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Alter-globalist Latin American Religious Responses to Economic Globalization

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Religious voices have become a recurring element of public discourse lately in many parts of the world. Valued for their contributions, faced with a condescending attitude reserved for idealistic thinking, or opposed for their tendency toward unwarranted or uncompromising claims to truth, those religious voices are increasingly heard. In some cases, such as initiatives taken by organisms of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, they are sought after as authentic representatives of local constituencies around the world. An area where they had not been particularly active, or welcome, is that of economic debates and economic policy making. But this has significantly changed from the early 1990s onwards. This can be a recent development for certain religious groups, but the perceived public visibility of such religious voices is more the effect of a deliberate ignorance or indifference toward them than an actual return.

Old or new, there are religious discourses on the economy in the public square. And some of them have been very keen to articulate religious responses to the challenges of globalization, particularly in the context of anti- or alter-globalist discourses. Such religious discourses can come from different directions. Some may be purely reactive to uprooting and loss of hope brought about by the downside of the movements of financial capital and the alignment of governments in many parts of the world with the dictations of the market. Some may also challenge globalization from a more proactive way. One of the most remarkable developments in this case has been the emergence of religious agency in the wake of heightened discontent with globalization following street demonstrations against the WTO, in Seattle, in 1999. A major expression of such disaffection has been the World Social Forum1. But it is by no means the main or only site of religious activism in relation to economic global issues (cf. Mayo, 2005; MacDonald, 2006). My contention is that experiments like the World Social Forum

are actually the tip of the iceberg of myriad small and big initiatives that have for some time enlisted but also been shaped by religious organizations.

This paper will analyze a regional fraction of such endeavours, namely some Latin American Christian organizations which have played an active part in connecting notions of solidarity, cooperative forms of economic production, trade and consumption to a critical – but not sectarian – view of capitalism and a search for alternative forms of globalization. The tensions between ethical, political and religious discourses will be explored with relation to those initiatives as a means to shed some light on the requirements of whatever could be the contours of a contemporary virtuous economy.

In arguing this case, two basic assumptions and one statement of fact should be spelled out. First, the assumptions:

a) there is no single form and theory of globalization, but for this very reason whatever we say it "is" is inextricably a statement on what it "should be". Hence, description is achieved through a selective process which neither comes by chance nor is neutral. Any description of globalization has to do with normative for a series of reflections by militants and official statements relating to the World Social Forum, cf. Sen et al., 2004.

engagements, standpoints, both those we start with (our own agendas and traditions) and those we aim at. Therefore, in seeking to probe the modes of relating to globalization or to contribute to coupling it with virtuous modalities of economic life, we must spell out our acknowledgement of these points. This is about epistemological assumptions, but it is also about values and commitments that at the very least distinguish us from others.

b) Also, we need to be clear that it is misleading to oppose virtue or the acknowledgement of values on our side, and lack of virtue or "pure" self-interest on the other side. In what we are about to explore, it should be clear that the debate on how to bring the (capitalist) economy in line with values – something religious discourse can be an example of – is a struggle for *what definition of virtue should prevail*, not its location on one single side along polarised battle-lines. This is, therefore, an ethico-political struggle which may (or may not) transform the ways in which we think of the economy and act as economic agents. The main thrust for this line of argument, in fact, goes beyond a consideration of whether there should be *more* virtues and values in the economy. I assume there always are, decisively so. The problem is which values. What we

need is to work out an assemblage of operations and coalitions to enact *a different game*, through connecting the crucial intervening role of social location2 in the conformation and effectiveness of economic arrangements to the practical articulation of various kinds of political “friends”3.

This understanding can be found in William Connolly's recent assessment of the connections between capitalism and Christianity in the US. He says,

[C]apitalism – and every political economy – always has an ethos embedded in it. It is never disembedded. An urgent need today is to reload the ethos of investment, consumption, work, and state priorities. (2008:xiii)

By spirituality I mean individual and collective dispositions to judgement and action that have some degree of independence from the formal creeds or beliefs of which they are a part. (...)

A large cultural constellation can also emphasize one spirituality over another. I call a shared spirituality an ethos. An ethos of engagement is a set of constituency dispositions that informs the shape and tone of its relations with others. And it is more than shared: once a few elements are in place, the parties act upon each other through church assemblies, neighbourhood gossip, TV programs, electoral campaigns, casual sports talk, films, and so on, to amplify, dampen, or modulate that ethos. (...) *E+very institutional practice – including economic practices – has an ethos of some sort embedded in its institutions. The institutions would collapse into a clunking hulk if the ethos were pulled off. Of course the ethos might display considerable ambivalence, uncertainty, and points of contestation (Idem:2).

Here we can find all the aspects introduced above – ethos (hence, values, dispositions and actions) embedded in economic practices and institutions; and agonism between different shared spiritualities, including economic ones, highlighting their mutual contestation and the political moves they are permanently entangled in4. This is important because no discourse on what relates capitalism, globalization,

2 By social location I mean identity-forming features and organizational networks that define people's modes of belonging and chart the coordinates of their socio-economic practices. Though referred to the latter, such positionalities not only emerge politically but are also sites of politicisation, no matter how strictly “a-political” they may seem in relation to the conventional sites of politics.

