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Neither euphoria nor defeatism: Christian ethical considerations on the new epochal changes in Latin America

Guillermo Hansen

Where are we? Farewell to romantic utopia and emergence of neo-liberal messianism

Since the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society, Latin American theological contributions at international events have been marked by strong “revolutionary” language and a moral conviction stemming from the belief that we were participating in the birth pangs of a new historic-redemptive dispensation. Relating divine epiphany to social movements gave a distinctive thrust to the theology of liberation which, in turn, guided pastoral and political concerns which were introduced at different levels to the ecumenical movement’s agenda. This was not an exclusively Christian impetus but corresponded to a local “optimistic” élan which mobilized popular organizations, parties, and intellectuals. The heavens were about to be stormed, and Latin Americans constituted the chosen vanguard.

In the late eighties and early nineties the mood in Latin America (both in secular as in ecclesiastical circles) changed significantly. Reasons for and causes of this shift abound, and interpretations differ considerably.¹ Whilst some believe the continent to be awakening from a utopian dream to face a globalized and neo-liberal nightmare, others believe that the unfulfilled utopia of the sixties must make room for a new and cool pragmatism not prone to romantic lapses; the more poetic speak of the transition from a drama, that is, the consciousness of being midwives of transcendence to the shallowness of bur-

¹ For what follows see the answers given by several dozens of Latin American social scientists to a questionnaire presented by the periodical *Nueva Sociedad* 139, 1995, pp. 60-149.

lesque mass-mediatic cacophony or nihilistic tragedy. Furthermore, there are those who have fallen prey to postmodern cynicism and for whom history has taken a wrong turn rather than evolving towards the axiom of a "great qualitative change."² However one rationalizes the impact remains the same for all those who have devoted their lives to the ideal of social justice: it is very difficult to imagine our place and role *within* a new context and new demands yet *without* the utopian horizon constituted by anachronistic or revolutionary symbols.

This shows that a profound transformation is taking place which is compared by some to a "crisis of civilization" or "cultural mutation." This mutation, of course, is not only at the level of representations, but follows the different development strategies implemented in Latin America as it attempts to adjust to the rules and demands of the market, an integral part of the globalized economy. This new economic and social scenario has been described by Xabier Gorostiaga, a Roman Catholic sociologist and theologian, as follows, "we are living a change of epoch, not merely an epoch of changes."³ In cultural terms this change of epoch is marked by perplexity, uncertainty, fragility and a search for new meanings; in political terms by the spread of democracy accompanied by a crisis regarding the role of the state and the proliferation of single issue groups; in economic terms by the Darwinian rules imposed by a globalized economy and the concentration of profit in the hands of a small, "competitive" class strategically related to international capital. A contagious euphoria surrounds the latter rather like a cloud.

Without falling into reductionism one has nonetheless to conclude that economic transformation is central to cultural and societal changes. Whilst in the past Latin American countries—children of the West—structured national, independent

² Cf. Martin Hopenhayn, *ibid.*, p. 115. See also Juan José Sebrelli, *El asedio a la modernidad: Crítica del relativismo cultural*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1991, p. 15.

³ Xabier Gorostiaga, "Entre la crisis neoliberal y la emergencia de la globalización desde abajo," *Nuevo Mundo* 50, 1995, p. 107.

identities around the liberal and modernist creed, they seem today to be unequivocally committed to letting the logic of the market define that of which social membership and standing consists. Therefore, social relationships and symbolic expressions are strongly conditioned (yet never reduced) by it.⁴

The significant changes which have characterized this new epoch in Latin America may be summarized as follows:

(a) Economic transformation: Neo-liberal adjustment⁵

During this decade most countries in the region have experienced a profound transformation at the level of economic policy and strategy as well as in their productive systems. Whilst the reasons for these changes are many they were essentially sparked off by the debt crisis and, in some cases, rampant inflation, that revealed the structural weaknesses of Latin America's economy. Moreover, one could mention the failure of different development strategies oriented toward the domestic market, and the natural fallibility of populist policies which attempted to redistribute that which it did not have or could not produce.

