

José Molina REYES

Globalisation: a Latin-American perspective

“Globalisation” is usually presented as an anonymous force, strange, incomprehensible and unpredictable. It is a powerful force that should be tamed or harness. For a person who lived under the Soviet regime, this definition evokes a lot of fears, equipped by the Soviet ideology and based on the Marxist conception of “conflict”.

Terms such as “class of bourgeoisie”, “capitalistic world”, “enemies of working class” are no more concrete or abstract constructs than “g l o b a l i s a t i o n”.

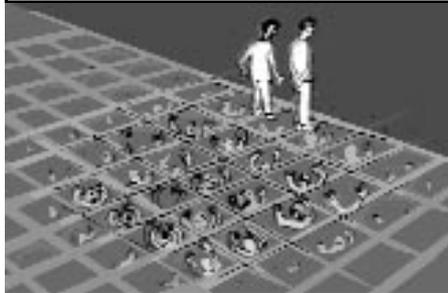
“Globalisation” is also a sign or a stimulus to divide the world into two: the globalised world and the not-yet-globalised; states which make globalisation and which undergo it; states which profit from globalisation and those which are exploited. In the post cold war world “globalisation” has taken the role of the only criterion for a new division.

CHOICE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Does “globalisation” have its limits? Today everyone says that globalisation is “limitless”, it influences everybody and everything; that even the Antarctic is globalised, and that we cannot escape it. But the truth is that the human being as a rational being, and also as a creature of God cannot be “globalised”. One is personally free to act and takes responsibility for one’s deeds. As a creature, one has no need to create one’s identity, one only has to find one’s proper place in the changing world.

It can be stated now that “globalisation” does not exist. The word “globalisation” is only a very imperfect theoretical construct; in most cases a quite erroneous one. Today we could only claim for “more globalisation”. The “totally globalised” world would give no opportunity to divide it into two big “conflicting” parts and would present one more hope for an even more peaceful and friendly life.

• Nerija PUTINAITE is a doctor of philosophy, a research-fellow in the Lithuanian Institute for Philosophy and Sociology; her main interests being Immanuel Kant’s practical philosophy and contemporary ethics. She is a member of the Lithuanian SCM.



With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the polarisation, which had existed in the world, came to an end, or at least seemingly came to an end. The economic model known as liberal capitalism has been imposed to the world. This strengthening of neoliberalism has been especially harmful in Latin America.

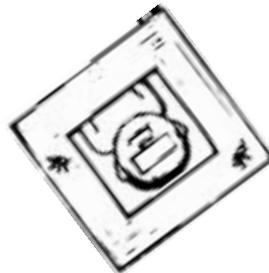
THE INVISIBLE HAND NO ONE SEES

Although some growth at macroeconomic level has been attained, the social costs, however, have been disastrous as numbers of the

World Bank prove: in one of its reports the World Bank estimates that 34% of Latin America’s population lives in poverty. According to the same report this number is expected to grow. This is the situation we are currently facing in the region.

The process known as globalisation of economy has caused an enormous gap between the social classes on the continent. Those who talk about the advantages of this model (transfer of technology, free trade, etc.) do not realize that it is only certain privileged sectors of our societies who have access to these advantages. The total liberalization of markets (as a result of the World Trade Organization’s foundation) has created terribly unjust situations for the small producers who - deprived of state incentives (another neoliberal policy) - cannot compete with the great multinationals. Adam SMITH and his “invisible hand” theory are the ones who support the whole economic doctrine behind globalisation.

This situation make us raise various questions: Do the Latin-American countries, and “Third World” countries in general, gain any benefit at all in this process? Or are we possibly just seen as an enormous market for others? Does a real concern for social issues exist behind “globalization”? To us the answer is clear: the only interest existing here is of economic nature and



this excludes social investment and concern for the environment (as an example we can remember the US refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol).

GLOBAL IMPERIALISM

Nobel prize winner Adolfo Pérez ESQUIVEL said, in a conference given some time ago, that there is no difference between what we before called imperialism and what we now call globalisation. There is something of truth in this, taking into account, however, that the actors have changed. What we know as imperialism was a strategy to impose policies of the US-State Department in our region during the last decades. In the globalisation process, on the contrary, the big companies and corporations are the protagonists, supported by the economic policies implemented by the governments of each country.

ADJUSTMENT TO PAY FOREIGN DEBTS

We have reached the peak of seeing how political leaders, apparently "social democrats", have laid their hands on the neoliberal model as a means to achieve an economic increase. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) with its "structural adjustment programs", whose only aim is to assure the repayment of the external debt, is yet another instrument of this politics. As the Latin American Jesuit Provincials emphasized in a document on neoliberalism published in 1996, the payment of the foreign debts "forces states to drastically cut social investment". It is what prevents an improvement of the living conditions of our societies' most marginalised sectors.

THE HOMOGENISATION OF CONSUMPTION: MCDONALDISATION

This phenomenon is not only economic. We also have a "globalisation of culture" or, as Eduardo GALEANO calls it, a "McDonaldisation". As a part of the interrelation of global markets, a global consumption culture has been created. The result has been an homogenisation of cultures, fashion and ways of dressing. The Anglo-Saxon culture has been imposed in the region, especially among the younger generation. Under the pretext of the "material progress" we have been invaded by perspectives and lifestyles which are completely strange to our reality. Peoples that do not adhere to this stream, like Cuba, have been condemned to a brutal isolation.

WORLDWIDE RESISTANCE

The same has happened to aboriginal peoples in Latin America, who can be overlooked by the marketplace logic as long as they are not consumers. On the other hand, we also have worldwide resistance movements who struggle against this "New Order", like the protests in Seattle, the conferences promoted by the Peoples' Global Action movement, or the Zapatist National Liberation Army in Mexico.

Facing this complex phenomenon, what is the challenge for us as young Christians in Latin-America?

We cannot allow that our identity is taken away from us. It is our duty to denounce this inhuman economic model which deprives the poor of the minimum needed for human beings to lead a life in dignity.

SOLIDARITY GLOBALISATION

We do not believe that the globalisation process is irreversible as do some prophets of neoliberalism (and some its critics, like Fernando Henrique CARDOSO). We rather think that we have to impose a new model, a "solidarity globalisation", which makes sure a fairer distribution of wealth and which allows aborigines and Negro people and all those excluded in our region to take part. As it was stated in the WCC Consultation on Globalisation in Fiji in August 2001: our prophetic task is to "oppose to the distortions of economic globalisation".

To conclude, I would like to quote Pope JOHN PAUL II who said in his encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*: "We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called "Real Socialism" leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization. It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development."

• José Molina REYES is from the Latin American Council of Churches' Youth Program, working in Quito, Ecuador.

