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Tolerance and Democracy Instead of Fundamentalism and Empire

Guillermo Hansen

The globalizing and unsettling forces of capitalism, technology, climate change, mass media and popular culture chart a reality marked by fleetness, disorientation and rapid social change. Empire is the name that we give to the global network of hierarchies and divisions that promise and attempt to maintain order through new mechanisms of control and conflict—a specific regime of global relations.¹ Empire refers neither to a single country, nor to a unified political system, but to a global network of sovereignty that rests on dominant nation-states, supranational institutions and major capitalist corporations.

Yet, in spite of empire's attempt to order and control planetary life, millions of people are reacting and resisting in different ways. Most are pursuing personal solutions to systemic problems, thus confirming that "biopower," (regulating social life through control over individuals' bodies and thinking), is the essence of imperial domination. Others, small numbers affiliated with religious, leftist and ecological organizations, attempt to resist empire by postulating an outside utopic realm of moral purity, from which an epic redemption will flow.² Finally, far greater and growing numbers identify themselves with religious fundamentalist views that are usually functional to or absorbed by empire or, in some cases, embody anti-systemic resistance—by peaceful and/or violent means.

The phenomenon of fundamentalism is particularly significant because here we witness a multilayered crisis. If today, under empire, the global economy is tending toward the production of social life itself, in which the economic, political and cultural increasingly overlap, then it can be argued that fundamentalism is one of the main symptoms of empire's dysfunctional

¹ I follow Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's concept of Empire, as developed in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. xi-xii, 23.

² See *ibid.*, p. 46.

character. It is more than a religious superstition;³ it is a rallying point for all those who feel distressed by the peculiar way in which empire seeks to regulate the mesh of economic, political and cultural life. This is often referred to as the “materialist” and “secular” dis-values of late modernity. Certainly not all forms of fundamentalism react equally to all these dimensions, but since they are religious movements, the cultural aspects deserve careful attention—especially how religious symbols seek today to influence the political and institutional configurations of the emerging world.

This article focuses on democracy as a genuine alternative to the logic of empire and the different forms of fundamentalism. Although fundamentalisms are avowedly not keen on democracy, it is also true that the economic and political forces of empire are steadily driving existing (liberal) democracies into “states of exception.” This poses a peculiar menace to democratic principles. Democracy as a political system and culture, resting on values such as freedom, equality, social justice and the rule of civil law, is likely to be the real casualty of the struggle between fundamentalisms and globalization.

Yet, there may also be new opportunities for democracy, emerging from inside empire, that is, from the underside of the hierarchies of domination, through the creation of new global circuits of cooperation and collaboration. Here new kinds of relationships and power are locally and globally linking people, who have a common desire to exercise democracy as an affirmation of life in its multiple expressions, across religious, ethnic, cultural, gender and class divides. In this form of active resistance, a fourth strategy in the face of empire, tolerance, becomes a key instrument in the search for democratic solutions to systemic problems.

While as moral beings we are always faced with ethical choices, today there is increased urgency to reach wide consensus over the values and metaphors that will determine our lives. Freedom and equality have been focal desiderata of modernity, yet the historicist and progressive myths, through which these values have been nurtured, are on the wane. Since values are always embedded in mythical narratives, we need to understand the ways of knowledge and cultural mutations linked with sociopolitical and systemic changes. Today, as societies and consciousness become more pluralistic, tolerance is not only a desirable moral virtue but a necessary systemic quality. Combined with freedom and equality, tolerance makes participatory democracy the best arrangement for shaping our collective

³ From *super stare*, to stand over something that is a vestige from the past.

and global fate. In this regard, religions are again poised to play a critical role—either for or against tolerance, democracy and peace.

How then does our Lutheran heritage and its core theological metaphors contribute to what confronts us in public life, with its new networks of power? Can this meaningfully orient us for dealing with these matters? In sum, can Lutheran theology be a beacon for democracy, tolerance and pluralism against fundamentalisms? I suggest that Lutheranism may be able to contribute significantly, if its theological metaphors for salvation also cut across the “order of creation.” In this sense, justification by faith and the cross, understood in terms of God’s threefold-multidimensional action (two kingdoms), may evoke a theological space for relating to values such as difference, plurality, tolerance and acknowledging the other within a democratic institutional framework. This can ground a robust Lutheran public theology which inspires strategies to face the subtle power of empire and the enchanting choruses of fundamentalism.

I propose three insights that structure Lutheranism’s intersection with the present challenges: justification by faith and the upholding of inclusiveness; God’s threefold-multidimensional action (i.e., two kingdoms) of creating and sustaining democratic arrangements; and the cross as the critical “weapon” (and a critique of weapons) against the “glory” of empire, totalitarianism, fundamentalism and war. The challenge is to articulate these dimensions without falling into moralizing or legalistic solutions to deep structural, cultural and social disputes. This implies placing our theology within the present cultural and religious debate and consistent with the methodology of the cross: a theology done from the bowels of empire, revealing its true face behind its allegedly “benevolent” mask.

From republic to empire

Symptoms of transition

It is tempting to fall into the vice of binary thought when approaching the relationship between fundamentalism, tolerance and democracy. Media, news, reports and discourses can lead to the conclusion that today democracy—broadly defined⁴—is at peril primarily because of

⁴ Democracy understood as a set of institutional and legal principles and practices such as: the rule of law and equal access to justice; division of powers; guarantees of human and civil rights that are upheld and independently monitored; free and fair elections involving a genuine compe-

the “external” and “evil” forces of religious fundamentalism (especially Islamic). Samuel Huntington’s highly influential theory of the clash of civilizations, for example, has given academic veneer to a political paradigm that compartmentalizes inner dimensions of the contemporary world-system into antagonist camps. This creates a false impression and consciousness. The real danger for “democracy” may lie not only with those who express grievances against the hypocrisy of “democratic” countries, but also with those who in the name of democratic values support intolerant and vigilante practices. Inherent to the different forms of fundamentalism is establishing regimes of intolerance, which challenge the system and culture of democracy. “Democracies” around the world are increasingly sliding toward a “state of exception,” where freedom is curtailed in the name of freedom, as Latin American dictatorships once curtailed democracy in the name of democracy.⁶

