2014

### **Preamble**

*The question of widening wealth disparities has recently been the subject of much public discourse, scholarly inquiry, and ecclesial statements. SCUPE, because of its commitment to urban contextual theology, finds the question highly relevant to its mission and seeks to address it through its seventeenth Congress on Urban Ministry.*

*Convinced that its best contribution to this question is from a theological lens, and that societies arrange their political and economic systems based on their faith and values, SCUPE convened a consultation of eight theologians to address this question. Their task was to articulate a sound theological basis for economic justice that re-roots us, the participants in the Congress, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were also charged to peel away any partisan political and economic biases that may cloud our commitment to the Gospel, and to discern a path through the tensions that the subject evokes. The document was then vetted through several constituencies of churches, community organizations and business groups before being brought to this Congress on Urban Ministry for affirmation, continuing discussion and action.*

*Aware that this is a specifically Christian document prepared by a Christian organization, and that effective engagement in such a public discussion requires many religious partners, SCUPE encourages its partner institutions to offer similar contributions from the perspective of their own religious traditions.*

*This manifesto seeks to contribute to the on-going public discussion of an extremely complex question. We invite all people of goodwill to join in the struggle for economic justice and hope that this document will be a useful tool for the purposes of preaching, teaching and organizing in churches and community organizations towards Together Building a Just Economy.*

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Pursuing the vocation to build a just economy together, SCUPE's seventeenth Congress on Urban Ministry meeting in Chicago, Illinois, June 23-26, 2014,

**Affirms** that all people are created in the divine image and are equally valued in God's sight;<sup>1</sup> that as the Psalmist has declared, the earth and all its fullness belongs to God,<sup>2</sup> and therefore nothing that we have is ours to "own" but to be used in love and obedience to God's will; that just as Jesus Christ came to give us life in all its abundance,<sup>3</sup> God wishes all to live to their full potential; and that following Jesus Christ in discipleship requires living out for our time what it means to proclaim "good news to the poor."<sup>4</sup> The Congress further affirms that the churches' commitment to the practice of wealth held in common, the commonwealth,<sup>5</sup> has provided an historic organizing principle for a just economy.

**Recognizes** the contribution of churches, and other religious and community institutions to foster social welfare and human well-being, to catalyze movements of justice, freedom and peace, including movements towards civil and human rights; and their potential to engage in the present struggle for economic justice.

**Affirms** the methodological principle of urban contextual theology in which theological reflection and missiological action begins by listening to those in the urban context, especially the stories of struggle and hope, wisdom and faith of those who are poor and marginalized.

**Recognizes** that while wealth disparity has been an ever present reality in human society, today's disparities demonstrate the deep injustice and unsustainability of the present economic system. Today, globally just 67 people own as much as half of the world's population (3.5 billion people),<sup>6</sup> while in the United States the wealthiest 1% owns 40% of the nation's wealth and the bottom 80% own 7%.<sup>7</sup> Many religious leaders including Pope Francis,<sup>8</sup> ecclesial bodies such as the World Council of Churches,<sup>9</sup> and the Cape Town Commitment of the Lausanne Movement;<sup>10</sup> scholars including theologians,<sup>11</sup> social scientists<sup>12</sup> and economists;<sup>13</sup> global organizations such as Oxfam<sup>14</sup> and think-tanks such as the Brookings Institution;<sup>15</sup> and politicians including President Obama<sup>16</sup> have made statements critical of the present disparity and the unjust state of the economy.

**Recognizes** that while the present economic system that produces such wealth disparities exacerbates poverty globally, it disproportionately affects cities. Today more than half the world's population lives in cities and will grow to two-thirds by 2030. Also, today, one-third of the world's population lives in slums or other urban ghettos, a number that is projected to grow faster than population growth.<sup>17</sup> Women and people of color will suffer disproportionately from this ever-widening wealth disparity.<sup>18</sup>

**Acknowledges** that this disparity is based on structural inequalities inherent in the United States' political and economic systems, creates in metropolitan areas communities of concentrated poverty and communities of concentrated wealth, and deprives poor communities of decent housing, living-wage jobs, access to healthy food, public education, health care and safety. It also creates a racially-biased system of mass incarceration that disproportionately imprisons African American young people, and deports large numbers of undocumented persons -- mostly of Latin American origin -- who have come to the US seeking economic opportunity, thus breaking up their families.

**Deplores** the perversion of democracy that accompanies this level of wealth inequality<sup>19</sup> which allows the injection of vast amounts of anonymous private and corporate money into local, state and national election campaigns, and the dismantling of voting rights legislations that specially disadvantage those who are poor, elderly, disabled, and those who are African-Americans, Latino/as and other minorities.

Therefore, the 2014 Congress on Urban Ministry

**Acknowledges** that we live in the midst of tensions inherent in our need to earn and invest for our own well-being, and the requirement to live in accordance with Jesus Christ's injunction that we cannot serve God and wealth;<sup>20</sup> the biblical instruction that our economic systems should pursue strategies of just distribution,<sup>21</sup> and the capitalist economic system in which we live which encourages accumulation; and the legitimation that some theological traditions have provided to accumulated wealth as being a blessing from God, and the consequent delegitimation of those who are poor as having been deprived of such divine blessing.<sup>22</sup>

**Confesses** that we as religious people and institutions have too often been complicit in the systems that perpetuate economic injustice that hurt and violate ourselves and our neighbors; that the greed about which Jesus warned us too often takes primacy in our lives over our allegiance to God, muting our witness against the unjust economic systems; that we have been silent, fearful of building powerful movements that speak truth to, and challenge unjust political and economic institutions and act to dismantle systems of injustice.

