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Pastoral action

in a context of economic slavery and cultural apathy

topics:

- *pastoral care in a context of economic oppression*
- *the public dimension of pastoral care*
- *pastoral theology and human sciences*

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Introduction

This paper will attempt to discuss some traits of the modern economy and its pervasive influence on the shaping of contemporary cultures. The current process of economic globalization is critically identified from the perspective of the so-called emerging countries. The engagement of globalization as an economic, cultural and political process with diverse contemporary religious phenomenon is explored. Implications and applications for Pastoral Action and Pastoral Care within this encompassing cultural context provides the major focus of this study.

The pastoral-theological theory that underlies this paper comes from Practical Theology. Within this frame of reference two specific theological concepts will be emphasized: the reign of God and God's Grace. Major presuppositions of this analysis are:

- (1) Pastoral Care and Counselling of individuals and families is not adequate to address the current social and economic conditions of most of the global population;
- (2) Pastoral Care givers have a special vocational call which implies that their mission goes beyond the limits of a congregation or institution; Pastoral Care agents together with the churches can create and develop prophetic-pastoral channels to fulfill the public dimension of the ministry of care.

A. Defining the context

First of all, let me share with you the findings of recent researches by three different scholars on current economic processes. In the 5th Asian Conference on Pastoral Care and Counselling, held in 1993, in Indonesia, Lester E. J. Ruiz Krisetya, 1993, p. 8) states:

“We are living in a time of world-changing events. Historical conditions are changing at an almost unimaginable rate forcing us to redefine our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. We are witnessing, indeed, participating, not only in the acceleration of history, but in a profoundly uneven, not to mention deeply contradictory and contestatory transformation of that history. This distinctly modern experience has many names: integration and fragmentation, combined and uneven development, the transnationalization, if not globalization, of the market and of capital.”

Ruiz contends that according to different international scholars (such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Joyce Kolko, Maria Mies, Richard Flack, Cornel West), “increasingly, there exists a single, integrated global economy, oriented around a capitalist ideology. By global economy I do not refer to national economies that are linked globally. Nor do I mean a totally homogeneous, invariant and symmetrical economy. I mean, rather, an extensive and fairly complete global division of labor, with an integrated set of production, distribution, and consumption processes that are related through corporate market institutions by which I mean a complex set of interlocking enterprises that have a disproportionate amount of capital, power, and exercise a disproportionate influence on how our society is run and how our culture is shaped” (p. 8).

Ruiz continues his statement: “the global economy is characterised by both the globalization of the market as well as the regionalization of capital. It is marked by the globalization of production and the territorialization of consumption. The global economy is a process and structure marked by hierarchy and unevenness that links economies as diverse as those of the advanced capitalist states as well as those more popularly called ‘semicolonial, semifeudal or postcolonial, even post-modern’ ” (p. 89).

Richard Falk (in Ruiz, p. 9), in his article “Economic Aspects of Global Civilization; the Unmet Challenges of World Poverty” states: “These interlocking constellations of economic and political power [G7, IMF/WB, GATT] are concentrated in the North, and augmented by the Asian NICS - although its practices and effects are dispersed widely throughout the planet. So confident are the G7 countries that in 1990 they declared that ‘market-oriented constitutionalism’ was the only acceptable basis for legitimate governance.”

According to M. Douglas Meeks (1998), “the global market economy is not only full of promise, it is also full of threat. At the turn of the century there are several tectonic plates just under the surface of the global economy, several fault lines that could erupt into destructive social earthquakes: there is an increasing gap between rich and poor in developed and developing countries...; there is major migration of non-skilled peoples to the areas of brainpower industry just when knowledge has become more important than manual energy; with the end of the cold war there is no completely dominant political and economic power. International corporations become too powerful for national governments and regional trading organizations to control them; no one knows whether democracy and global market economy will be able to live together and survive together. They have different beliefs about the proper distribution of power. Democracy believes in the completely equal distribution of political power, ‘one person, one vote’. Democracy is the systematic criticism of privilege. Democracy tries to include all people in the public household and to give all persons the dignity that is owed them because of their humanity. The global market economy, on the other hand, believes it is duty of the economically fit to drive the unfit out of business and into

economic extinction. Inequalities in purchasing power are what capitalistic efficiency is all about; finally, nature itself is more and more exploited and depleted in order to be at the service of human economic goals.”