In the industrialized countries the new geopolitical space manifested in the socialist debacle was preceded and accompanied by the emergence of more "dynamic" sectors of capital which demanded a new political and economic profile of their respective governments. Thus the Keynesian economic paradigm (welfare state) gave way to conservative and neo-liberal models. This new geopolitical situation soon turned into a geo-economic one which pressed neo-liberal prescriptions on many Latin American countries. These formulae were dictated and

⁴ Cf. WCC, *Report of an Ecumenical Consultation on the Topic of Development*, Geneva, WCC, 1995, p. 35. This notion has been developed by Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1944, pp. 56ff; and Daniel Bell, *Las contradicciones culturales del capitalismo* Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1977, pp. 80ff.

⁵ For what follows see Xabier Gorostiaga et al., *Los cambios en el mundo*, San Salvador, Istmo Editores, 1993; Eugenio Lahera et al., "Orientaciones centrales de la propuesta de la Cepal," *Revista de la Cepal* 55, April 1995; Mario J. Yutzis, "Alternative economics: Latin America moves into the twenty-first century," *A Just Asia*, p.213ff.)

monitored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the Interamerican Bank for Development (IDB). Macroeconomic reforms sought to assure the flow of capital from South to North in the form of the payment of interests on the huge public debt.⁸

For the majority of Latin American countries this has in practice meant the reduction of social spending, increased flexibility of the labor market and regressive taxation policies resulting in the net transfer of income from the poor, and the working and middle classes to a powerful minority. Arguments used to legitimize the sustaining of these policies are the need for rapid technological change, more efficient macroeconomic management, regional economic integration, the strengthening of the productive structure for better compliance with and more effective insertion into the dynamics of world commerce.

(b) The state and the privatization of its functions

In the face of the challenges emerging from a new globalized economy and the needs of financial and/or speculative capital the limits and functions of the state are rapidly being redrawn. The government's traditional regulatory function is disappearing in the light of the forces shaping the "free" market, and its role as producer of goods and source of gainful employment has been displaced by private capital. Furthermore, traditional services which to a large extent legitimized the existence of the state (education, health care, social security, public order and security, etc.) are being transferred to private enterprises and corporations. It is true that rampant corruption, inefficient services, overexpansion and overspending of populist states have in the past created a domestic environment favorable for reforms; but what the neo-liberal model seems to be doing is putting an end to the concept of state *per se*.

⁸ We would be wrong, however, if we were to blame exclusively "external" subjects, since the consensus of the local transnationalized faction of the capitalist class and acolytes is essential for the neo-liberal project to succeed. In fact, one can certainly speak nowadays of a new, globalized, transnationalized class associated with the major corporations and financial institutions.

(c) Democracy

In spite of the state's dwindling presence there has never before been such widespread consensus concerning democracy in Latin America. After decades of dictatorship and authoritarian governments, democracy is considered to be the political order which, relatively independently of economic arrangements, the majority of Latin Americans find desirable, recommendable and worthy of implementing and fostering. Democracy distinguishes itself through its representative character, regular, democratic vote, a multi-party system and a fundamental respect for the national Constitution. Thus a democratic regime has the tools necessary for resolving conflict without recourse to political violence—a means so often resorted to in the history of the Latin American continent.

Far from being a simple tool of neo-liberal consensus,⁷ democracy is in many cases the outcome of decades of popular struggle and demand. Yet, while democratic practice and culture are becoming entrenched in many Latin American countries, an unequal access to representation, defective mechanisms of accountability, and the impending social inequality severely threaten democratic institutions and damage the tie between state and society.

(d) Exclusion and marginalization

In view of the demands arising from the globalization of the national and regional economies (point a) and the concomitant readjustment of the state and its regulative power (point b), classes excluded from the new neo-liberal covenant of domination (capitalists and businesses not directly related to international capital, business people not involved in the privatization of state enterprises or public services, workers and their labor organizations, large segments of the middle class and most of the traditional peasant classes) are losing the ability to demand an

⁷ See William Robinson, "Nueve tesis sobre nuestra época," *Revista Electrónica Latinoamericana de Teología* 164, September 1996, p. 4.

intervention by of the state on their behalf and are not represented by the hegemonic bloc.⁸

Exclusion and marginalization, in terms of social and economic benefits, profoundly mark the present situation in Latin America. Those who are deemed "superfluous," those who are not integrated, have in fact lost all powers of negotiation and thus the opportunity to contribute to societal growth. This has resulted in the breaking down of the very concept of community and national purpose. New "circuits of violence" thus overlap with old ones.⁹