It is essential to have a systemic view of the present globalized world system to situate the dynamics linking fundamentalism with the contemporary neoconservative “states of exception.” Fundamentalisms are symptoms marking the passage to a new state of affairs.⁶ They embody a refusal of some or all aspects of modernity, democracy and secularity, which are conceived, rightly or wrongly, as weapons of “liberal,” foreign or Western hegemony.⁷ They are late- or postmodern in a double sense: in that chronologically they follow and oppose modernity, while cultur-

tion of ideas, permitting consensual, non-violent changes of government; freedom of speech, press and media; healthy, autonomous civil society institutions and networks, independent of the state; accountability of authority and transparency of decisions; entrenched property and economic rights; social justice and basic security; an ethos of dialogue, questioning, trust, and moral awareness; widespread, free access to the information needed to discuss, scrutinize, make choices about and uphold all these components of a democratic society. Behind these principles lay certain core values such as the political equality of all citizens; open deliberation before decision making so that all can voice their interests and concerns; a high degree of citizen participation in the processes of democracy, that respects and encourages the different views of others; a pluralism of institutions and the independence of critical voices that maintain the long-term health and openness of democratic societies.

⁶ In *Stato di eccezione*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben shows how Western democracies become invested with the need of turning emergency into the foundation of their existence. The military and the economic “state of emergency” often merge into one, employing war metaphors as main currency in public speeches. He states that “The principle according to which necessity defines a singular situation in which the law loses its *vis obligandi* [...] is inverted into that according to which necessity constitutes, so to speak, the ultimate foundation and the very source of the law.” Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), p. 37.

⁶ See Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, (note 1), pp. 137ff.

⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 149.

ally they ride on the waves generated by the falling walls of modern (and Western) philosophical theories which placed religion in an interdict.⁸

Late-modern fundamentalism requires us to look at the long-term economic, political, cultural and epistemological dynamics characterizing empire. Thereby we can understand why democracy and tolerance have such urgency today. Inspired by chaos theory, the social scientist, Immanuel Wallerstein,⁹ maintains that an existing system that can no longer function adequately within its defined parameters faces a bifurcation where a "choice" is pressed upon it. Neither of the present antagonistic camps will prevail; the system as a whole will change. In effect, every system can be said to be "alive." The "liveliness" is seen in its processes. If a system survives, it pursues its historical life within the framework and constraints of its constitutive structures. It obeys a cyclical dynamic, as well as secular, linear trend (s). When the expansion of secular trends jeopardizes the equilibrium enacted by the cyclical process, the crisis cannot be solved within the system as such; a bifurcation is imminent.

Thus today, institutions and social arrangements face a new set of possibilities: either a radicalization of democratic principles and practices, or falling into new hierarchical and intolerant forms of tutelage. The outcome will depend on the many decisions or actions taken in times of rapid change. History does not have a moral vector; it does not necessarily lead to greater tolerance, liberty or equality.

We therefore find ourselves in a crucible of uncertainties. This period is of extraordinary importance because the intellectual, moral and political decisions made will have exponential effects. For this reason fundamentalism cannot be dismissed as a romantic reversal of history, destined to fail because history always "progresses." Actually, it is one of the possible outcomes of late modernity. In times where interdictions against religion are falling, the religious dimension may be destined to play a critical role in either democracy's demise or its flourishing.¹⁰ Do Lutheranism's core metaphors have any role to play in this new cultural,

⁸ This notion is developed by yet another Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, in "La huella de la huella," Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds), *La religión* (Madrid: PPC, 1996), pp. 111f.

⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-System Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Uncertainties of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ It is ironic that modern democracy, whose roots can partially be traced to a reaction against religious intolerance (Locke *et al.*), may today require the mystique and conviction given by religion.

political and social scenario, that is, in constructing an alternative, more humane global network?

The “longue durée”:¹¹ Tolerance, intolerance and violence

A systemic analysis of empire posits neither nation-states, political regimes, religious bodies, nor geo-cultural zones, but rather the dynamic network, cutting across and undergirding all of the above and providing a structural unity. A world system is thus spatial/temporal, cutting across political and cultural units and creating an integrated zone of activity with institutions that obey certain systemic rules. The modern world system has origins in European expansion beginning in the sixteenth century. It is not bound by a unitary political structure, although after World War II, democracy became the desirable political regime. Its unifying factor is not a political regime or culture, but the division of labor resulting from the relentless pursuit of gain.¹² The accumulation of capital, which splits the system along a core and different degrees of periphery, determines the nature of this division.¹³

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the political history of the modern world system became the subject of a debate about the line dividing the included from the excluded, as well as about the tenor, extent and limits of tolerance. This debate occurred “within the framework of a geo-culture that proclaimed the inclusion of all as the definition of the good society.”¹⁴ This geoculture was liberalism, which proved to be a formidable ideological force acquiring a solid hegemony in Europe around 1848. Not only did it establish the juridical and institutional foundations to be emulated by most countries in the world, but it was also elastic enough to absorb anti-systemic movements arising within it. Within nation-states, attempts by groups to achieve inclusion as full citizens were the central

¹¹ Term used by Fernand Braudel.

¹² See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), pp. 43ff.

¹³ The core, the “comfort zone,” does not necessarily have to coincide with nations or states, but with the dominant sectors of the production process cutting across them. However, since monopolies need the patronage of strong states, there is a geographical consequence of the core periphery relationship. It is also the case that the same country or nation may present a mix of core and peripheral conditions. Usually, core products and services are monopolies or *quasi* monopolies, while peripheral products and services are truly “competitive,” that is, abundant and diverse. Thus, when there is exchange for core products and services felt as critical and crucial for the advancement of the well-being of populations, an unequal or asymmetrical situation develops.

¹⁴ Wallerstein, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 60.

focus of radical movements. First came industrial workers, who once organized in unions and syndicates sought political power. After decades of struggle, a compromise emerged: the welfare state. Then, beginning in the 1960s, those excluded from full participation and decision making—certain racial/ethnic groups, women, sexual minorities and oppressed minorities in colonies—voiced their anti-systemic claims. All these movements were more or less successful in achieving full citizenship and/or independence, but failed fully to redress systemic dynamics of exclusion.