B. Pastoral analysis

...on excludent competition

Rumscheidt (1998, p. VII) affirms that “Local, national, and continental economies have been restructured within an integrated free market system. The imperatives of ‘globalization’ compel all members of the human family to secure their livelihood in competition against each other, in a global market place. A consolidation of this ‘global economy’ has been proposed by the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), negotiated secretly in closed sessions around the planet, by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).”

...on apathy

I will refer to my short article published by the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling from Düsseldorf, Germany.

In a conversations between Rene Girard and Brazilian theologians on the connections between violence and economy, Girard points to a subtle way of sacrificing people. His words: “There is another way of sacrificing people: indifference. The mimetic desire of the indifference concentrates on an obsessive object and destroys the importance of the rest” (cf. Assmann, 1991, p. 21). This apathy seems to be a major trait of many societies. It is more than a personal attitude, it is part of a cultural pattern that idolises “success” [profits] and the “winners” to the detriment of the victims [of economic exploitation]. The victims become visible in the faces of the unemployed, the two-thirds of the world that is impoverished, children, women, Indigenous persons, and others. For Girard, this is a type of sacrifice is derived from indifference (Sathler-Rosa, 1998, p. 20; cf. Assmann, 1991, p. 21).

...on ethics

Corruption at the level of politics, sports, law seems to be a hallmark of humankind in our present time. It appears in different cultural contexts, in rich and impoverished countries. It splits the so-called minorities and also contaminates the younger generation. There is also a general and broad consensus among various authors that we all live in a worldly society molded by the logic of market, which creates the social conditions for corruption of religious and ethical values. Hanna Arendt refers to our time as “gloomy times”; it means, in her own way, that we are living under a social atmosphere that creates room for the neglect of basic ethical values, such as meeting fundamental human needs (cf. Josgrilberg, 1999). We may examine ourselves vis-avis the seduction of the consumerist relation. The consumerist relation is the predominant offer in a market-oriented society. From a pastoral-theological perspective human relationships should not grow apart from the soil of gratuity. Sound and creative relationships cannot be replaced by “talk-shows”, “friendship lines”... (cf. Josgrilberg, 1999).

Rumscheidt: “In the ‘global economy’, restructuring corporate enterprises, breaking social contracts, and privatizing public services may provide jobs. But there is

no economic security. The common good is actively underdeveloped by a perverse but rational process in which privatization produces privation. The impact of this process on the real lives of real persons takes a corresponding toll on the actual faith of actual people” (p. 87).

...on our congregations

In the presentation of the book *Faith and the Future*, by Metz and Moltmann, Fiorenza says that “Metz’s critical analysis of modern society takes particular aim at the crisis of the church posed by bourgeois religion. The bourgeois virtues of autonomy, stability, competitive struggle, and performance obscure the messianic virtues of repentance, compassion, and unconditional love for the least of the brethren (xiv). “Industrialization goes hand in hand with an exponential growth of impoverishment. The technological rationality that dominates nature leads to a neglect of the Other” (xiv)

M. Douglas Meeks in his *God the Economist* states: “The worship and life of churches in our society appear isolated from the economic context. Christians have often been unaware of the ways in which economic systems have distorted Christian faith and the way in which perverted religious notions have dehumanized economic relationships. The predominant economic values have sometimes been virulently ant-Christian. Yet church people have tended to assume that the economic environment of the church had nothing to do with faith. Theologians, moreover, seem assiduously trained not to see critically the connections between God and the economy. When these convictions hold sway it is easy to make surreptitious use of Christian faith as religious legitimization of assumptions behind prevailing economic systems.”

Meeks (1998, non-published paper): “While the science called economics is certainly a modern invention, the word economy (oikos + nomos) is not; it is an ancient word that means literally the “law or management of the household”. The word “economy” is found throughout the Septuagint and the New Testament and the phrase oikonomia tou theou (the economy of God). “Economy” is central and decisive for the biblical rendering of God. Economy in its biblical meaning is about access to what it takes to live and live abundantly. The basic question of economy was, “Will everyone in the household get what it takes to live? Will everyone survive (sur-vivre = “live through”) the day and, where possible, flourish. As the arrangement that makes it possible for the household or community to live, economy was bound to community. In fact, it was clear that economy existed to serve community. Economy in the broadest sense meant the relations of human beings for the producing of the conditions of life against death. Economy was about human livelihood and human flourishing.”