(e) Atomization and new configurations of identities and the political

Finally, the public's growing disaffection with the state in addition to the general cultural crisis stemming from a pluralization of symbols and values, has led to a dispersion and atomization in the dynamics of identity-building which presents a new challenge in the quest for political consensus. The difficulty of visualizing a profile of national identity in a globalized world has (partially) encouraged a micro-group reference which, in most cases, lacks a global perspective. While the emergence of single issue groups must be fostered and cherished as true expressions of democratic impulses, one must nonetheless bear in mind that the logic and goals that rule groups at the level of civil society are different from the ones that guide parties in the political sphere; only the latter—refashioned so as to integrate themes promoted by single issue groups—can articulate and furnish a powerful political alternative on the basis of new visions which confer an inclusive identity.¹⁰ New political representation, that is, new articulations nurtured by identity and purpose, will constitute the basis for a new vision of the state and society and, eventually, a counteroffensive against the seemingly triumphant power of transnational capital.

⁸ See Yutzis (note 5).

⁹ See Gerardo Caetano, *Nueva Sociedad*, p. 139.

¹⁰ See Ricardo Córdova Macías, *ibid.*, p. 86.

A landscape of paradoxes

The issues outlined above constitute a scenario dominated by phenomena that can only be described as being paradoxical. In effect, while points (c) and (e) above speak of the supersession of *political* marginalization through democratic processes and increasing *civil* participation through popular associations and organizations, points (a), (b) and (d) refer to accelerating *economic* marginalization and *social* exclusion imposed by the new dynamics of a globalized economy. Social groups and classes that lack the economic, material, organizational, ideological, and political resources demanded by the neo-liberal pact, seem doomed to be cast aside.¹¹

Political freedom and democracy, coupled with growing socio-economic inequality, unattended social demands, the emergence of the "new urban poor," increased mobility and rapid technological change affecting production and labor, the crisis of a cultural ethos which used to legitimize conditions for communal life, and the mass media's promise of the immediate satisfaction of desires manifested in the ever increasing demand for goods, seem to paint a picture of chronic crisis and expanding "spaces of frustration." This begs the question what the outcome will be of this overlapping of political and social demands for recognition, the "show" put on by the global bazaar and the neo-liberal fetishism of goods, and the frustration that comes from being displaced from the redistribution of goods. Are not the democratic institutions discredited when it is merely the interests of a minority that seem to prevail? Furthermore, how can social and democratic expectations be correlated to neo-lib-

¹¹ See Hector Dada Hirezi, *ibid.*, p. 93; Manuel Antonio Garretón, *ibid.*, p. 103. Adding the variable of the mass-media's penetration of Latin American society, the Chilean sociologist Martin Hopenhayn thus describes this paradoxical landscape: a communicational transparency corresponds to a crisis of public space; a greater political democratization corresponds to an increasing inability of the state to process social demands; the deterioration of formal education system in the public schools corresponds to the uncontrollable access and exposure to information; an explosion of signifiers proposed by the new consumer sensibility corresponds to a drastic poverty of meaning regarding shared visions of society, *ibid.*, p. 115.

eral policies? Comparing the last two decades with the present one, Mario J Yutzis summarizes this point as follows.

Populist policies which demagogically distributed resources which were not produced were ill fated for the regional development. The political illusion burst with the economic reality. Today, however, adjustment policies drag the pendulum to the other extreme, risking a similar fate: the economic illusion will blow up in face of the [present] social and political reality.¹²

The political economy of desires

When we hear that being exploited is today considered a "privilege"¹³ ("at least I have a job!" is a phrase one hears in any Latin American city), we realize that we are on the threshold of a deeper, more complex and more dense time and space than previously thought; in other words, the concept of the absurd, of the real, that which is worthwhile and constitutes "common notions" (such as "social justice," "a job," "work") are radically mutating along the axis of neo-liberal codes. Thus having a job, even a badly paid one, in the context of labor uncertainty and growing unemployment constitutes a "miracle" that no one dares jeopardize. At least being exploited, is "to be in."