3 I'm obviously alluding here to friendship as a political-strategic category, as it has been elaborated by Carl Schmitt or Jacques Derrida.

4 This applies even to professional economists who would apparently be far removed from any kind of consideration

values, morality, and faith will secure an inch's foothold in its struggle for acceptance or compliance (in a word, hegemony) by merely “preaching” values or “ raising awareness” towards the bad effects of not having them.

A second formulation, now coming from a specifically religious ethical argument, is offered by Rebecca Peters5. For her,

“*d+iffering perspectives on globalization exist because people experience the world in different ways. Consequently, social location shapes the way that people approach the topic of globalization and causes them to reflect differently on their obligations, values, and decisions. In many ways the different theoretical standpoints addressed in this study represent not just four different viewpoints and voices, but four manifestly different social worlds that are marked and separated by particular values, some of which may be irreconcilable” (Idem:7)6.

In her case, these standpoints are thus named: neoliberal, development, earthist and postcolonial (Idem:10). The first two tend to uphold a positive view of globalization, while the latter two emerge as critiques of globalization. But Peters is far from approaching these positions from a no-place. She has her own agenda, in line with her understanding of the stakes. According to her normative framing of the debate: “our moral task is to ensure that globalization proceeds in ways that honour creation and life and that any theory of globalization ought to be grounded in values that prioritize a democratized understanding of power, encourage care for the planet, and enhance the social well-being of people” (Idem:5). These would stem from the “desire to pursue genuine critical social transformation” (Idem:7). Such understanding both enacts a different standpoint and requires a shift from the dominant logic of globalization (Idem:8).

In relation to such assumptions, I will also argue that they can be demonstrated to guide both the self- awareness of particular religious actors in our world, and their concrete actions to bring about a different articulation (Connolly would call it, assemblage) of religion and economic globalization. This will be exemplified through a Latin American form of alter-globalism springing entirely from within the religious field. Articulated around the syntagm “faith and economy” this discourse draws from both ecumenical Protestant and liberationist sources to find concrete forms of expression in various civil society networks and social movements since the early 1990s. We will see how.

On agency, faith and globalization

Before moving into our case details, there are two steps I still need to take. One will stress the fact that “between” values and actions something must take place. Although they are *formally* always embedded, there is also more than one way of bringing about their articulation, and each way bends and twists both

of religious dimensions in the functioning of the economy. For an assessment of how economists' discourse is full of values, and unstated or unreflective moral assumptions, see Nelson, 2010:72-74, 284-86. 5 I do not quite agree with the unproblematised way in which she invokes postmodernism into her analysis (cf. Peters, 2004:4-6), but still value a good deal of her argument. 6 Contrary to Peters, I maintain that these differences are not merely, perhaps not even mainly, epistemological in nature. Rather, they involve the triple register of identity – intellectual, affective, and practically-oriented – and therefore constitute difference as an ethico-political positionality.

sides of the equation, producing different if not opposing results. In other words, “between” those two constitutive dimensions of practices and institutions, values and actions, we need to locate an articulating function, an agency. Of course this is not the whole story, because all three aspects of this complex take their specific purchase and find their particular mode of articulation within a set of practices and institutions that are not simply a surrounding context. They prompt, induce, allow, constrain and are themselves object of attempted change or destruction through new value-action ensembles. The second move is an illustration of this point, meant to draw the attention to the fact that the terrain where an ethos of engagement (i.e., a shared spirituality in act) operates is never void, but is the object of contestation. In this case, I will point to an alternative form of religious economic ethos which is today fully at home in the dominant globalization discourse.

The need for agency does not predetermine who or what will play that role. But whoever or whatever does it will be decisive in shaping an ethos. Peters's argument (cf. 2004) corroborates this view of agency. This is on one hand a theoretico-political affirmation that there are alternative ways of constructing or morphing globalization. On the other hand, it is a call to responsibility. If we are not purely or entirely determined by forces beyond our comprehension and control, then what direction these forces take or lead to is in part a result of various forms of agency. I would add: responsibility, however, is not a self-referential, voluntaristic disposition. It takes place in a relational context and depends as much on those who will benefit from a responsible stand as on those who are challenged or interpellated by it. Agency, as responsibility, therefore, is divided between a singular decision and a response to the other. As we will see

below, this complex dynamics of embedded values, institutional life, and agency-amenable practices evinces distinct routes in economic life, which do not come without strife. The economy is a political field.