The 1960s marked the end of the supremacy of liberalism, thereby dislocating the geoculture that had kept the political institutions intact.¹⁶ Decolonization, women's movements, youth culture and labor, vindication of difference and minorities, concern for the environment—these have unhinged the underpinnings of the capitalist world economy and exposed it to the full force of political and cultural shocks from which it had been sheltered.¹⁶ During the same time, fundamentalist trends gained ascendancy again in different places in the world.¹⁷ Cultural transformations soon led to new self-esteem and political demands, which in turn put new pressures on the system through the expansion of linear trends. The result is that in the last fifty years there has been a growing squeeze on the average rate of profits; costs of production has been rising while the margin of surplus is narrowing. Capitalist production had to face rising labor costs, increasing costs for infrastructure and raw materials and taxation.

Capitalist endeavors always attempt to maintain oligopolistic conditions. For example, the present neoliberal phase in Latin America was enacted by dispossessing the "enclosing the commons."¹⁸ The "Washington Consensus" gave new impetus to institutions such as the International

¹⁶ This corresponds to what Eric Hobsbawm calls the end of the "golden age." See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: a History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

¹⁶ See Wallerstein, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 77; Hobsbawm, *ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁷ In the case of Islamic fundamentalism, the 1967 Israeli-Arab war signals a turning point. See Bas-sam Tibi, "The Worldview of Sunni Arab Fundamentalism: Attitudes toward Modern Science and Technology," in Martin Marty and Scott Appelby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family and Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 81.

¹⁸ A Marxist notion developed by David Harvey to refer to the reversal of common property rights and the commodification of cultural forms, histories, intellectual creativity, the environment, genetic information, public works, health and education. Capitalism resolved its cyclical crisis by expanding its secular trends; but in the new era of globalization the possibility of overflowing towards an "other" (land, population, and market) decreases. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 137ff.

Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the World Economic Forum. These in turn pushed for a type of globalization which opened up all frontiers to the free flow of goods and capital, but not of people and/or labor.¹⁹ In the midst of this, 9/11 served to legitimate the more conservative sectors within some core states by giving them new political clout. These events weakened links with the more moderate center and thus undid cultural and social transformations dating from the 1960s. Most dramatically, neoliberalism was replaced by neoconservatism—a religiously sanctioned force that culturally and politically is at war with the freedoms and social advancements of the previous four decades.²⁰

Far from bringing order and restoring equilibrium to the system, these reactions have accelerated the cycle of crisis, leading to a general global state of war. The secular trends are moving toward blocking the unrestrained continuation of an endless accumulation of capital, the engine of capitalist development. On the horizon are indications of great social turmoil, in response to 1) the very fluctuations of the system itself; 2) the declining legitimacy of state structures; and 3) the cultural crisis of prevailing symbolic systems. As Eric Hobsbawm asserts, “The world of the third millennium will [...] almost certainly continue to be one of violent politics and violent political changes. The only thing uncertain about them is where they will lead.”²¹

What will dominate in the upcoming arrangement? Should we speak of a system or multi systems? What values will be paramount? One thing is certain: the present world system, ideologically dominated by a center-liberal outlook, has now achieved its full maturity. It will do anything possible to ameliorate the crisis, even adopting conservative discourse(s) to suit the demands of electorates, who are determined to behave in customary ways in the pursuit of short-term benefits. Precisely because the fluctuations and uncertainties are becoming more acute, the demand for security will be stronger—and so, too, the violence.²² “States

¹⁹ See Néstor García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1999); Zygmunt Bauman, *La globalización: consecuencias humanas* (Buenos Aires: FCE, 1999).

²⁰ See Harvey, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 184.

²¹ Hobsbawm, *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 460.

²² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri link this form of security to the contemporary strategies of biopower: “Security requires rather actively and constantly shaping the environment through military and/or police activity. Only an active shaped world is a secure world. This notion of security is a form of biopower, then, in the sense that it is charged with the task of producing and transforming social life ...” In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p. 20.

of exception” are erected as paradigms for political rule, where all citizens are placed under permanent suspicion and surveillance (the “Patriot Act” in the US is an example). Moreover, as stated in the (in)famous ideological blueprint of the Bush administration, Project for the New American Century,²³ military strength and control of foreign territories become necessary steps in the larger project of spreading “appropriate” codes of conduct to the rest of the world.²⁴ This violence exercised in the pursuit of “security”—doubtful ends combined with immoral means—has received strong popular backing and ideological support from a growing social and cultural force—evangelical fundamentalism, the backbone of neoconservative hegemonic military power.²⁵ In this fashion, liberty is curtailed in the name of security, which in turn exacerbates inequality.

Fundamentalism promises a safer and more fulfilling world by submitting to new heteronomous codes and arrangements. Rather than through a direct attack on the economic and political basis of empire, this occurs indirectly by questioning the cultural and moral dynamics of empire: rejecting the priority of universal rights and civil law, refusing gender equality, dismissing the separation of religion and government and a general rebuff of democratic values. Neoconservatives in the US receive the backing of Christian evangelical fundamentalists who are thoroughly supportive of the system, while Islamic fundamentalists are anti-systemic. But both Christian fundamentalist system supporting neoconservatism and Islamic anti-systemic fundamentalism have a common pattern: they either lower tolerance or openly practice intolerance, threatening the very nature of democracy. Both have an inbuilt tendency toward intolerance and the negation of the other.

From plurality towards a postmodern unum

Different strands of fundamentalism are commonly marked by militancy, exclusivism, a “fight against the world” attitude and a profound distaste for (philosophical) relativism and (ideological) pluralism. Setting boundaries,

²³ The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) is an American neoconservative think tank, based in Washington, D.C., cofounded as “a non-profit educational organization” by William Kristol and Robert Kagan in early 1997.

²⁴ See Harvey, *op. cit.* (note 18), pp. 184f.