The neo-liberal creed has done for Latin America what military and authoritarian regimes were unable to do: a transmutation of all values and desires, of "the common," of what yesterday may have seemed absurd but today is fate. And how has this been done? By howling about the fairness and rationality of the market, neo-liberalism can dress itself messianically; by globalizing *our* wants and desires, *satisfaction* is promised to all. In other words, neo-liberalism feeds upon the fears and expectations which flow from the deep and irrational desires that our

¹² Mario J. Yutzis, "Democracy, Underdevelopment and Governability in Latin America" (unpublished paper delivered at the Consultation of First World Economics and Third World Ethics, Sigtuna, Sweden, Sep. 20-23 1993), p. 12.

¹³ Franz Hinkelammert, *Cultura de la esperanza y sociedad sin exclusión*, San José, Costa Rica, DEI, 1995, p. 30.

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ego—within the “possibilities” promised by the market—project under the garb of rational demands. The solitary self and its wants, then, becomes the agent that is made to believe that it rules by demanding. The market, of course, appears as the natural, providential space which gladly supplies. Loyalty is thereby bought at the rate of this exchange, while redemption comes to those who can support their demands with currency.

The unlimited dream: the metaphysics of the free market

It is therefore the legitimation of gain, the defense of one's own interests as the best and natural road to progress, as well as the concept of the market as a supra-human entity capable of transforming individual interests into the welfare of the community (either nationally or globally) that constitute the basic components of a neo-liberal metaphysics.¹⁴ The trinity of unlimited production, unlimited growth, and unlimited transformation of desires as demands, speaks of a new concept of the limits in time and space.¹⁵ Have the classical attributes of God through a transformational criticism (Feuerbach) not become the attributes of bourgeois space, time and person? If this is the case then it is no wonder that with the receding of the limits signified by the sacred (and the cultural ethos that it sustained) the world and its creatures become the immediate playground for the satisfaction of unending desires.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the problem is that unlimited pretensions within a world empirically finite and limited logically demand the sacrificial disposition of the majority of creatures and resources.¹⁷

The issue of boundaries and limits, and the lack thereof, is perhaps one of the central topics to be faced in the search for a

¹⁴ Jung Mo Sung, *Economía: Tema ausente en la Teología de la Liberación*, San José, Costa Rica, DEI, 1994, pp. 153ff.

¹⁵ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell, 1989, pp.1ff.

¹⁶ See Bell (note 4), p. 34.

¹⁷ The sacrificial demand of neo-liberal economics has been extensively developed by theologians such as Franz Hinkelammert and Jung Mu Song.

new cultural ethos independent of the unwanted consequences of the unfettered *logic* of the market. For, in effect, what has taken hold of Latin America today is the expansion of one sphere above all others, namely, the tyranny of the market forces over all spheres of society.¹⁸ As Pascal put it in his *Pensées*, “tyranny consists in the desire of universal power beyond its scope ... is the wish to have in one way what can only be had in another.”¹⁹ Once implicitly recognized that money and commodities define standing and belonging, all other goods fall into the gravitational pull of its mass.

The national and public space is thus shaped in such a fashion that the traditional manifestations of former goods and its spheres acquire the profile of the grotesque (one can for example think of telemediated religion, public office as access to drug trafficking or embezzlement, or media merchandizing of crime cases and trials). This is especially apparent in the rationale that rules values such as social justice: when the state no longer functions as the political mechanism for redistributing benefits on the basis of a plural consideration of goods, social justice is then defined as the obtaining in the market of what each one of us *deserves* on the basis of norms derived from the economic sphere: competitiveness, efficiency and performance.²⁰

Some consideration for moral deliberation and political action

The gloomy tone of the above should not elicit either a cynical resignation or a romantic posture. Frustration in view of the unrealized social(istic) utopia or autonomous development can for Christians never result in the abandoning of hope for this world. Rather it can lead to a redefining of this hope on the basis of a careful and realistic assessment of present possibilities.

¹⁸ Cf. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, New York, Basic Books, 1983, p. 17.

¹⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1931, #332, p. 93.

²⁰ See Daniel García Delgado, “Argentina: La cuestión de la equidad,” *Nueva Sociedad* 139, 1995, p. 11.

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It is not heaven but the earth that is the object of our moral responsibility, and the understanding that different rules govern both realms is perhaps one of the most significant steps for Latin American theological existence today. This would mean, on the one hand, in conversation with others who do not necessarily share our Christian faith to clarify the moral values to be realized in society (search for a moral vision)²¹ while, on the other, to discuss and analyze the morality of specific decisions and actions. This calls for the meticulous consideration of economic themes in light of our new understanding of the different factors that constitute the complex equilibrium of our "social ecology."²² For social scientists, pastors and theologians who have for decades been fascinated with the notion of "magic realism," namely, that Latin America is somehow placed outside the laws that govern space and time,²³ this is not an easy task.