In the early 1990s, Latin America began its experience of neoliberal globalization. One by one, those countries joined the doxa that the times of state "interventionism" (developmentalism, state regulation of labour and markets, social legislation, social spending, etc.) were over and their deep economic and social troubles could be dealt with by full integration to the global market. The highly unequal, highly indebted, high-inflation and fragile Latin American economies were offered help in exchange for market freedom, deregulation of domestic financial markets and thus borrowed money from the IMF, the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank, conditioned upon the adoption of "structural adjustment" packages. Privatisation, deregulation and massive capture of economic and formerly public organizational assets by global investors dramatically reconfigured the economic and juridico-political framework of state-society relations. It didn't take very long, though, for the promises to reveal themselves as a continuation of the overall regional and indeed Western capitalist pattern of development-cum-inequality. Social exclusion soared, economic instability was amplified by the vulnerabilities now accrued through interdependence to global markets, the generalisation of the market logic to every corner of social life deeply affected the social bond. Violence and corruption became even more pronounced. Measured by the market values of competition, investment, profit, and efficiency, social life became significantly commodified. Disdain and indifference towards losers and misfits, the argument that blamed their incompetence, lack of qualifications or conformism and called them to be proactive in finding the way out of their misfortunes, added to this "banalisation of social injustice" (Christophe Dejours).

This all coincides with the gradual return to democratic rule after years of military-controlled and largely failed authoritarian modernisation. Promises of political freedom, participation and well-being were associated with democratisation. An emerging, self-assertive civil society and a proliferation of social movements were an integral part in this reconstruction of democracy, soon becoming crucial elements in the steering of social change. The redressing of persistent inequalities, racism, gender domination, environmental depletion, and urban violence, among other critical problems, was strongly associated with the return to democracy. It doesn't take much to realise the mismatch of the two processes, and to imagine the tensions and clashes such disparate projects created within Latin American social formations. Any observer of the Brazilian 1998 financial crisis and the Argentinean 2001 turmoils could easily spot the fault- lines of such

seismic cartographies.

This context represented both a defeat and a new opportunity to forms of religious discourse that had thrived in the continent throughout the previous two decades. Liberation theology among Catholics and ecumenical Protestants, and a discrete emergence of some sort of radical evangelicalism, had thrived on the rejection of military dictatorships as proxies for capitalism. They called Latin American Christians to break with political absenteeism or active condoning of dictatorships, and to respond faithfully to the Gospel message – as read by those radical religious movements – in committing to social transformation. For a while they were suddenly at a loss *vis-à-vis* the crisis of socialism in Eastern Europe and Russia, and the simultaneous advances of neoliberalism and economic globalization. Their growing impact within the religious field throughout the 1970s and 1980s was eclipsed by general apathy and demobilisation, as neoliberal policies were gradually imposed. Internally, the rapid growth of Pentecostalism, particularly its prosperity-gospel variant, made significant inroads into the constituencies formerly attracted to the discourses of grassroots, militant Christianity.

This serious challenge was responded to in ways that, however *ad hoc* and transitional (there is no space to pursue this point here), rendered more nuanced both liberation theology's and radical evangelicalism's original critical stances. A growing recognition developed about the relevance of culture and identity as irreplaceable dimensions of social life. Accordingly, any practice came to be described as a combination of material and symbolic elements. Therefore, how people signify their practices is a constitutive dimension of these and economic practices are just as much cultural (and political) as material. Thus, the deeply politicised tone of discourse in the seventies and eighties made room for a richer consideration and inclusion of spiritual and ethical motifs. This formed the basis for a regrouping of those who remained attracted or committed to “left-wing religion”, and one of the outcomes of the process was a renewed discourse on faith and globalization through a critique of neoliberalism: the “faith and economy” argument7. Together with the socio-political alter-globalist discourse that emerged a decade later, this argument was articulated to the latter's “another world is possible” motto.

Nevertheless, and here my second move finds its place, the liberationists and radical evangelicals then had to confront a powerful enemy within. For throughout the 1990s, emerging from the fringes of the growing Pentecostal movement as a distinctive variation, a religious counterpart of neoliberalism sprang forth in full force: the prosperity gospel. Originally bred and brewed in US conservative

evangelical circles but reworked to as to speak to the poor, the theology of prosperity provided an intriguing and highly successful “libertarian” alternative to the costly activism associated with leftist religious discourses, centred in the notions of “struggle” and nothing short of an anti-capitalist structural transformation. Prosperity discourse was not only promised as a natural outcome of the correct faith and confession in God's power, but also had an empowering appeal to the poor's sense of self-worth and autonomy (gearing that toward entrepreneurship). It also reversed the future-oriented logic of liberationist struggle for structural change by promising more palpable and immediate gratification through access to consumption as a gift from God to those who give him first. A crude, radicalised version of the Calvinist blessed faithful, this voluntaristic, competitive and individualistic approach to faith made visible inroads in the religious field, heightening conflicts with Catholicism and mounting a formidable challenge to the discourse of liberation. At ease with the ethos of market competition, the narrative of prosperity reinterpreted biblical images of risk-taking, summoning God's power on behalf of his children and the fruition of God's grace in material terms (wealth, health and self-realisation) that sounded very much like a religious version of the neoliberal ethos. Adopting an aggressive expansionist strategy that combined political leverage, “secular” business ventures (operation of media networks, franchising, bank investments, property development, and a full industry of “religious entertainment”), marketing strategies and missionary outreach beyond national borders, some of the so-called neo-Pentecostal churches rapidly became powerful, if controversial, public actors.

