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The global socio-economic context as a basis for dialog between Churches

Indian and European Christianity in Dialogue

Ecumenical Relations between Mar Thoma and Old Catholic Churches as a Source of Intercultural Learning.

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Globalization and its Discontents

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) took place in Busan, Republic of South Korea, from the 30th October to the 8th November 2013 under the theme “God of Life lead us to justice and peace.” Just at the same time Pope Francis published a very important pastoral Exhortation with the title “*Evangelii gaudium*” that was able to attract more attention than the WCC’s decisions although there are a lot of joint agreements. So the WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism states: “We are living in a world in which faith in mammon threatens the credibility of the gospel.” (p. 53) And the Pope in Rome accused that the violation of human dignity. “When these values are threatened,” - so the Pope – “a prophetic voice must be raised.” (218) He shocked the world in his letter about the joy of the Gospel with his famous sentence: “This economy kills.” No to an economy of exclusion, No to the new idolatry of money, No to a financial system which rules rather than serves, No to the inequality which spawns violence, No to warring among ourselves. As the Pope says “This economy kills” the WCC states in its message “Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All”: “Our present stark global reality is so fraught with death and destruction that we will not have a future to speak of unless the prevailing development paradigm is radically transformed and justice and sustainability become the driving force for the economy, society, and the Earth. Time is running out.”

The November 2013 is a very important date for Church History. It starts new and great ecumenical agreement about the economic and social worldwide situation and its impacts for the Churches’ mission. The Churches agree in analysis, descriptions of the current world and in ecclesiological and ethical answers. Long before the Churches are unified they have a joint agreement about disaster of the world economy and are able to formulate a joint answer to the crucial question about the mission of the Church in the era of disastrous global capitalisms. And this is very urgent, because it is about the future of God’s creation and life on this planet. The Pope complains, that “the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root.” And the WCC states: The current economic system is an „ unjust system “. The Pope shared this description in his Encyclical “*Laudato si*”: “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (139) Large parts of the world’s population are excluded from the joint produced wealth according to the systematic logic and not by an incident. What is being discussed here has only a limited impact on distribution issues. Rather, it becomes clear that our entire civilization and economy are structurally not sustainable and therefore not justifiable. There is a great consensus among all churches around the world, that the deadly and destructive dynamism of capitalism must be overcome. It is a civilization whose nature and logic risks life on this globe. The structural causes must be combated from the root.

This analysis gets approval from a side that you would not expect. For business and political leaders gathered in the Swiss Alps town of Davos for this year’s World Economic Forum, globalization is a cause for some anxiety. The economic and political leaders draw attention to the failed

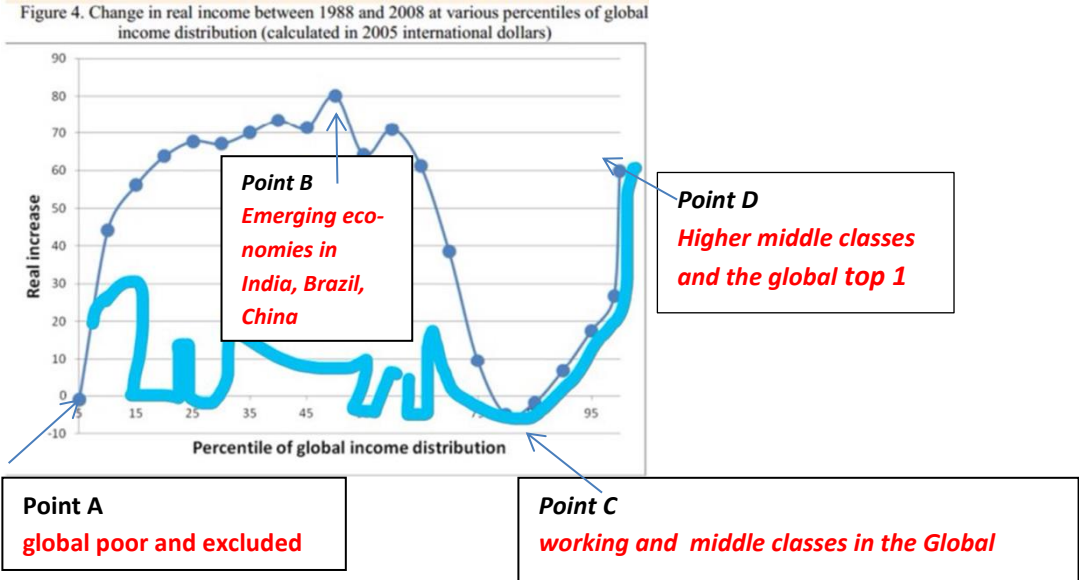
globalization in a discussion-forum held about “Rebellion of the Forgotten”. They claimed that globalization seems to be become a negatively connoted term.