²⁵ See Walter Mead, “God’s Country,” in *Foreign Affairs* 85/5 (Sept.-Oct. 2006), pp. 24-43.

identifying enemies, proselytizing, creating and strengthening intermediate institutions are common strategies. Common moral positions include patriarchal models of family and opposition to abortion and same sex relationships. Although counter-modern or anti-secularization attitudes seem to galvanize their focus, most evangelicals, for instance, are not opposed to capitalism, bureaucratic organization, mass communication technologies, or higher education. They are not simply antimodern, but rather critical of those aspects of modernity that they perceive to be threatening to their core beliefs, social organization and ideology, such as cultural developments leading to a pluralization of consciousness and views.²⁶

As a strategy facing pluralization and secularity, fundamentalisms share a highly cognitive doctrinal religiosity marked by an objectivistic, dogmatic, legalistic and dissonant style. The claim to “objectivity” revamps a hermeneutical circle, unaffected by human experience, interests and location. In a sense, they simply continue the “epistemological objectivism” of the West, as if reality were composed of foundational blocks of a certain order. To uphold “the truth” means to respect this structure and order. As the anthropologist Anthony Wallace asserts, there is a predisposition to be infatuated with a worldview that promises order, for this is perceived as diminishing stress. It is associated with every satisfaction derived from life and with the maintenance and reproduction of life itself.²⁷ Consequently, any element that produces disturbances in this worldview automatically implies a disturbance in the rules of behavior. The cognitive and the moral are, at this point, indistinguishable. Multiple cultural choices become a terrain in order to simplify reality according to a divine norm.

Yet (late) modernity has brought to the fore the complexity of reality, which requires multiple metaphors and views.²⁸ Any monolithic conceptual

²⁶ Cf. Peter Berger, *Una Gloria lejana: la búsqueda de la fe en época de incredulidad* (Barcelona: Herder, 1994), p. 93.

²⁷ See Anthony Wallace, *Revitalizations and Mazeways: Essays on Culture Change*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 182.

²⁸ Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 78. Integrism as fundamentalism expresses thus a cognitive strategy which tries to homogenize what is radically plural. Against this background they can be considered as a form of superstition (*super stare*), to the extent that they intend to recreate conceptions of nature, society, culture and self which are thought or imagined as having once wide currency. Although to a certain extent they share many of the traces of religious revitalization movements (Wallace), that is, the deliberate, organized and conscious effort to construct a more satisfying culture and social environment, they are epistemologically unable to produce what these movements successfully do: a widespread reduction and/or redirection of stress. Therefore it would be more adequate to consider fundamentalisms as truncated revitalization movements, for they are constantly tempted to idealize a past in face of the perils of the present.

system soon proves to be inconsistent, unable to establish congruence with diverse metaphors and symbols. In the end, fundamentalisms are not only incapable of surmounting dissonance, but they become spawning terrain for new ones. This generates additional cognitive dissonance which at best may be able to offer a "solution" for individuals within empire, but not to the injustices brought by it.

In sum, different fundamentalisms appear to share a common, intercultural strategy that is linked to the social, cultural and economic conditions set in motion by globalization and late modernity. Facing this dislocation, they aim to influence societies and cultures by encouraging stances to secure or avoid uncertainty, sanction power distance, stress the collective rather than the individual and give prominence to the masculine rather than the feminine.²⁹ In these strategies, matters pertaining to sexuality, family and above all, the role of women stand out.³⁰ These issues not only enforce patriarchal property rights and the male monopoly of the labor market, but also communal reproduction where women are perceived to be the most reliable agents in the transmission of culture and religion. Because modern economic pressures invariably change family patterns and gender roles, "womb" and "school" appear as the institutional battlefronts of fundamentalist reaction. "Womb" signifies the power to control reproduction and perpetuate the patriarchal model of family; "school" represents the entrance gate into the public sphere.

Tolerance as a critical and democratic tool

Because of cognitive, social and cultural uncertainties, fundamentalisms (directly or indirectly) support political regimes that curb tolerant

²⁹ Cf. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), pp. 14ff.

³⁰ See Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 64ff. In the case of Roman Catholic integrism, this cognitive objectivism, distaste for pluralism and legalistic outlook is illustrated by its militant opposition to issues ranging from the introduction of sexual education in schools and the distribution of condoms in state hospitals, to gay rights (civil union) and the decriminalization of abortion. The war metaphor acquires new currency, as denoted by the statements of integrist ideologues when referring to feminism, one of the disturbing "dissonances" in late modernity. According to Adolfo Castañeda, director of *Vida Humana Internacional* and a consultant for the integrist circles in Latin America, we are facing a "cultural subversion," where "gender perspectives" represent one of the most dangerous ideological weapons mustered to destroy life and family, and therefore, society. "That such views exist in the pluralistic setting of late modernity must not alarm us; what is cause for alarm is their active pursuit of political means to enforce their vision of a *Catolicismo integral*."

practices and democratic demands. Often this takes the form of an open protest against globalization and its discontents, thus coinciding with other forms of protest stemming from the left.³¹ But these strategies for change seeks to reinforce rigid cultural and institutional values. They severely question not only the shortcomings of actual democracies under empire, but also the core values that inform and sustain democratic practices in its many forms. When globalization, democracy and secularization are lumped together as a threat, when pluralism and epistemological uncertainties are seen as uniformly eroding the very fabric of human society, then violence and intolerance appear as suitable weapons in an already violent and increasingly intolerant environment.

In effect, uncertainty, pluralism, relativity, radical difference, liquid boundaries, diffuse hierarchy, soft epistemology—i.e., cultural characteristics of late modernity—represent for fundamentalism a dreadful and demonic horizon that must be avoided and fought against at all costs. While these factors appear to be easier to digest for some, fundamentalist movements—especially Islamic and evangelicals outside the US—seem to provide a consoling response to those who lose out or are subordinated, excluded and/or threatened by global cultural and economic trends.³² When differences of culture, ethnicity and religion coincide with class and/or geopolitical subordination, the terrain appears particularly fertile for fundamentalism. This monumental systemic challenge calls for new understandings of democracy and tolerance and redress of economic and social inequalities.

We cannot forget, as Hardt and Negri have noted, that these reactions are symptoms signaling a passage to a new social, political and economic arrangement. The tragedy is that fundamentalism purports to be a cure, encouraging its supporters to pursue strategies that curb democratic practices. Plurality, diversity and tolerance are seen as contributing to materialism, consumerism and the West's cultural "decadence."

Is it possible to separate the waning forces of empire from the values associated with democratic practices? Is "democracy" indissolubly tied to the cultural and political history of the West? Can the value and

³¹ Cf. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 235f.

³² Cf. William H. McNeill, "Fundamentalisms and the World of the 1990s," in Marty and Appelby, *op. cit.* (note 17), pp. 558ff. One problem of his account is that he does not pay enough attention to the systemic dimension of fundamentalism, and the class component of it. Rather, he sees it mostly as a strategy that minimizes friction in the transition from rural to urban life.

practice of tolerance be proven to be an equally effective way to redress social, cultural and economic grievances?