Growing in numbers, highly professionalised in their economic and political initiatives, the prosperity- inspired brand of Christianity found in economic globalization a very rewarding setting for the enactment of their visions of “another Christendom”. For them another world was possible, too. Only this would be the world of unfettered global capitalism under a charismatic form of Christian ethos and theology. There is no sectarianism in the economic and political strategies of neo-Pentecostals: they actively work within the context of political and social pluralism and economic competitive players, and enjoin the collaboration or partnership of non-religious or non-Christian people. And contrary to old Calvinist thrifty and saving ethics, neo-Pentecostals are active and avid consumers. So, another agency articulating Christian values and

7 Building on the work of older generations of liberation theologians, such as Franz Hinkelammert and Hugo Assmann, and new contributions from younger theologians, such as Jung Mo Sung, this rethinking of liberation theology's more crudely Marxist accounts gave the movements a new chance of recasting its anti-

capitalism in the light of a theological critique of the market. Cf. Assmann and Hinkelammert, 1997; Duchrow and Hinkelammert, 2004; Sung, 2007; 2008.

actions and, of course, redescribing those values as a result.

This is a force to reckon with in contemporary Latin America, as we look for the possibility of finding within the religious domain the resources and allies to infuse current global capitalism with distinct values and, as a consequence, altering its conformation (whether merely reforming it or setting off a structural transformation of it). They are counted in millions in the region, but are far from being an isolated case. The powerful association of conservative Christianity in America with regressive forms of capitalism and global discourse is another case in point8. Both configure, in different ways, what Connolly (2008) has called the "Evangelical-capitalist resonance machine". They are a clear reminder that, in searching of the common good as an alternative mode of globalization, as another globalization, we would be advised to go beyond a simple call to connect the economy with faith values. Something is already in place, and any move to bring about an alternative will need to proceed at least in two fronts: economic reconstruction and ideologico- theological contestation.

The context in which Christian globalism and Christian alter-globalism emerge is one in which deep dislocation has unsettled older forms of economic and political institutionalisation in Latin America and weakened alternative discourses to those. Formidable challenges are posed to the development of a "virtuous economy" in the face of current developments in the religious field, as well: fragmentation, perceived threats to traditional religious identities leading to reassertion of conservative views, internal dispute between growing conservative-capitalist articulation of discourse and dwindling or stagnant "mainline" forms of spirituality. However, there is no lack of alternative views. During the whole period underlying the argument so far, a recomposition of a critical economic discourse infused by a theological ethics of engagement was carefully crafted in response to perceived gaps and failures of the framework and practices of liberation theology. It can be presented as one of the sources for the anti-globalization and alter-globalization movements of the post-neoliberal era, also indirectly responding to the limitations of social-democrat and Third Way alternatives experienced as from the second half of the 1990s in some Latin American countries. We need to see them in more detail.

Alter-globalism as religious discourse

Alter-globalism emerged in the 2000s as an explicit challenge to "neoliberal globalization" which called for its rejection in the name of another globalization.

Fully appreciating the potential for political and economic change introduced by the ambivalent forces of globalization, this movement sought to supplement the economistic definition of globalization with two broad and subversive elements: a) bringing to bear on each other the various dimensions or strands of globalization that could not be reduced to the shape and logic of the economy, such as the politicisation of global issues, operation and reinterpretation of the roles played by certain institutions of global governance, cultural globalization, the global diffusion of

8 One should not, in this case, exempt Catholic sources, as can be clearly seen, since the 1980s, in the development of the "democratic capitalism" argument by the likes of Michael Novak (cf. 1990; 1993).

technological and scientific innovations; b) using the network form of communication, interaction, economic organization and political mobilisation as a strategic device to coordinate small-scale actions in view of large-scale impact in the global scenario.

Clearly focused in resisting neoliberalism's capture of both the initiative and the imagination of what a global order should look like, the alter-globalization movement combined both anti-globalism and a sense of constructive proposition of alternatives. The resistance element focused on countering the arguments that the neoliberal policies were the only credible form of steering the world system of nations and the global interdependent economy. This was done by calling the excluded to pride and to action in solidarity across borders and by bringing to the fore how globalization in its current form raised a much more insidious threat of Western dominance under the image of "the Empire". However, beyond the protest dimension of certain anti-globalist movements, alter-globalism sought to offer counter-hegemonic visions of "another world" without neoliberalism. The World Social Forum, an event first convened in Brazil in 2001, became both a site and an icon of this alternative discourse on globalization.