The defenders of globalization recur on the successes. They are right to cite the last UN-Report on the Global Millennium Goals which states that unprecedented efforts have resulted in profound achievements: Extreme poverty has declined significantly over the last two decades. Globally, the number of people living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half. The proportion of undernourished people in the developing regions has fallen by almost half since 1990. On the other hand globalization makes a gap between winners and losers. Only few days before the Davos Forum the British helping organization “Oxfam” published its new report with the title “An Economy for the 99%”. The report summarizes:

- The richest 1% of the world population owns more wealth than the rest of the planet.
- Eight men now own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world.¹

The Oxfam report summarized: “Our economy must stop excessively rewarding those at the top and start working for all people.” As President Obama told the UN General Assembly in his departing speech in September 2016: „A world where 1% of humanity controls as much wealth as the bottom 99% will never be stable.“

A new study from the former economist of the World Bank Branko Milanovic confirms the Pope and the WCC. He illustrated the development between 1988 and 2008 with the picture of an elephant. He has divided the world population into groups by means of their income. These are, starting with the poorest, abolished on the horizontal x-axis. Then, on the vertical y-axis, the prosperity of these groups was developed between 1988 and 2008.



¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-99>

The elephant shows three different developments:

1. The population up to 45 of the world population had an increasing income. Those who are between point A and B have gained income even more in the last 20 years are the ones in the 'new global middle'. These are mainly people in Brazil, India and China. They are the winner of globalization.
2. The elephant's forehead and the trunk show the decreasing income of the population at the middle from point B down to the point C. This is the worker class or the middle class in the global North, especially in America, Great Britain and Germany. They are the loser of globalization. The biggest losers are worldwide the very poorest at the bottom of the society (point A) and the workers and the middle classes in the Global North between point B and point C. This is not only a problem of salary or income. This development indicates the end of the compromise between capitalism, social welfare and democracy. The effects are to be seen in the election of President Trump or the Brexit in Great Britain. The Washington Post asked about this trend on March 4, 2016: "Is this the end of the West we know it?" The British working poor rebelled with the Brexit against the globalization that had made them losers.
3. The point D shows the global winner: the world's top 1% of income 'earners' have seen their incomes rise by 60% since 1988. They form a global plutocracy.

The industrial workers in the US are the greatest losers. Since 1980 companies as General Motors, Ford or Chrysler cut two from five working places. However, the unemployed automobile builder little benefit from cheaper T-shirt. Often borders and globalization are used as a chiffre for a situation in that social politics are no longer possible. So in Great Britain, The Netherlands, in Germany and other European countries the populism is increasing. The stranger will be suspiciously responsible.

"Capital in the Twenty-First Century" is a 2013 important book by French economist Thomas Piketty. The book's central thesis is that when the rate of return on capital is greater than the rate of economic growth over the long term, the result is concentration of wealth, and this unequal distribution of wealth causes social and economic instability. He argues that the world today is returning towards "patrimonial capitalism": the power of this economic class is increasing, threatening to create an oligarchy. The world is on a way into a global plutocracy. Crony capitalism benefits the rich, the people who own and run these corporations, at the expense of the common good and of poverty reduction. The dire effects of this kind of neoliberal globalization are targeting Europe in a manner the Global South has known for decades. The globalization is returning back to the Global North.

Forced migration and flight in the wake of globalization

The last annual report of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), stated the record level of 65.3 million displaced. All the migrants have one common concern: They are fleeing from violence, war, misery, hunger, unemployment, climate disaster. They have one reason: They cannot stay at home. For a long time Europe has been shielded from this situation. So it was possible to avoid seeing the misery of millions of people who were fleeing from war, hunger, poverty or climate change. The so called refugee crisis is no refugee crisis but a crisis of the current worldwide capitalism as Pope Francis impressively describes:

"It is the tip of an iceberg. These poor people are fleeing war, hunger, but that is the tip of the iceberg. Because underneath that is the cause; and the cause is a bad and unjust socio-economic system, in everything, in the world – speaking of the environmental problem –, in the socioeconomic society, in politics, the person always has to be in the center. That is the dominant economic system nowadays; it has removed the person from the center, plac-

ing the god money in its place, the idol of fashion. There are statistics ... that 17% of the world's population has 80% of the wealth.”²

The refugee crisis not a crisis about refugees, it is a crisis of the impacts of globalization. The great poorer part of the world is asking the small richer part: Why is the one part of the world population poor and the other rich? The migrants are asking the question of justice as a global social question. It is not right to label migrants and refugees not as only victims; they are constructors of a globalization from below against a globalization from above. What the migrants and refugees are doing is the proclamation and appropriation of their human right to a decent life.