Tolerance has been defined in many ways depending on the social, political and cultural valuations of diversity, otherness and difference. It is not an absolute reality, but signifies different points on a continuum, different possibilities and strategies that move from more passive to more proactive understandings.³³ For example, when a moral good such as peace is set as a socially desirable goal, then tolerance may come as a resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of that ultimate goal. Tolerance is therefore instrumental in the pursuit of another moral good. This attitude may come very close to one where tolerance results from its lack of moral weight, as when a relaxed benignity stems from sheer indifference towards differences. A third possibility poses tolerance as the appropriate attitude that must follow the recognition that others have the same universal rights as we do, similar to stoic and Kantian philosophy. Tolerance, thus, is associated with the realization of universal sameness,³⁴ and becomes something that must be endured, ignored or made dependent upon a homogenizing identity.

Two other attitudes regarding tolerance are possible as proactive responses to the challenging globalized scenario. Here difference and plurality acquire a moral quality of their own, and the idea of tolerance mutates from negative or condescending forbearance to active love. The first is an attitude of curiosity toward the other that leads to respect and the willingness to learn. Here tolerance is subsumed under an openness towards that which is different, and assumes that our own stories, traditions and being are by themselves incomplete. The second embraces tolerance as sheer and unwavering acceptance of the other, as an expression of the largeness and diversity of human nature in God's evolving plan.

From certain points of view, this second attitude constitutes the ideal to which humanity is called—a veritable state of grace and love. But in a pluralistic and globalized world, this is likely to be limited to small numbers who are inspired by mythic narratives. It is impossible

³³ In what follows I pursue Walzer's suggestions, although with certain modifications. See Walzer, *op. cit.* (note 30), pp. 10ff.

³⁴ History shows different political arrangements to cope with difference and otherness—multinational empires, millet system, consociates nations, nation-states, immigrant societies, etc. But in these regimes, tolerance has always been an instrumental and external achievement, something necessary in order to enforce other ends and goods—the rule by the few, peace as controlled violence, assimilation, economic exploitation, etc. Yet, the fragility of these regimes of tolerance was the latent or overt intolerant principle inbuilt within them, an intolerance that precisely made of "tolerance" a necessity of instrumental value.

for tolerance to have the same subjective meaning for all participants in society. Moreover, a psychologically normal and sane society is one in which habitually people strongly disagree; general and homogeneous agreement is rare outside the sphere of instinctive human qualities.³⁶ But the main objection against unqualified acceptance is that it does not leave much room for a critical appraisal of the other that can squarely face the constant conflict of values and interests that marks human reality.

A Lutheran anthropology has taught us to be critical of utopianism that purports to uphold lofty ideals without recognizing the conflict with other values, interests and concerns. Life always presses difficult choices to be made in the larger and often conflictual arena of political life. Therefore tolerance, as a moral practice, can be said to occur properly when we are open to communicate and interact with people whose beliefs we do not necessarily adopt and whose practices we do not imitate—when we coexist with an otherness that remains different, alien and strange. This is tolerance as critical openness, recognizing our ongoing incompleteness and relative truth. Yet it is also a critical openness since it attempts to balance the moral weight of otherness with other values—such as freedom, peace, equality and integrity. It entails not only recognizing that the other, with their truth, will perhaps never come closer to ours, or vice versa, but also that in exercising our choices as moral beings we will often collide with other choices, interests and values.

Openness, a pluralistic epistemology and a critical acceptance of the other, delineate a sound psychological, affective and cognitive approach for practicing tolerance today. But critical openness requires that tolerance must not restrict itself to behaviors and attitudes. It must express itself in an institutional and political form. Otherwise, tolerance may only breed its own demise. Values and moral goods, encoded in the symbolic language of religious (or secular) narratives, must be made effective in social and political arrangements.

Narratives and theological construal: Steps towards a public Lutheran theology

Tolerance, therefore, is a multileveled compound of cognitive, social, institutional and psychological factors. But three dimensions must be

³⁶ See Carl Jung (ed.), *Man and his Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1975), p. 46.

addressed for the sake of a tolerant and democratic culture and social arrangement:

- As the Dutch anthropologist, Geert Hofstede, has shown, power, distance and tolerance are key dimensions structuring any society and culture through dynamics acquired in the family, school and workplace.³⁶ We cannot ignore the psychological and symbolic ground that nurtures certain views of tolerance. Background theories, social experiences, religious symbols and mythical narratives set the parameters for an axiological universe (mythical-ethical core) where tolerance and respect are paramount. Here the theme of justification is key for an attitude of inclusion in the face of the exclusion generated by fundamentalism and empire.
- In order for this to flourish, a receptive environment is necessary. A democratic horizon and regime are needed to sustain a new biopolitical network. While the patterns of genuine democracy are created in the collaborative and respectful cooperative practices from below, overarching institutional guarantees are also necessary. Building up a citizenship of service is the fundamental bulwark against empire's subtleties and fundamentalist militancy. The theme of the cross provides a crucial key for a political direction and social critique.
- Finally, the grievances and sufferings that may breed intolerant reactions must be redressed. Speaking about tolerance, therefore, implies a new world system where the services and resources involved in reproducing and expanding life are more or less equally shared and fairly exchanged. In other words, tolerance calls for new cooperative and communicative networks of labor and production. Empire in its present form must be destroyed but without falling into the fundamentalist temptation. Theologically, this involves a convergence of the cross as a critique of the empire and power, justification as a declaration of inclusiveness and the multilayered action of God in creation to provide clear direction for responsible citizenship in the world.

The first level refers to the psychological and epistemological openness that is communicated through mythical narratives and/or hermeneu-

³⁶ See Hofstede, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp. 23ff.

tics—either sacred or secular. Here the psychological lives of individuals and communities are formed. Thoughts, feelings, intention and adaptive practices are drawn from the range of belief systems in a given culture. In late modernity, religious symbols, narratives and myths are acquiring renewed vitality and interest. This places theology and ethics in a new light, for values never appear in a vacuum, independent from narratives.

We know what the human is by telling a story. A story interweaves the challenges and value conflicts that are a part of the human condition. Most of these stories have deeply religious roots—either because they refer to a reality that lies beyond the obvious one, or because they appear as eruptions or gifts coming from an unconscious and transcendental level. These stories are effective to the extent that the primary caretakers not only socialize the young in this atmosphere, but are also committed to realizing the values and prospects grafted into the myth.