...on Pastoral Theology and Human Sciences

“The specific nature of pastoral theologizing is to establish a dialogue between the data supplied by social [and human] sciences and the demands of revelation. In fact, to make pastoral action effective, socio-analytical mediations are necessary to unveil society’s mechanisms” (Sathler-Rosa, p. 32; cf Boff, 1987; Libanio, 1982, p. 25).

Clodovis Boff (1998, p. 378) says that the human sciences such as Psychology, History, Linguistics, and the Social Sciences, e. g., Economics, Sociology, Political Sciences, Anthropology take as their object of study the human being.

These sciences help us to understand the human being. Moreover, they are important auxiliary sciences to help Theology & Pastoral Care Agents to bring faith into history and culture. However, the scientific character of the sciences and their academic autonomy does not make them free from critique by theologians.

From a Practical Theology view Theology does not concern itself only with God; it scrutinizes the human processes that lead to know God and the events which happen between human beings and God, and among people in their searching for God (Sathler-Rosa, 1993, p. 36).

C. A pastoral agenda

What are some pastoral-theological principles that would underline Pastoral Care practices in the search for ways of doing Pastoral Action that could express fidelity to the Gospel, and offer meaning and relevance to our contemporary world?

Love and justice

First, we cannot forget the biblical connections between love and justice. Justice is the implementation of love. To work for justice within primary relationships as well as between communities, churches and nations is a perennial goal of all pastoral practices. As the professor of communications Clifford G. Christians (1999, p. 15) says: “Our long-term goal ought to be normative thinking on distributive justice widely shared by churches, media users and producers, teachers and students, government regulators, and engineers. A general understanding of justice is nurtured as we call one another to account within participatory media where we have a voice and a hearing.”

Resistance and solidarity

Second, to motivate congregations to become "communities of resistance and solidarity" (Sharon Welch). The congregations is a political model that invites people and communities to live abundantly.

To resist means to be in opposition to practices, legislations, policies that would work against the goal of creating a culture of peace and justice. It is a difficult and dangerous task. It brings back the messianic hope and memories. For some this stance may sound naive and foolish.

The theological principle of solidarity means an invitation to find pastoral ways of exerting mutual care among the members of the community. In addition, the community is invited to exert several ministries - or a variety of ways of doing critical pastoral care with others, nature and at the political-public level. The idea - and ideal - of solidarity is to support justice-love based relationships, i.e., opportunities and recognition of one's capabilities and fair differentiation. We are increasingly coming to realize that the role of the clergy needs to be reshaped. Instead of pointing out models or methods I would like to stress a fundamental attitude by the clergy as member of such a community. As a basic attitude I would say that this leadership should be shaped according to essential characteristics we find in Jesus ministry: compassionate, attentive, respectful. In other words, we need to be aware of Jesus' subversive and merciful power. Also, we may remember that Mary, Jesus' mother, sent him to the kitchen, in Meeks' words, to “do something about the wine”. As we look again to the story of the first miracle in

John 2, we learn that our pastoral duties are not as transcendent as they use to be. We have to deal with “down-to-earth” issues and concerns.

Ecologically anthropocentric-oriented pastoral action

Third, we need to search for ecologically anthropocentric-oriented Pastoral Action. The traditional theocentrism of many pastoral practices focuses on, for example, preaching about different interpretations and experiences of God, polemics on the history of God, indoctrination or moralist teachings. An ecologically anthropocentric-oriented Pastoral Action assumes that Jesus did not incarnate for the sake of the Divine, but for the sake of women, men, nature and the cosmos. An ecologically anthropocentric-oriented Pastoral Action would ponder human questions and human aspirations, and establish a pastoral dialogue on matters or subjects involved and correlate them with appropriate pastoral responses. It would look like a shared pilgrimage in which the Pastoral Care givers attempt to facilitate the process of self-knowledge, the search for meaning vis-a-vis the anthropological and theological concept of “Image of God”, and construct theological affirmations regarding the whole creation. This pastoral emphasis would seek to integrate “the whole-biosphere well-being perspective” as well as for “the whole-human-family well-being perspective” (Clinebell, 1996, p. 79-81). This emphasis would require attentive and continuing study of the economic-cultural-political influences on people’s lives.