Writing in the very first years of the alter-globalist movement, Peters both hit and missed the mark, by stressing its decentralised structure and grassroots dimension. She says that "Resistance to globalization does not follow traditional models of community organising and social change that are built on highly centralised organization models; rather the resistance to globalization is truly grassroots. In fact, the strength of the resistance to globalization, right now, lies in the fact that it is such a diverse and widespread phenomenon" (Peters, 2004:103). It is also acceptable that "*t+o the extent that resistance to the dominant forms of globalization is presently manifested in a wide variety of

movements around the world, it is more like a network" (Ibidem). However, as others have highlighted the movement is not simply horizontal and decentralised. There are several nodes that "stitch" certain actions together or command more initiative and leadership than other groups, globally and locally. The network image is more three-dimensional than a horizontal/vertical distinction can afford. It is through the combination and understandable tensions that the articulation of a very heterogeneous collection of groups, organizations and movements, operating at different levels and scales that the movement should be best seen.

A succinct depiction of the main tenets of the movement is offered by Marcheletti:

In contrast to the supposedly constitutive flâneurisme of cosmopolitanism, alter-globalism highlights the inevitability of relying on local factors for building up a viable political community. Social cohesion and solidaristic ties are needed for any political project. According to this perspective, any political struggle needs to be embedded within local factors, within local struggles, to be effective and able to mobilize people. Social and political bonds are key elements for generating local and particularistic mutual obligations, which in turn are the true bases for eventual political solidarity, be it local, national, or transnational. In sum, alter-globalism can be understood as a model structured around five paramount principles: place-basedness, participation, autonomy, diversity, and solidarity (2009:145).

Christian church and ecumenical bodies have been instrumental and fully participant in the emergence of the alter-globalist movement (cf. Ribeiro, 2009; Peters, 2004). One could even argue that several threads of such a discursive construction lay their roots in the grassroots-centred pastoral experiences and projects nurtured by radical Christian groups and organizations of the previous three decades9.

Alter-globalist religious responses to economic globalization in/from Latin America

By way of illustration, I would like to finally explore initiatives by Latin American Christian organizations who have played an active part in connecting notions of solidarity, cooperative forms of economic production, trade and consumption to the search for alternative forms of globalization. The tensions between ethical, political and religious discourses will be explored with relation to those initiatives as a means to shed some light on the requirements of a virtuous economy. I will focus specifically in the Faith, Economy and Society Program of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). It is representative of both the theological and the pastoral strands of the alter-globalist religious movement. The Program is

aimed at

1. The analysis of our realities in order to share the information with the churches. and to propose alternatives in the public space.

2. The production of documents on economic justice for the churches, not only from a biblical and theological perspectives, but also from a technical point of view.

3. The encouragement of inclusion of themes related to faith, economy and society in Latin American theological seminaries.

4. The strengthen the process of lobbying and advocacy of the churches, giving follow-up to the process began in the Washington Meeting with the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) (http://www.clailatino.org/fes/presentacion_ingles.htm).

Among its different activities I will concentrate in a set of resources produced in connection with a Consultation held in 2003, convened by CLAI and the World Council of Churches (WCC), on “Globalising Full Life”. The Consultation results led to the publication of a booklet, where participants address the Protestant churches in Latin America. Later on, the Faith, Economy and Society Program prepared and published a kit with short primers (*cartillas*) on various aspects of economic justice issues intimated by neoliberal globalization. The kit is named after the Consultation and it is presented as “resources for reflection and action”, designed for use in local congregations. It comprises a series of short group study leaflets: introductory or “generative” ones; biblical studies; and thematic study guides. The six generative leaflets all ask about *the meaning for today* of hope, community leadership, labour, power, generosity, and corruption. The structure is always the same: an introduction, where the problem is described, biblical texts, questions for group work, guidance for facilitators and suggestions for Eucharistic celebrations.

9 For a wealth of information, statements, pedagogical resources for local churches on issues relatied to economic globalization, one can check the website of the World Council of Churches (www.oikoumene.org/en/programs/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/poverty-wealth-and- ecology.html). The World Forum on Liberation and Theology met in 2009 during the World Social Forum, in Belem, Brazil, under the theme “Water, Earth, Theology: for another possible world” (cf. www.wftl.org). Several other ecumenical events took place during the Forum, as listed in the website of the Ecumenism and Rights Coalition (bringing together Brazilian and

European ecumenical and church development agencies (cf. ced-fsm.blogspot.com). Catholic initiatives can be found on CIDSE's and COPLA's websites (respectively, www.cidse.org and www.cop-la.net).

The general context is portrayed as one of dislocation – a series of transformations which have unsettled and worsened the living conditions of the people, particularly the poor, including church members (though this is seldom clear). The texts also assume an implicit anti-capitalism, through targeting the idols of “money” and the “market” and their corresponding “economic system” as objects of “worship” and cause of the perceived negative effects. Their focus on “meaning” points to another outcome of dislocation, its loosening of fixed representations of the social order, which enables a critique of the *status quo* to emerge through the construction of new meanings. Finally, the texts call for explicit solidarity with the losers in the new global context.