Theological reflection here offers critical clues for interpreting these myths and symbols, thereby enhancing their formative powers. Notions regarding the nature of the divine, time, space, will, body, mind, animals, plants, land and the human condition, directly affect the way people situate themselves in face of otherness, plurality and difference. Thus one of the foremost challenges is to qualify and/or deconstruct theistic God symbols inherited from the Axial Age (800 BCE–200 BCE), allowing instead for a vision of transcendence that can accommodate the integrity and difference of other beliefs and conceptions of the sacred.³⁷ Again, it is not a matter of simple and uncritical acceptance, a sort of “postmodern” embrace of everything in order to hold nothing. Instead, a critical openness is possible because of the non-exclusivist clues provided by the specific convictions of one’s mythical symbolization. Values pointing toward openness and tolerance can and must be found within the integrity of one’s own narrative. This theological endeavor will be measured by its ability to reconstruct a language of freedom, equality and tolerance after deconstructing texts that once served to legitimate oppressive dominion.

The doctrine of justification by faith, Paul’s interpretation of Jesus’ gospel as it reaches people in the margins (*Cf.* 1 Cor 1:26-29), is a key component in the Lutheran mythical narrative. The doctrine, as formulated by Paul and afterwards, is a critical and central guide to understanding the biblical message regarding the relationships between

³⁷ *Cf.* Mark Helm, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 6f.

humans, creation and God. It radically redraws the boundaries of God's domain in order to include those who hitherto were considered far from it: gentiles, slaves, women, urban poor, artisans and people of doubtful religious orthodoxy. This inclusiveness is basic to all other doctrines and statements regarding Christian life. It leads to a gracious appraisal of the life of every person and creature.

In the same vein, Luther employed the language of justification to indicate what God has done for all through Christ: making us equal participants in the justice revealed in Jesus. In this case, "sinners" were included, which in the medieval scholastic practice of distinguishing between clergy and laity meant practically all of those who lived in the *saeculum*. Luther could forcefully stress justification because this was central to a radical reconception of God and God's intimate involvement with creation in general and sinners in particular. Luther's formulation of the theology of the cross, which stands at the center of his understanding of the Trinity, is what gives such power to the notion of justification in relation to the graciousness of life. In both cases, the language of justification expresses a strategy of inclusion of the destitute, the marginal and the excluded, not into the logic of what exists, but into a new redistributive community of social, spiritual and material goods.³⁸ This communicated the hidden character of God's rule, and subverted the retributive traditions where God is powerfully present in the world and to whom all creatures must submit.

In their respective ways, both Paul and Luther sought to translate into their contexts the normative dimension of Jesus' message about a merciful Father and a generous kingdom, as well as his ministry of trespassing the multiple frontiers that put human beings in an interdict, thereby robbing God of God's glory. In effect, justification encodes the multiple forms in which Jesus' ministry interweaves divine righteousness, social justice and mercy, clashing with Roman commercialization, Herodian urbanization, priestly codification and imperial monetization. His wandering among the *ptochoi* with the empowering message of the kingdom reveals the different dislocations that the empire exploited for its own benefit. The existence of so many who were excluded indicated the inherent limits and cruelty of the "honor" and social net constituted by the overlapping of pyramidal schemes of patronage proper to the Augustan era.

³⁸ See this concept developed in Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods" (1519), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 46 ff.

Jesus' proclamation of a kingdom for the nobodies and undesirables touched on the most pressing issues of the time: debt, bread, shame and impurity. Exorcisms and the healing of bodies and spirits broke the spell that bound and burdened colonial and undesirable people. When Jesus broke bread, he adopted the degraded position of women: he served, he was the hostess. With this practice, he witnessed to the righteousness God willed for creation, and communicated an egalitarian and unbrokered sharing of God's goodness and mercy. In the same vein, Jesus' crossing of different frontiers allowed individuals and groups into an immediate physical and spiritual contact with God's justice, and thus unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another. As the gospel traditions emphasize, Jesus crossed the traditional boundaries of family, honor and dishonor, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, sick and healthy, pure and impure, rural and urban, poor and rich. Bearing witness to the Father's mercy and coming reign, Jesus embodies a new space: the space of the Spirit. His body, his presence, becomes the locus for a new narrative that is not only about God, but also about how God crosses over into the bodies and minds of those who never expected to be considered as somebodies. To draw frontiers is an act of disenfranchising power; to trespass is an act of divine imagination and love.³⁹

The plots of Jesus' parables have either a good or a tragic ending. Reversals are a standard feature. In its tragic mode, this reversal signifies an exclusion of those who think that inclusion is their lot due to their righteousness. In the humorous plot, those marginalized and outcast, who had never expected to be invited, paid in full, welcomed home, or rescued, are surprised by their sudden good fortune. Jesus' parables comprise a skillful social and cultural commentary on insiders and outsiders, subverting the code that establishes the boundaries of God's companionship.⁴⁰ Outsiders were synonymous with "sinners", that is, lepers, the maimed, the blind, gentiles, Samaritans, petty tax officials, single women, destitute fishermen and misfits of every sort.

Luther himself points in this direction as he relates the reality of justification to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). In this story, with its vivid bodily references, Luther saw the nature of God's saving activity in Christ portrayed as a God who becomes our neighbor,

³⁹ See Guillermo Hansen, "On Boundaries and Bridges: Lutheran Communion and Catholicity," in Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition. LWF Documentation 47/2001* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2001), pp. 87f.

⁴⁰ See Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 192.

a God who crosses frontiers. The wounded man is reborn through the gracious help of the Samaritan (Christ). The wounded man represents humanity under the curse of the law. To be justified and to be healed are practically synonymous. Luther comments that the Christian “has begun to be justified and healed (*sanari*), like the man who was half dead (*semivivus*).”⁴¹ In the end, what this parable tells us is that in God’s domain, help or salvation comes only to those who have no reason to expect it, and who cannot resist it when it is offered.⁴² It is an act of sheer, unexpected, gracious inclusiveness. From the point of view of what Luther called an existence cursed by the law, salvation comes from that quarter from which one does not and cannot expect it.