Now the migrants are bringing the message of the failed promises of globalization home to the Global North. Globalization is not a win-win-situation but a zero-sum-game with winners and losers. The reaction of this failed promise of globalization from above is a counter globalization from below in the form of migration. The gains from globalization are not evenly distributed. What the Global North has done to the Global South now backfires on the Global North.

An analysis of the economic elements of capitalism is not enough, for the totalitarianism of the economy must be analyzed in terms of its effects on the whole of life and the seemingly untouched value adjustments. Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Council of Churches add one aspect of criticism of current globalization that not often is made. They address the dominant classes in the Global North and Global South directly as responsible for the disastrous fashion of the world. The WCC says in his document “Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All“.

“These life-destroying values have slowly crept in to dominate today’s structures and lead to lifestyles that fundamentally defy the regenerative limits of the Earth and the rights of human beings and other forms of life. Therefore, the crisis has deep moral and existential dimensions. The challenges that are posed are not first and foremost technological and financial, but ethical and spiritual. “

Pope Francis accuses in a similar way: “To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed.” (EG 54)

The present migrant movements are a response to the conflicts invoked by this mode of life and its global generalization. The migrants try not only to secure their survival, but also want to take part in the prosperity of which up to now they only had to bear the impacts.

For the European countries the worldwide brain drain or care drain is very comfortably. Obispo Maximo Ramento of the Philippian Sister Church Iglesia Filipina Independiente put the question in his homily delivered at the Lambeth Conference in London in 1998. Let us listen what he said: “But why is it that the country is undeveloped and children die of curable diseases like pneumonia and diarrhea? Because our skilled laborers are exported to the Middle East and our professionals like doctors and nurses are either in the US or in England. We spent million dollars to send to school but they serve here in England. Sometimes we think that the poor Filipinos subsidize your education here in England.”³

The Churches and Bishop Ramento complain the globalized western life-style. They complaint what sociologists as the Austrian Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen call an „imperial mode of living“.⁴ It is a mode of living that is deeply embedded in the everyday life of the upper and middle classes in the rich countries, is marketed worldwide and propagated as a guiding culture. This mode of living is imperial because it is based on the fact that the products are produced by cheap

² <http://www.lastampa.it/2015/09/14/vaticaninsider/eng/the-vatican/francis-refugees-are-the-tip-of-the-iceberg-europe-must-welcome-them-Z588xG5rurwqC8oz6YFaJL/pagina.html>

³ Franz Segbers and Peter-Ben Smit (Ed.), Catholicity in Times of Globalisation. Remembering Alberto Ramento, Martyred Bishop of Workers and Peasants, Lucerne 2011: 71.

⁴ <https://www.degrowth.de/de/2017/02/no-degrowth-without-climate-justice/>

labor and cheap resources elsewhere, in order to maintain excessive consumption in the global North and the rising middle classes in the Global South. The true prize will be paid elsewhere in the sweat shops or in the ecological devastation of resources in the Global South. The imperial way of life produces suffering of people and destruction of the nature. During the process of globalization the imperial mode of living was expanded globally. In the course of the economic rise of emerging markets in Brazil, China or India, the middle and upper classes are living the high attractive and imperial way of life that is part of the mode of living in the Global North. But the problem is that the imperial mode of living is based on exclusivity. It can only function if not all people are practicing that mode of living.

Two different kinds of globalization are in conflict with each other. There is the globalization as a kind of universal outspreading of consciousness of humanity and solidarity. Different from that is the neoliberal project of globalization. It is a political strategy that does not pursue the aim to create a fair world for all but to expand the capitalism and the market. It has created a deep gap between the poor and the rich. This globalization failed and the impacts are arriving in the Global North now. The losers are now knocking at the door and are confronting the Global North with the impacts of their concept of globalization. The European borders as the border between USA and Mexico are secured with walls. How this planet can become a house for all creation?