There are four Bible study leaflets, focused on making new sense of known texts, in terms of “the social function of goods” (Gospel of Luke, chapter 12) and the biblical criticism of social inequality (Letter of James, chapter 5); power relations and the life in the Spirit (Letter to the Galatians); the social conditions of poverty, economic deprivation, social marginalisation and political persecution experienced by the original addressees of those texts, and the contemporary parallel situations created by globalization (studies in the Letters to the Corinthians and Hebrews and the book of Revelation). We also find here the broad themes of generosity, solidarity, and divine judgement on the economic and political structures that produce or sanction those evils. A final set of studies again read the book of Revelation, interpreting its symbols according to an economic key (rising prices, the constraining power of money, the association of political power and economic domination, and the fall of a political system that sanctions economic exploitation). The structure is threefold: introduction, activities (questions and commentary on the texts) and celebration. The third and most critical set of Bible studies does not have a celebration section. The emphasis on “unmasking” here, particularly in the third and fourth sets of studies, highlights the ideological critique as a site of struggle for economic justice.

The kit is complemented by seven thematic guides. They address the issues of external debt, poverty, the search for economic justice, the social consequences face of globalization, the economy under globalization, income inequality in Brazil, and the Americas Free Trade Agreement (ALCA).

For reasons of space, I'll look into more detail the thematic leaflets. A distinctive feature of all of them is the explicit rejection of “neoliberal globalization”, many

times simply “globalization”. “Neoliberal” seems to serve a reinforcing rather than a qualifying function as regards the signifier “globalization”. In that sense one could say the two words are almost synonymic. One will search in vain for any alternative qualifier of globalization. The expression is fully invested with negative connotations in a systemic way, and leaves very little room for any ambivalence or play. This conforms well to an anti-capitalist view of globalization. Another globalization therefore would seem to correspond to a total overcoming of current trends and dynamics, rather than a modulation, through distinct emphases or partial substitutions of constituent elements.

Several arguments are presented to substantiate this picture of (neoliberal) globalization. In the study of

the external debt, globalization is associated to a patient knitting of a vicious circle in which social symptoms such as street children, unemployment, domestic violence, lacking welfare services are outcomes of draining resources for the payment of interests. In order to do that, dollars must be generated through the export of primary goods. However, the rich countries are the ones who set the prices (and their fluctuations), protect their markets and force the import of their own products. On top of that there are political and moral factors: the money was borrowed by dictatorial regimes, without popular consultation, and under unfavourable conditions. The resources were used in the benefit of a few, and over time the total payments have already exceeded the original loans. The debt not only has become exponentially higher but also the burden is now falling on everybody's shoulders, with the highest toll being paid by the already poor through worsening living conditions. The pressure to keep up the payments of the external debt is actually threatening the very future of the Latin American peoples. From the Bible (Exodus and Deuteronomy), the argument about the exploitative and dehumanising nature of debts is made, leading to a call for the forgiveness of the debts and the systematic protection of the indebted.

The fourth leaflet (*La otra cara de la globalización*) lists 11 pernicious effects produced by globalization, covering all areas of social life. A summary of three points is then offered where an explicit association is made between “the neoliberal structural adjustment” and “the process-project of globalization” (p. 4). The picture is absolutely dramatic. Globalization:

a) “directly threatens the survival of a large part of the population. It worsens or debases the conditions and quality of living of the immense majority of the population”;

b) “tends to destroy the institutions, spaces and practices of social togetherness;

conveys an inertial trend toward fragmentation and economic and social warfare; concentrates to unprecedented levels economic, social, political and cultural power within ever smaller, alien elites, insensitive to the reality of the rest of society; it further polarises conflicts; is definitely inimical to any possible space of national life and ideas of the common good";

c) "threatens the sustainability of human and nature's life by exploiting nature in an indiscriminate and voracious way" (Ibidem).

However, and following the definition of alter-globalism that was offered above, one would be mistaken to conclude that this wholesale rejection of globalization projects a full exteriority of the proposed alternative and even its supporters *vis-à-vis* the existing order of things. Surely, two (contradictory) dimensions of traditional notions of emancipation, as isolated by Ernesto Laclau, can be found here – the dichotomy between the existing order and the emancipated one and the pre-existence of the emancipatory force to the act of emancipation (cf. Laclau, 1996). According to Laclau

If we are speaking about *real* emancipation, the 'other' opposing the emancipated identity cannot be a purely positive or neutral other but, instead, an 'other' which prevents the full constitution of the identity of the first element. In that sense the dichotomy involved in the emancipatory act is in a relation of logical solidarity with ... the pre-existence of the identity to be emancipated. It is easy to see why: without this pre-existence there would be no identity to repress or prevent from fully developing, and the very notion of emancipation would become meaningless. Now, an unavoidable conclusion follows from this: *true* emancipation requires a *real* other – that is, an 'other' who cannot be reduced to any of the figures of the 'same' (Idem:2-3).