In brief, intrinsic to the concept of justification is this tension between in- and outsiders, identity and universality, staying and crossing, local and global, particular and universal. For those who have been touched by God’s mercy, justification implies not only to be present at the many boundaries that divide humanity, but also to discern which ones need to be crossed, which ones need to be dismantled and which one’s need simply to be named and made visible. The gospel narratives about “crossing over” are a vindication of bodies that have been broken by debt, torture, enclosures, despair and abandonment—by the curse of the law. This is the particular sensitivity associated with God’s crossing movements, in which Christians participate in and out of the same love that once crossed over to them. This is why nobody is really an insider: to live by grace is the recognition that, to different degrees, we are all part of a *koinonia* of outsiders.

As any doctrine, the principle of justification is a regulative principle embedded in a cultural-linguistic grid that encourages certain attitudes, behaviors and relationships.⁴³ Reversal, inclusion, new circuits of power and affirmation, an assertion of the different that does not fit under the law, sensitivity towards the impure and shamed—these constitute basic attitudinal components encoded under justification by faith. To discern these is a sort of alchemy. It is an urgent task because empha-

⁴¹ Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 27 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 227; WA II:495. Luther shows a continuity of this image as we can see in writings from 1516 through 1546.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴³ Following Robert Jenson, we can say that the doctrine of justification functions as a “meta-linguistic” device to regulate that every speech on God and salvation must proceed in such a manner that salvation is understood not as a badge, a medal or a price, but as the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit in the person of the Son.

sizing an absolute Law or an absolute One has served as the foundation for sovereignty and dominion, forcing heterogeneous multitudes into a suffocating *unum*: One God, one People, One Leader.⁴⁴ This level is thus a key in the conformation of a spiritual and psychological openness to otherness that would be the basis for any challenge to hegemonic and intolerant views. Yet to create this climate, other variables must come into play, that is, key grievances must be institutionally and socially addressed—as mentioned below.⁴⁵

The virtue of tolerance requires not only particular religious and moral sensitivities (as derived from justification), but also a political regime or arrangement that guarantees minimal conditions, precisely because of the crisis generated by diversity. Moral and religious sensitivities are neither independent of certain narratives nor uncoupled from the political realm. This is the second level referred to above, which points to democracy as both a cultural horizon for the expression of the multitude, as well as a political and institutional arrangement that locates sovereignty in the hands of the people.

After the Cold War, the concept of democracy has been set adrift from its rigid moorings, thus providing new opportunities for its reconception.⁴⁶ In effect, the forces of globalization have posed formidable challenges, and there are strong differences regarding the compatibility and future of democracy in late modernity. Social democratic arguments claim that democracy is debilitated or threatened by globalization, especially by its economic forces and fundamentalist reactions. The reassertion of the sovereignty of nation-states, therefore, seems the best strategy in the present global system. Liberal cosmopolitan arguments stress that the forces of globalization, while not always beneficial at first, release

⁴⁴ Cf. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 329.

⁴⁵ Of course, we are not only socialized through religious narratives. School (state) and Hollywood also possess an incredible formative power. Religious views are constantly intertwined with other narratives, “background theories” and experiences, which in turn slowly modify, or manipulate, the prospective tolerant dimensions found in religious stories. These contextual aspects can never be dismissed; pluralized scenarios already constitute a powerful enticement for reviewing any sort of exclusivism and intolerance. But while for some this is a blessing in disguise since it catalyzes values and behaviors seen as central to one’s own religious outlook—as can be freedom, integrity, self-esteem, choice, diversity—for others, this same scenario is simply harrowing, cognitively and psychologically impossible to bear, thus encouraging an epic account that places the stressful conscience in the path of either a militant, apocalyptic or messianic release. In this fashion, intolerant attitudes are one of the possibilities that a confusing and pluralized semiotic context may elicit, seeking a sort of totalitarian order that promises to reduce stress by negating differences.

⁴⁶ See Hardt and Neri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 232.

the democratic potential of people precisely by promoting freedom from the rule of nation-states. Neoconservative ideologues stress that only intervention by the coalition of the willing—led by the US—can foster democratic forces and institutions. Traditionalists, on the other hand, contest both the leading role of the US and the compatibility of democracy with the cultural values of non-Westerners.⁴⁷

None of these views, however, seems sufficient for confronting the new demands for tolerance, justice, peace and democracy. Democracy is confronted with a leap of scale, where the local appears more intensively related to the global, superseding the boundaries of traditional nation-states. The present grievances against political, ecological and economic aspects, including the current state of war, are symptoms of a crisis within the present world system and a rebellion against the formal mechanisms of sovereignty and its failing system of representational decision-making processes.

Lutheranism came only rather late to valuing democracy positively. Luther was certainly no democrat, and neither were most Lutherans—especially in Germany—until well into the second half of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ But this anti-democratic stance has more to do with a patriarchal and hierarchical sociopolitical ideology than with the message of justification and the cross. Not only theologies of glory, but also ideologies of glory need to be criticized; cross and justification also entail a gospel which transversely impinges upon power and authority. This is precisely what a theology of the cross does. It should not be limited, as in classical Lutheranism, to an anthropological and soteriological dimension, but it is also a sociopolitical event that reveals, or makes visible, the use and abuse of power by empire. Jesus' cross was not an event marginal to the empire. But neither is only its underside—as in Gustavo Gutiérrez' sense. Rather, it expresses its very core, the center of empire itself, the manifestation of its raw power, of its mercilessness, its debauchery and its arrogance.

Imperial sovereignty does not exist without the negation of an "other" who refuses to be a willing participant in the spoils of exploitative machinery. The cross is a profound "No" to the "Yes" with which we tend to ordinary life. It is a verdict denouncing something that is fundamentally

⁴⁷ See *Ibid.*, pp. 233-237.