Above we have suggested that if there is to be any resistance against the "tyranny" of the logic and forces of the market this will have to come from a renewed concept of culture, hierarchy of values and vision of what is morally desirable yet politically possible in this complex web which constitutes social ecology. Precisely the political arena, and the possibility to conform to or to restructure an historical bloc,²⁴ is the place where symbolic representations and different (economic) interests converge. Nevertheless, the political realm as such is not a foundational,

²¹ See Larry Rasmussen, "Moral Community and Moral Formation," *The Ecumenical Review* 47/2, April 1995, p. 182.

²² On the notion of "social ecology" see Juan Luis Segundo, *El hombre de hoy ante Jesús de Nazaret*, Vol. I, Madrid, Cristiandad, 1982, p. 347.

²³ See Sebrelli (note 2), pp. 293-312.

²⁴ The concept of historical bloc is borrowed from Antonio Gramsci. It refers to basic consensus around a certain social order, where the hegemony of one social class is created and renewed through a network of institutions, social relations, symbols, ideas, etc. An historical bloc is always structured around a dominant mode of production which in turn defines, to a large extent, the manner in which different social classes are related. Yet an historical bloc can never be explained in purely economic terms. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Q. Hoare and G. Smith (eds.), New York, International Publishers, 1971; also Anne Showstack Sassoon, "Hegemony," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, T. Bottomore (ed.), Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983.

but an *articulating* space of values and demands to be present and formed in different segments of civil society.²⁵

A renewed cultural vision must therefore consider issues such as the new ways of perceiving and symbolizing that which is real, changes in the representation of time and space, the crisis of old individual and collective identities, and moral motivations, ends and values.²⁶ The production and reproduction of meanings, in which our churches play an inescapable—yet not unique—role, is therefore a necessary step toward redrawing the boundaries, the spheres of pertinency within which different social goods must be distributed according to a moral vision not ruled by the market or state.

In what follows we shall outline some of the issues and topics that may constitute our churches' theological and ethical contribution to this larger conversation within civil society. The search for approximative norms for action inspires these reflections.

The limits of utopian illusions

Pablo Richard, a Chilean liberation theologian, rightly observed that the discourse of the neo-liberal ideologues of the nineties is analogous to the revolutionary and liberationist talk of the seventies: their speech is flavored with messianic accents certifying that the future belongs to them.²⁷ A critical theological assessment, therefore, has two fronts here: first, to help redraw the profile of hope for all those Christians who have been politically committed and are disillusioned with the turn that history has taken and, secondly, to critique the metaphysical assumptions of the neo-liberal creed. In the first instance the pastoral goal is to walk through the defeatist frustration that arises from experiencing frontiers; in the second it will be to recall the limits that any historical project is subject to.

²⁵ See María Cristina Reigadas, "Ética y política en la encrucijada postmoderna: Una interpretación de Daniel Bell," *Cuadernos de Ética* 14, December 1992, pp. 101ff.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁷ Pablo Richard, "La fuerza del Espíritu," *Nueva Sociedad* 136, 1995, p. 132.

Christian theology is called to stand on its own feet and drink from its own well, namely, from the eschatological promise embodied in Christ which clearly sets limits to what is historically achievable, yet does not abandon history to its own devices and ruses. The notion of the gratuitousness of God's love, the futurity of God's being and kingdom, the eschatological *telos* of the cosmos anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth signify that no human achievement will realize transcendence, that there are definite limits to what we can be and do. The overcoming of limits, the conquering of rebel powers, the inauguration of that which is totally new is reserved for God alone, not for us.