**Repents** and in the sense of *metanoia* turns away from systems that produce such vast economic injustices towards God who calls us to justice and freedom, acknowledging the imperative to strive in our individual and public lives to work towards a just economy as a calling for Christian witness.

**Stands** in solidarity with communities of resistance located at margins of society, recognizing that God comes to us in the poverty of a Bethlehem manger and the powerlessness of a Golgotha cross located outside the city walls with an imperative for us joining God there.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the 2014 Congress on Urban Ministry commits to:

**Network** with each other and with churches, religious communities, community organizations, and political and business institutions to build powerful coalitions and alliances towards building a just economy

**Strategize** with sharp political analysis ways to enact equitable tax structures and moral budgets whose aim is to reduce the disparity between the rich and the poor; to strengthen democracy so the voices of "we the people" are not manipulated by the economic and political oligarchies; to ensure that vibrant communities, where decent housing, living wage jobs, access to healthy food, education, health care and safety are available to all, especially those who are most vulnerable

**Speak forthrightly** a message of hope with a new moral vocabulary and grammar for public discourse on restorative justice that is generative of a new way of thinking, doing and being.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26.

<sup>2</sup> Psalms 24:1.

<sup>3</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 4:18.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:44, 4:32-35. "Commonwealth" was a key principle of the founding of the United States of America, thus three out of the original 13 states had in their name the word Commonwealth (viz., Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Virginia and later Kentucky by 1792).

<sup>6</sup> [Kasia Moreno](http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinsights/2014/03/25/the-67-people-as-wealthy-as-the-worlds-poorest-3-5-billion/), "The 67 People As Wealthy As The World's Poorest 3.5 Billion" *Forbes Magazine*, March 25, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinsights/2014/03/25/the-67-people-as-wealthy-as-the-worlds-poorest-3-5-billion/>.

<sup>7</sup> Dale Archer, "Could America's Wealth Gap Lead To A Revolt?" *Forbes Magazine*, September 4, 2013. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dalearcher/2013/09/04/could-americas-wealth-gap-lead-to-a-revolt/>

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<sup>8</sup> Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)* of Pope Francis (November 24, 2013) [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

<sup>9</sup> Two documents from the World Council of Churches informs the Congress declaration

a. *International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life* (Sao Paulo, October 2012) <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/finance-speculation-debt/sao-paulo-statement-international-financial-transformation-for-the-economy-of-life>.

b. *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (November 2013). <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>.

“Mission from the margins seeks to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. . . . People on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. People on the margins, living in vulnerable positions, often know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and can best discern the urgency of their struggles; people in positions of privilege have much to learn from the daily struggles of people living in marginal conditions.”

<sup>10</sup> The Cape Town Commitment (October 2010) of the Lausanne Movement.

<http://www.lausanne.org/docs/CapeTownCommitment.pdf>

“Accordingly, let us. . . . [h]ave courage to declare that the world cannot address, let alone solve, the problem of poverty without also challenging excessive wealth and greed. The gospel challenges the idolatry of rampant consumerism. We are called, as those who serve God and not mammon, to recognize that greed perpetuates poverty, and to renounce it. At the same time, we rejoice that the gospel includes the rich in its call to repentance, and invites them to join the fellowship of those transformed by forgiving grace.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf: Joerg Rieger, *Theology, Religion and Class: Fresh Engagements after Long Silence* (Palgrave, Macmillan: 2013), and Ulrich Duchrow, *Transcending Greedy Money: Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations* (Palgrave, Macmillan: 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Cf: Rakesh, Kochhar, Richard Fry and Paul Taylor, *Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics*, (Pew Research Center, July 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Cf: Alan Krueger, chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, “The Rise and Consequences of Inequality in the United States” a speech to the Center for American Progress (January 12, 2012), and Thomas Picketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Belknap Press: 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Fuentes-Nieva, Ricardo and Nicholas Galasso, “Working for a Few: Political Capture and Economic Inequality” Oxfam International (January 2014) <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/working-for-the-few-economic-inequality>.

<sup>15</sup> “Faith in Inequality: Economic Justice and the Future of Religious Progressives” Brookings Institution (April 24, 2014) <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/04/24-future-of-religious-progressives#/full-event/>.

<sup>16</sup> Remarks by the President on Economic Mobility (December 4, 2013)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/04/remarks-president-economic-mobility>.

<sup>17</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Risks 2014*, (Ninth Edition), 22.

<sup>18</sup> “All Cities Are Not Created Equal” Brookings Institution (February 20, 2014)

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/02/cities-unequal-berube>.

<sup>19</sup> Supreme Court Justice Lewis Brandeis: “We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we cannot have both,” as quoted by Raymond Lonergan in Irving Dilliard, *Mr. Justice Brandeis, Great American* (1941), 42.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 6:24.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity” in *The Christian Century* (March 24, 1999) <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-01/liturgy-abundance-myth-scarcity>.

<sup>22</sup> Cf: Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Allen and Unwin: 1930); Robert Bellah, *American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (University of Chicago: 1992) and, Fredrick Herzog, *Jesus, Justice and the Reign of God* (Westminster John Knox: 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Hebrews 13:12-13.