In other words, this form of constructing the "before" and the "after", the "us" and the "them" in the opposition between the forces of globalization and the defenders of "another globalization" is, on one

hand, fully relational and imaginary. The two identities are symmetrically opposed; one is defined by what the other is not, one depends on the other to assert who it is. On the other hand, only if the seeds of the new order are already present and growing within the old order, can any *alternative* really make sense. The fact that "globalization" (thus construed) exists threatens "our" very being – it challenges, distorts, exploits, puzzles, outrages, fascinates; in other words, whatever it is both becomes part of what/who we (think we) are and puts a threat to this identity. But in the thought that there is another globalization, we are actually saying that it is not only possible to imagine the alternative from within the present order, but also

that there is room for redefining it which is in keeping with at least broader features of it – "another" globalization is still, after all, some "globalization". Obviously, one can wonder here why nothing short of a totally other order can be acceptable (as in anti-globalist discourses) if the existing order already makes room for its very reversal.

This is where the subtle difference between anti-globalism and alter-globalism takes its significance10. For, following the biblical image of the seed suggested by Jesus in several allusions to the work of the Kingdom of God, religious alter-globalism not only locates the operation of the critical forces already within the system, but it also accepts the possibility of reclaiming globalization for "the common good". It not simply admits of possible conjunctural and partial advances here and now, but it also aims at "globalising the full life"11. So, in the motto "another world is possible", alter-globalism seems to be saying: "another globalization is possible" and it starts now. Alter-globalism is less than a fully fledged revolution and wavers about naming what will be in any precise way. Keeping the future open is, indeed, another name of this game.

Moreover, it is admitted that the very agents of change are being called into being by the situation they oppose. Globalization would be challenging the churches to rethink their own ways:

We are aware that to be the church in a globalised world requires us to rethink our faith. We do this not only in view of responding to the growing demands from those who wander without hope, but the very future of the church will depend on its ability to make sense of and give meaning to the message of Jesus about fraternity, justice, solidarity and love in the face of a world that is violent, excluding, non-solidary, unjust and filled with hatred.

The perverse effects of globalization are present in the whole of human life and nature (Cartilla 3, *Iglesias en búsqueda de justicia económica*, p. 2)12.

It is because biblical figures such as Moses and several of the prophets were simultaneously inside and outside the system – as part of the royal family, as court prophets, aristocrats or members of the priestly

10 This is also the point where, according to Laclau's argument, the two dimensions invoked before are incompatible with each other: if the dichotomy is real, there can be no common measure between "us" and "them": globalization must be rejected *in toto*. But alter-globalists do find margins for play in the existing order and even the possibility that "another" globalization be achieved.

11 A similar logic is used in the leaflet about poverty, when it is argued that globalization dehumanises *both* the poor and those who benefit from it, through the loss of meaning that consumerism, the dictates of fashion, virtual relationships and the subordination of social relations to the benefits that can be reaped from them. “The world and life are turned into a gigantic market”, it concludes (*Cartilla 2, Señor líbrame de mi pobreza*, p. 9).

12 This point is made even more forcefully in another document produced in the same context as these ones, “*Buscando salidas ... caminando hacia adelante!*” (cf. CLAI, 2003:19-22).

class, but also as followers of Yahweh – that this need for self-transformation emerges. But the fact that they are also affected by the system, gives them the chance to take a stand: to disassociate themselves from the oppressive order, and confront or denounce the powers that be. It is here that several recent statements by churches in different parts of the world is invoked so that the Latin American churches feel compelled to follow the same example: reformed churches in Africa, churches of the Pacific islands; Canadian churches.

And if this all fails, resistance remains as the last resort. Resistance can take several forms: delegitimation of neoliberalism, exposure of the system's vulnerabilities (thus “ridiculing” it and breaking the spell of fear of its all-powerfulness), refusal of the conditionalities imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, participation in campaigns for “fundamental transformations” of those financial institutions, focus on strengthening local and regional economies (use of local currencies, barter and local trade; use of alternative forms of energy; creation of cooperatives of producers and consumers), and use of advocacy as a new expression of “diakonia” (service), a “creative form of being a Samaritan” (Idem: 7).

“Searching for alternatives ... and walking ahead”13 is a more immediate outcome of the Consultation “Globalising Full Life”, in 2003. It is a public statement and also a submission for churches throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to subscribe and make their “prophetic and pastoral voice” heard in the public realm, in their own contexts. It comprises a short statement, “Evangelical churches in Latin America and the Caribbean: between pain and hope”, and a detailed argument in four parts (Dealing with pain; analysing the dominant ideology; reconstructing hope from the sources of our faith; a different world is possible – which leads to a global and a national agendas). This is where much more concrete references to economic alternatives are found, compared with the pedagogical approach of the *Cartillas*. It is also where very plainly it is asserted

that “the problem that affects us as society is economic, but also moral and ethical. Our crisis points to a system of values, a form of existence, a civilization of inequalities. In turn, from our perspective, the problem is also spiritual: as Saint Paul says 'the wrath of God reveals itself from heaven against all impiety and injustice from men who block the truth with injustice'” (CLAI 2003:7). Globalization is perverse and calls for resistance, critique, but also for building up political tools to prevent hypocrisy and barbarism from spreading. A cry is heard, in capital letters: ENOUGH! (Idem:8)