The limits which this sets to the illusions propagated by the neo-liberal creed are obvious enough (cf. *supra*). Yet it should also be apparent that this view grounds in an eschatological spirituality as Christians commit themselves to those in need, knowing that it is a hope against all hope that will sustain us in face of the inevitable disappointments found in historical processes. *A priori* one is not committed to a *utopia* known to be unattainable, but rather to the lives of women, men, children and creatures of all sorts which intrinsically demands a careful assessment of what should and can be done in the (ecological) conditions of this space and time. What we need are not so much grand schemes, dramatic declamatory documents, ineffectual and condescending stances, or a moral purism oblivious of a fallen creation, but rather to discern approximative norms, this "nicely calculated less and more" of good and evil" (Niebuhr) on which economies, political institutions and civilizations, in other words, life and its spaces, depend.²⁸

The goods that people (and God) want

"Things are our anchors in the world," according to Michael Walzer when addressing a topic that most of our churches need

²⁸Reinhold Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, New York, Meridian Books, 1959, p. 176.

to consider more carefully. Speaking about material things touches on the form of God's creation as well as human sinfulness, on the plurality of God's being as well as human desires. More often than not, groups and trends in our churches, inspired by a laudable concept of social justice, have nonetheless promoted *quasi* ascetic attitudes towards modern life, exchanging the notion of greed with that of enjoyment of artifacts produced in exchange with the world. A unilateral and dualistic emphasis on the *nefesh* that comes from God has displaced the fact that we are also an *afar/adama*, therefore naturally attracted to (while necessarily dependent upon) that from which we come. A living being emerges both from the shaping of (dust) and the imparting of (breath); biblically, therefore, dependence on God implies the responsible acceptance of our creatureliness and our sensuous nature.

A romantic attack against "progress" and "development" (certainly not new in the West, i.e., Rousseau!) is not only theologically dubious, but also anthropologically unsound. Yet the rejection of a romantic longing for an idyllic past does not imply supporting an unbounded idealism. A more nuanced (theological) view must counterbalance the fact that technical progress and economic development have provided increased opportunities for survival, new and different ways to be part of the world, in sum, new expressions of life expressed in songs, houses, foods, fields, prayers and faces, as well as ecological damage, new social injustices, new forms of enslavement and domination. In our historical situation, the paradox of a fallen yet ontically exocentric orientation has led humanity to develop civilizations and devise technological ways for escaping situations of want, misery, dissatisfaction, suffering, poverty, in other words, to escape from the very nothingness and emptiness that is carried within and threatens from without. Yet this desire and search is also an occasion for sin and alienation: not so much because they are materially mediated (Augustine), but because they are egocentrically grounded. Luther recognized this paradox of desire, the different array of humanity's wants which constitute both a sign of finitude and perishability as well as a

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prelude to or foretaste of the gracious eschatological fulfillment.²⁹ The problem is not the want, but the self's illusion for immediate fulfillment associated with it. What else is the *amor sui*, the *incurvatus* in se but the transposition of totality to the self, of the systematic and compulsive violation of boundaries and spheres that allow life of the multiple and diverse to grow and flourish in their own integrity?

While Christian theology can never become a justifying tool for progress and development, it nevertheless constitutes a horizon against which economic growth can be seen beyond the apparent selfish motivations of private, corporate and national interests. To develop a theology of God's historical *opus alienum* would be tempting, but in the end would mean naively falling into a "providential" conception of the market. However, an eschatological and Trinitarian hermeneutic grounded in the vision of the Father's glory mediated through the Spirit's recapitulation of creation in Christ (Iraeneus) may help us understand the (provisional) meaning of our economic activities and planning, namely, to be one of our main means of relating to neighbor and nature. Development is certainly not a road to the kingdom, but a temporal hiatus allowed by the approaching kingdom. The relationship between both realms comes to light when we consider that biblically this kingdom coincides with the unification of the Triune being of God, and that the deity of this God is mediated by the lordship exercised over the multiplicity of creation. "All things are put in subjection" according to Paul in his hermeneutics of the resurrection in I Cor 15:27-28 "when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all." It is not merely the fact that God's being has chosen to be mediated by the creature that is stressed here, but also that this mediation is signified by the multiplicity, diversity and integrity of creatureal existence (cf. also Rom 8:18-25).

²⁹Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 28, H. Oswald (ed.), St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1973, p. 142.