Of course I am not speaking about a modern anthropocentrism that, in J. Moltmann’s words (1995, p. 188ff) “has robbed nature of its soul and made human beings unembodied subjects”. An ecologically anthropocentric-oriented pastoral care of persons, systems, world and nature “can be fitted into the conditions for life on earth and into the symbiosis, or community, of all living things in a way that is not a nostalgic and ‘alternative’ flight from industrial society, but which will reform it until it becomes ecologically endurable for the earth, and is integrated into the earthly fellowship of the living”. It means that one of our tasks as Pastoral Care givers is “to decentralize human culture and to incorporate it harmoniously into a single web with nature” (Moltmann, 1995, p. 193).

The public dimension of pastoral care

Fourth, this pastoral agenda would incorporate into our current care of individuals and families the public dimension of Pastoral Care, i.e., look for ways of witnessing prophetic and messianic concerns for the underprivileged.

As Larry Graham (1999) says:

“In the last fifteen years, pastoral theology has discovered social and cultural ‘location’, and has gone contextual and ‘public’. Through the rise of feminist and womanist consciousness family therapy and other systems analysis, intercultural conversations with pastoral caregivers around the globe, liberation and other political theologies, the ecological crisis, and greater clarity about a variety of oppressive structures, the field of pastoral theology and care have expanded its theory and practice to interpret and engage the larger world. Indeed, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, one of the leaders in the field, characterizes pastoral care and counseling as moving from exclusive focus upon ‘living human document’ to attend also to the ‘living human web’.”

I would like to offer an image that could illustrate this public dimension of Pastoral Care: joining hands with social and communitarian movements that are

struggling for a more just distribution of land, equal opportunities, and against economic slavery. I would like to offer a model to implement the public dimension of Pastoral Care. We may confront, i.e., to offer another perspective, to policy-makers, politicians, business persons, entrepreneurs in order to show the reality, or the social location, of those who are the victims of their economic decisions.

As Konrad Raiser pointed out in his address at the jubilee Consultation 1996:

“Any perception of reality, in particular of social reality, is shaped and conditioned by a perspective which reflects the social position and the interest of those who speak or act. This was brought home to me very dramatically at an ecumenical hearing about the international debt crisis. A senior representative of the World Bank, fully convinced of the validity and realism of his analysis, was confronted with the testimony of people from countries which had experienced structural adjustment programmes. They spoke about a reality which he had never seen or experienced personally. Under the impact of these testimonies, he said somewhat helplessly: ‘Could it be that we have become blind and cannot see reality?’ ”

Hope

Finally, we need to examine the past and be hope oriented. Some sociologists have adopted the concept of “analysis of conjuncture” (K. Marx, Bromide 18th) as a tool in order to understand the circumstances and historical factors which have contributed to the present shape of groups, societies, institutions. Many of our legitimate critiques of, for example, institutional ecclesiastical bodies would be much more effective if we were aware of the past factors which have shaped us – and our congregations – and tailored us into a “bourgeois religion” (see Metz and Moltmann, 1995) rather than a radical Christian religion. Hope-oriented Pastoral Action would be “utopian-oriented”, that is, reject the dictatorship of “facts”, or of the so-called “common sense”, that would adopt attitudes such as “this is the way things are... you cannot change it... this is the way we do business...”

“Hope” is one of the constitutive elements of the theological metaphor of the reign of God. The reign of God is hope-oriented.

Hope for the coming reign, in Jewish tradition, was more than merely an addition to the pious duties of the law. The hope that comes from Jesus' message is the unique spring of “knowledge and guidance for living. Whatever God demands from [men and women], and whatever he gives to [men and women] is comprehended in the message of his imminent kingdom” (Pannenberg, 1977, p. 54). The concept of hope is even more significant when it is articulated in concrete and conflictive situations. Gustavo Gutierrez discusses how Ernst Bloch has used this predominantly theological category. According to Gutierrez, Bloch has pointed out that humankind dreams of the future and hopes for it; however, Gutierrez says, “it is an active hope which subverts the existing order” (p. 216). Hope belongs to “expectation affections” together with anguish and fear (E. Bloch). The expectation affections foresee the unseen.

In Gutierrez's words:

“Hope is the most important as well as the most positive and liberating [of the expectation affections]. Hope is a daydream projected into the future; it is the ‘yet-not-conscious’... the psychic representation of that which ‘is not yet’. But this hope seeks to be clear and conscious... When that which is ‘yet-not-conscious’

becomes a conscious act, it is no longer a state of mind; it assumes a concrete utopia function, mobilizing human action in history. Hope thus emerges as the key to human existence oriented towards the future, because it transforms the present” (Gutierrez, 1971/1973, p. 216).

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