As opposed to neoliberal globalization an *economy of sharing* is put forward. It does not deny property, money and goods, but subjects them to their “social function” of “guaranteeing, maintaining and improving life”(Idem:9). An economy of sharing is characterised by a “spirit of community”, which is based on “values of life for all, such as love of work, dedication, effort, compassion and solidarity” (Idem:9). The document

13 The Consultation that resulted in this booklet was preceded by another event, also sponsored by CLAI and the World Council of Churches, a Seminar on Youth and Globalization that gathered young people from 14 countries. The seminar's final statement can be fruitfully compared to *“Buscando salidas...”,* and can be found, in Spanish, at www.oikoumene.org /es/documentacion/documents/programas-del-cmi/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st- century/youth/27-04-03-juventud-y-globalizacion.html.

advances two main strategies to create the conditions for such an economy to thrive: a) improving international governance of globalization; b) setting a minimal national agenda. These depend on a seven- point realistic approach, which involves self-awareness of the discernment to analyze present realities, distinguishing short-term valuable initiatives from systemic, long-term ones; stimulus toward dreaming and let new thinking flourish; struggle against poverty; promotion of social and economic compacts; and renew politics (Idem:43-46).

Improved international governance relates fundamentally to more and better regulation of the flows of financial capital; reform of the international financial institutions; the enhancement of international human rights enforcement; and subjecting economic regional integration to the globalization of “full life”, which implies rejection of ALCA and the reaffirmation of existing mechanisms (such as Mercosur, Comunidad Andina de Naciones, Caricom, ALBA, etc.).

A minimal national agenda is required to redefine the community and country to which each Latin American people belong to and to question the legitimacy of the

existing ruling elite. This can be achieved through a new social and economic compact that may strengthen the place and role of civil society, social movements and NGOs in their interaction with governments. Civil society will craft a more relevant role in decision making if it is fostered by tools for a new social contract. But there is also the need for a new democratic welfare state (*"Estado social de derecho"*). Economic reactivation is a crucial task, to be promoted through short-term, emergency actions, that keep it open the need for a deeper systemic change; stimulus to a viable popular economy, combining survival, subsistence and lifelong strategies; economic growth to eradicate poverty; call for bolder and forward-looking economic policies able to "open up new ways"; legal change to protect national states from volatile investments and corruption; and adopt social welfare (cf. Idem:51-62).

This is admittedly still vague and improper to configure a project. But at no point any anxiety or calculation are expressed in relation to this point. In one or two odd places one reads references to fair trade and solidarity economy, which have been mainstreamed all over Latin America following the recent "left turn" started in the late 1990s14. Though limited in their impact and scale, and clearly unable to become a general economic form in global times, these have deserved attention and effort as *testimonial* economic practices, that somehow embody the kind of value-action complex that was argued should be recognized in any economic system. This is not to say that more sustained reflection and detailed procedures for implementation do not have a place in the logic of this discourse. But perhaps this is a recognition that this kind of reasoning, while limited in its form and direct practical economic application, is good for its purpose: to harness internal support from Christians, to extend bridges towards other languages of activism and political strategy, and to open up a public space for religiously oriented economic

14 On solidarity economy in this concrete context, see GT de Economia Solidária, 2008; Haan, 2007:283-325.

ethics 15. There is a clear notion that the proposition of an alternative is a *doing* (cf. Haan, 2007:404). There is work to do. Things will not happen by default.

There are finally reasons for hope. This is an important trope in the economic discourse of theology to name action in the face of uncertainty, defiance of dead ends, pulling oneself by one's bootstraps when sinking in quicksand. Again, this marks a difference between old leftist discourses based on laws of history and irresistible trends. Alter-globalist religion is fallibilist. It wagers on a doing that may bring achievement. Hope is about persistence. Persistence has been historically a winning game for minorities and small elite progressive groups. Globalization

facilitates networking and communication among dissenters and sufferers worldwide to unprecedented levels and this potentialises the impact of small groups through “corporate voices” operating cross-nationally. In addition, the dramatic nature of current economic problems and the disorientation of hegemonic economic discourse have opened a few doors to listening to moral discourse on the economy.

But, we have already said this before, no bridge between moral discourse and moral action will come naturally. There must be agency and this always comes, only we don't know if we'll be part of it or what it will be. Others may get the upper hand. We then need to be responsible: both responsive to the summons of the other in solidarity and accountable for our decisions and bets. If we are lucky and persistent enough there may be a chance between the prosperity gospel embraced by desperate poor and the unrelenting profit-making machine of the global market embraced by the rich or aspiring ones. It is likely, then, that given the failures of both, we will better understand what we mean without knowing now when we name our hope a “virtuous economy”.

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15 A much more expanded argument can be found in Rodolfo Haan's dialogue with Latin American “theology and economy” discourse (2007:245-397).

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