Theological Approaches to Globalization

The intention expressed by the Busan Assembly was to initiate a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace exactly on those issues. The Central Committee described the issue of the pilgrimage: “The planet sits at the brink of disaster and life itself is imperiled. A stumbling global economy leaves millions of people idle and exacerbates inequality and poverty in both North and South.” (July 8, 2014) The WCC understands the pilgrimage as journeying together in addressing common concerns, such as poverty, inequality. Its aim is to inspire the churches to ground their dialogues with questions about the economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges that confront the churches in a time of global crises. That highlights the issues of the dialogue between the Churches.

Globalization is not simply an economic issue. It is a cultural, political, ethical and theological issue. In my last point I would like to highlight how the Church can respond to the neoliberal globalization. My thesis is that catholicity provides a particular access. Catholicity is a way that responds to socio-ethical issues not only as an ethical challenge but theologically and ecclesiologically.

There are three different accesses to respond. The first one is the Lutheran respond. The Lutheran World Federation explores the significance of the church as communion. The second approach is the Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 2004. It declares that matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political and moral issues but matters of confession.

The concept of Catholicity is a third respond to the issue of globalization. The starting point is the understanding of the Church itself: The Church is catholic. Globalization challenges the Church in a particular way, because Catholicity combines the local and the global. In its quantitative understanding, catholicity focuses on the “universality” of the church. In its qualitative understanding, catholicity points to the quality of the life of the church catholic. Ignatius used the term “catholic” in a further very important way that unfortunately is often forgotten. Referring to some heretical people he wrote: “They have no regard for love; no care for the widow, or the orphan, or the oppressed; of the bond, or of the free; of the hungry, or of the thirsty.” The heretic people can be seen in the fact that they don’t have any regard for the widow, the orphan, the hungry, or the thirsty. But the true catholic faith is in the very beginning not only defined by the quantitative aspect, but by solidarity and the right practice for the poor too. The compassion with the poor is a touchstone for catholicity.

The Philippine Iglesia Filipina Independiente, the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, the Episcopal Church, and the Church of Sweden as observer made a consultation about catholicity and globalization that take place between 2006 and 2008 and in a second term in 2014 and 2016. I would like to pay attention to the last Conference on Catholicity and Globalization in Manila in 2016. Members of Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, Old catholic Churches, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and the Lutheran Church of Sweden formulated a joint statement on “Catholicity as witness to God’s Justice and Peace in a Globalized World” in the Conference. They reformulated an understanding on liberating Catholicity:

“In the Philippines, the term Catholicity was misused historically by the colonizers of the past as they waged wars against the people. Christians have rediscovered the liberating power of Catholicity within its larger and reformed post-colonial understanding, unfolded within the ecumenical movement, and offering a viable alternative to current experiences of globalization. ... In the face of the adverse and destructive impact of globalization, the Church must be a Church with the people in their struggle for better living conditions.... It is imperative for the Church to be with the people and journey with them in the arduous but fulfilling pilgrimage of justice and peace. And it is only then that Catholicity – a truly liberating Catholicity – may fully be realized.”

Catholicity is affected by colonialism and imperialism. In history catholicity was part of the colonial conquest side by side with imperial powers. The non-Roman but catholic Churches who are arisen against the imperial might can offer a particular post-colonial notion of “Catholicity”. Catholicity is not only about the connectedness of global and local. It offers space for cultural differences. In a second passage you can read:

“The experience of globalization is often that the universal overwhelms and homogenizes the local. Human beings become commodified as migrants separated from family and community. The contrasting hope of catholicity is that the authentic experience of relationship and solidarity in local community reveals the life-giving power of God for all, and shapes the whole world’s experience of that abundant life which Christ came to give (John 10.10). The experience of this abundant life is not meant to be delayed, but is an urgent call on the world to be changed so that all people may enjoy fairly the fruits of a good creation.”

The crucial point is: Catholicity brings ethics and ecclesiology together. The ethical issues are at first not an ethical obligation for the Church but a reality that derives from its Church being. The pilgrimage for justice and peace or in general terms: ethical issues are primarily not a moral or political obligation but that what the Church makes the Church before acting. Church has no mission. Church is mission. The participation in God’s mission, the *missio Dei*, is essentially for the Church. Catholicity can be understood as a quest for an alternative globalisation that is not about the globalization of goods and money, but about a different globalization of the rights of human beings. Therefore the Church is at its heart when it is dealing about life and hope for this world full of death and destruction.

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