In this vein the fostering and praise of multiplicity, diversity and integrity of beings and things can be appropriated as criteria for understanding the ultimate purpose of such an equivocal notion as growth, development and progress. These constitute that which in ethics are called “goods” or non-moral values. They are data, realities which precede human volition and freedom—even though they inform and are certainly affected by human action. The economy, the way in which we administer resources and reproduce conditions for living, is therefore an area of encounter between goods that precede us (which have their own laws to preserve their integrity) and human decision. Theologically the economic realm is of utmost concern to the extent that it mediates the arranging of our temporal realm as the (future) *oikos* of God. It would be heresy to say that God’s being is at stake with what we do or not do in this domain; but it is theologically correct to affirm that what is historically at stake is the morphology, that is, the form and shape that anticipate the multiplicity contained by God’s being. It is God’s will—a will that can also be partially understood in our dealings with the world—that creatural multiplicity and diversity exist as masks of the material bountifulness that flows from the mutual loving between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

According to this theological understanding, economic growth can only be justifiable as a means of fostering the creaturely multiplicity, the diversity within each of its manifestations, and the integrity of a complex systemic equilibrium. Development is of course a necessary process because without it—and especially considering the interdependent state of our global civilization—not only ecological concerns and the well-being of present and future generations are threatened, but also because it constitutes a means toward the multiplication of finite possibilities for life to be fulfilled in God. However, technological progress and growth can become meaningless when, dazzled by quantitative goals, they threaten the very quality of that life which they seek (at least tacitly) to aid and assist. Global statistics on massive poverty and demographic pressure also point to the contradictory effects of a quantitative “growth” without

qualitative goals. As the WCC proposed,³⁰ policies aiming at poverty reduction, long-term employment, as well as environmental restoration and protection are reasonable and attainable qualitative goals that best assure quantitative growth. Our economies, however, tend to put the cart before the donkey hoping for a trickle-down effect.

Some criteria for a (relative) conception of fairness and social justice

On the socio-political arena confusion between law and gospel has resulted in many of our churches forgetting that the goal is not to call people *to be better*, but *to do* good.³¹ This fomented either an inflated historical expectation or a wishful and moralistic attitude which *misplaced* Christians *vis-à-vis* society. Thinking that there is a linear relation between high principles and socio-political action (ethical monism), or overlooking one's own and nature's sinfulness, can only lead to enthusiastic proposals doomed to frustration or a self-centered rigorous morality which serves to distance ourselves from the world.³² Christian love, however, seeks to engage neighbors and situations in the conditions in which they exist, trusting that the reason with which God has adorned creation is a powerful (yet insufficient) means to search for a responsible way of living. In this vein groups and segments that form the large spectrum of civil society can together with Christians integrate a process for consenting to a shared view, a "moral vision" that will serve as a temporal horizon for socio-political goals. Compromises between our view, other's views, and the facts and limits that come with human behavior are inevitable. Furthermore, serious consideration of the latter is a necessary step in order accurately to assess the morality of actions.

³⁰ WCC (note 4), p. 6.

³¹ Cf. Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1961, p. 164.

³² See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*; Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1945, p. 103.

A Just Asia

The drive to maximize gain and the search for self-aggrandizement are expressions of an aggressive instinct born from the desire to affirm the self in face of the empirical limits that bind finite existence. With different degrees and intensities, overtly or covertly expressed, it will exist as long as the reconciliation of creation in Christ is still pending. In sociological and psychological terms this aggression that is intrinsic to existence needs an effective outlet through which to channel this.³³ Greed and gain are two of its multiple expressions.

The fact that in our century the economy has become the main outlet for this “aggression” must fill us both with a sense of relief and give us cause to worry. Relief to the extent that other spheres (family, state, religion) are partially freed from the worst manifestations of aggression; worry in as far as the economic sphere seems to grow exponentially, threatening to overrule all other spheres of life (including, of course, all ecological niches). But what will justice look like in face of this? Shall we directly fight greed and gain? Do we need to regulate an abstract economic egalitarianism by moralizing this field of activity to such an extent that it will in fact invite even more abuses and violations?³⁴ Does not a simple idea of justice and equality—and a monistic idea of the moral—invite more manifestations of sin?

In view of this and the ethical horizon described above we believe that a conception that advocates different expressions of justices—rather than a Justice—has a greater chance of being ethically sound and instrumentally viable. Such understanding acknowledges the specificities of different spheres and recognizes that distinct criteria of fairness and justice apply to them. Different social goods must be distributed for essentially different reasons. It would therefore be acceptable—on the basis of a societal consensus—that strategic rationality and competition for gain are principles that rule the economic sphere (whatever the

³³ See Paul Tournier, *The Violence Within*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1982.