⁴⁸ See John Stumme, "Lutero no era democrata," in J. Severino Croatto *et al.*, *Democracia: una opción evangélica* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1983), pp. 19-35.

wrong with how the world is structured.⁴⁹ In other words, Golgotha is the mirror image of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, the distorted reflection of the Octavian imperial realized eschatology, the unmasking of Rome as the benefactor of all humanity.⁵⁰ The cross signals the end of empire in a dual sense: as the end of its hidden goal, violence, as well as the end of its legitimacy through God's reversal of values in which God justifies the victim of the public, legal and official imperial power—Jesus.⁵¹

This understanding of the cross is what distinguishes as well as galvanizes the dialectic of law and gospel. This cross, in turn, is the key for a contemporary Lutheran appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity and the theory of God's multidimensional action in creation (the so-called doctrine of the two kingdoms). In this vein, the very dynamic of the Trinitarian concept of God and the twofold or multiple ruling of the Triune God encourages a public and political theology firmly anchored through the cross in the world of the victims. Its thorough deconstruction of a power that stems from above postulates that another form of power is possible, a power that is enacted by breaching frontiers and vindicating the right of the powerless to live. Yet, part of the same Lutheran articulation is of a cautionary tone that protects the irreducible nature of the gospel from the necessary temporal realizations that always include a certain degree of coercion and even violence. In this eon we cannot live only from the mediations furnished by the gospel, but at the same time we cannot exercise a power that is not congruent with the drive of this same gospel. Far from falling into new dualisms, this Lutheran caution is the basis for the critique not only of any form of (fundamentalist) enthusiasm, but also of any form of imperial power which always attempts to hide the violence of its law under a putative *evangelium* of peace, "democracy," progress, or God's will.

The theology of the cross calls things as they really are,⁵² without falling into a legalism or an utopian idealization. For this theology to be publicly relevant, its metaphors must be woven with kindred values

⁴⁹ Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth Of Christianity: Discovering what Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), p. 258.

⁵⁰ See Helmut Koester, "Jesus the Victim," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111/1 (1992), pp. 3-15.

⁵¹ See John Dominic Crossan, "The Resurrection of Jesus in its Jewish Context," in *Neotestamentica* 37/1 (2003), pp. 29-57.

⁵² See thesis 21, Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation" (1518), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 53.

from other traditions. The Roussonian concept of *volonté générale*, Montesquieu's and Locke's division of powers, Kant's *sapere aude!*, Madison's constitutional check and balances, Marx's concept of social democracy, Lenin's critique of imperialism, Foucault's microphysics of power—all coalesce in a postmodern notion of radical democracy that grows as the living alternative of the multitude through the network spawned by empire. This form of democracy, which challenges the monarchical principle of empire (as in US military force), and its aristocratic principle (the G-8), emerges from within the imperial logic of late modernity. It is a new form of sovereignty based on communication, relationships and different forms of life that nonetheless are able to find and discover what they have in common. For that reason, democratic demands—although always imbued with particular and therefore self-interests—can be seen as the means through which the living God providentially holds God's creation in view of its final fulfillment. After all, this form of swarming communication—and not an hierarchical *Ordnung*—better reflects the dynamism proper to a Trinitarian God.

This Trinitarian understanding, mediated by Jesus' cross and God's justification, provides a positive valuation of the new realities set off by the new democratic networks. They communicate middle axioms where participation, tolerance and peace appear as central values for political practice. Democratic participation and tolerance thus ground the minimal conditions for a lasting peace; a peace that is not merely the absence of violence and war, but the basic precondition for reason, imagination, desire, emotions, feelings and affections. Without tolerance, without participation, but above all, without peace, no cooperation, communication, forms of life and social relationships can emerge from the incredible potential of the swarming multitude. These are the "weapons" that signal the democratic critique of arms, launching a critique of the massive means of destruction at disposal of the core powers, as well as of the equally disturbing weapons of the dispossessed, namely, the immolation of their own bodies.

As Reinhold Niebuhr once asserted, the human capacity for justice makes of democracy something possible; but its inclination to injustice makes of democracy something necessary.⁶³ The same can be said regarding tolerance. Therefore democracy should be measured both

⁶³ Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

by its capability to voice the grievances of a particular group as well as the ability to connect different kinds of groups (economic, political, human rights, education, ecology, health). These grievances give rise to a multitude through which the future of democracy is at stake. This requires a renewed democratic ethic, one which bridges ideas, hopes and affection, allowing an emotional yet also rational identification with a network of differentiated democratic power.

With this we reach a third level as to how we redress global and local grievances that are economic, social and ecological in nature—different forms of intolerance that also generate intolerant reactions. If the imperial world system cannot become more egalitarian, then the appeal of fundamentalist minorities will certainly be strengthened. Grievances and suffering bring us to the bedrock of human existence; this is the source of “local knowledge” that signals the inadequacies of ideological, social and economic systems.⁵⁴ Grievances, therefore, voice the “insurrection of subjugated knowledge” against hegemonic ideologies—which also include the different forms of fundamentalisms.⁵⁵ Of course, suffering is never without interpretation, but our bodies make of it a mediated immediacy, thus enclosing a negative universality that challenges programs and systems thriving on elusive promises and concrete duress.

Deprivation and poverty may breed anger, indignation and antagonism, but revolt arises only on the basis of “wealth”—a surplus of intelligence, vision, experience, knowledge and desire that is generated by a shift in social practices and cultural patterns. Herein lies, precisely, the inadequacy of the intolerant strategies and weapons of both empire and fundamentalisms. They recoil from the most fundamental “weapon” of all, a proactive tolerance that comes with love. Without this love, neither justice nor peace can permeate the increasing webs connecting us all on this fragile planet. It is not that fundamentalists are incapable of loving, but that they are blind to the political dimension of love. If both the forces that create economic disparities, as well as many of the fundamentalist reactions, make of violent behavior and intolerance prime weapons, then violence can only grow exponentially until it destroys us all.

This is why fundamentalism is a symptom of the disruptive forces of an unfair globalization, but not its cure. It is one of the powerful fluctua-

⁵⁴ Cf. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Crisis of Hermeneutics and Christian Theology,” in Sheila Greeve Davaney (ed.), *Theology at the End of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. 135.

⁵⁵ See Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp. 80f.

tions indicating a possible bifurcation. But so are the powerful cultural and political experiences disclosing a common bio-political desire that rests on a proactive exercise of tolerance as an affirmation of life in its multiple expressions. For that to happen, the fight for democracy must always be tied to a relentless pursuit of fairness and the eradication of poverty, which can only be reached through a serious reorientation of the disparities generated by capitalism and its global division of labor. For only when the grievances of the majority are duly heard and redressed and when we are ready to look at the grim face of asymmetrical power, will we be able to walk in the full promise and creative force of tolerance and democratic affirmation. And in the midst of its humming, also be able to discern the Triune and promising activity of our Triune God.