³⁴ See Walzer (note 18), p. 15.

form of property advocated). Nevertheless it is unacceptable that this same rationale be imposed or spills over onto other spheres, where other values and rules must prevail. Money and political power (to cite one example) must be culturally declared as reciprocally inconvertible. The same applies to love and gain. Once the economic ratio supersedes its boundaries, the fabric of political and civil society starts to disintegrate into anarchy, corruption (Brazil, Argentina) or Mafia-style behavior (Colombia).³⁵

In order for this to work it is imperative to depend on a state equipped with mechanisms for social and political control of the forces which constitute the market. Nevertheless, a state is an easy prisoner of the powers that be in the event that a culture of moral deliberation is lacking. The public space constituted by this deliberation must discuss its moral values and vision as well as serve as the foundation for a political resolve to curb the impulse of a social and economic powerful minority by democratic means. In the same vein a proposal along these lines must depend on a new type of state which is more integrative of opposition parties as well as other non-political groups from civil society representing those groups marginalized by the neo-liberal hegemonic bloc. Taking advantage of the existing democratic institutions, senior groups, "original" (native) peoples, women's rights associations, neighborhood organizations, human rights leagues and ecologically concerned circles as well as churches and other clusters of civil society can channel their demands in an orchestrated fashion through consent on common interests and goals.

A tactical cunning must take advantage of the very cultural contradictions of capitalism³⁶ as well as of the need of the hegemonic classes to recreate their hegemony in the present historical bloc by seeking to integrate other groups' visions and appeals. It is unlikely that we will see the emergence of a new

³⁵ See Julio De Zan, "Ética y Capitalismo (Sobre el control social de la racionalidad estratégica)," *Cuadernos de Ética* 15/16, 1993, p. 57.

historical bloc in the near future, but in the light of the above one can reasonably expect new policies seeking out social fairness and ecological balance, severely restricting the logic of strategic rationality to a circumscribed sphere. Essentially this will consist of a new systemic integration between state, civil society and market, where the laws of the latter are not allowed to exercise a monopoly. A system, as the Zapatistas demanded in Mexico, "where everybody has space."³⁷

Active social policies that touch on the distribution of income, property and wealth through a re-engineering of tributary criteria and processes is one of the decisive points for a new agenda.³⁸ It is time that the wealth and riches of this sphere be distributed among the areas of health, education, culture and last, but not least, employed in programs for ecological sustenance and redress of environmental damage. It must be borne in mind that the new relationship between capitalism and territoriality signified by a globalized economy must also inform our people's vision and strategies for justice. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, interlocking in a global economic network also means being subjected to social processes transcending our own group, class, and nation. What this means in the long run is that a "globalization from below" (Gorostiaga), i.e., the international networking of groups and associations, constitutes one of the means for the birth of a "geoculture" able to cast a new vision for life on this planet. May our Lutheran communion be a tool for fostering this proprium within the alienum of economic globalization.

³⁶ Cf. Daniel Bell's thesis (note 4).

³⁷ See Hinkelammert (note 13), pp. 108-109, p. 311.

³⁸ For this see Lahera et al. (note 5); Yutzis (note 5).

Alternative economics: Latin America moves into the twenty-first century

Mario Jorge Yutzis

The political economics of globalization

The crisis of the 1970s precipitated radical transformations in the world economy. Since the 1973–1979 recession (the last two oil crises) everything has changed. Twenty years hence, the restructuring and relocation of industry have affected all sectors. In the light of the economic rivalry between the industrial centers these transformations were accompanied by the technology of production, communications and transportation as well as different forms of company organization. The principal objective was to find new paradigms for a global corporate organization aiming at international redeployment and healthy profits for investors.

The dynamics of this reorganization have brought about the fall of the Keynesian economic model and international financial agreements. The welfare states which had hitherto guaranteed a certain measure of social consensus between management, unions, and state began to disintegrate because the emerging more dynamic factions of capital demanded other political and economic forms of government. The development of more conservative political and economic processes after 1989 and, especially, following the demise of the Soviet Block in 1991 resulted in a growing internationalization of the economy (cf. Joice Kolko, 1990).

Internationalization provided favorable conditions for financial capital (that of the banks and industries) to take advantage of certain domestic economic policies that stimulated production. At the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties these national policies precipitated a relocation which would previously have been unthinkable. Michael Porter recognizes that today there exists a type of “global firm.” Global