

Global and local concerns in theology

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Pilgrimage is a basic symbolic activity, in Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and also in small religious traditions throughout the world. With our hearts and feet we search for a better life, for enlightenment, for joy. In modern times, the rich symbol of pilgrimage shows, among other things, how common people are moving within and beyond globalization (1). Concerning the global reality, I offer a theological commentary, that seeks dialogue with other points of view.

Christian theology is not a mental-doctrinal activity; rather it is a loving relationship with God that implies celebration, transformation, understanding (an "intellectus amoris", according to J. Sobrino). A modern theological agenda begins with a critique of the signs of the times (in the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes* 4-10). Let us consider globalization in local, ordinary people's "lo cotidiano" (2); where we lovingly search for human well-being within mother earth. Let us examine faith/hope/love from the underside of history, in communion with all the excluded who cry for life.

My point of view arises from an indigenous community in the Americas. Their strong desire and daily struggle for modern progress, is it for also being global citizens? Their pain and hope, shape my focus on macro-realities. Moreover; people's inter-religious features demand a genuinely ecumenical theology. This essay is conditioned by my being among the poor, in ecclesial and professional work, and in a masculine and socio-political status. My input is also shaped by a model of inculturation 'from below'; this is part of a tradition of church reform and refoundation that I assume fullheartedly.

1) Hopeless and hopeful signs

The leading global factors are a test on christian hope; but these factors are counter balanced by emerging, alternative forms of globalization. Briefly, what are the major theological concerns?

On one part, hegemonic global guidelines are a test of faith in the living God, since modern absolutes (in spite of their secular claim) are really polytheistic. They also confront hope in future life; since the so called end of history allows for no qualitative transformation of today's world order. Furthermore, they undermine the foundations of love; since two thirds of

humanity is condemned to poverty. As leading forms of globalization question faith-hope-love, they show themselves as without hope.

This does not mean that globalization is an evil and demoniac reality. The key problem is an inadequate capitalist world economy (3). It reduces and consumes everything. So, seeing that human fulfillment is not to be expected from global factors, one can join others who build a sustainable, just world order. People acknowledge values in modern sciences and technologies, global communications, politics of participation, democratic consumption of economic production, migration, and other global processes. These are ambivalent and limited goods (these are not gods!). At the same time, one seeks new paths.

Yes. There are emerging and plural alternatives. Some of them are: day to day resistance to cultural-military confrontations; acceptance of differences; distrust towards manicheistic patterns (such as: modernity is good, tradition is bad); plural religious products and meanings; local experiences of the sacred that sustain local theology and church; efficient new social movements (that are not yet linked together); all kinds of small economic initiatives, that underline solidarity instead of private success; wisdoms of the marginalized, for example, a new vision of the global as expressed by Rosa Khuno (teacher of Bolivia): "all for everybody and with everybody" (4), that is, a genuine global reality includes every person and is produced by all.

We may not sacralize each of these alternatives; in them we find weeds and also good wheat. However, they are small and powerful signs of human hope that have a transcendent thrust (5). Here we are nurtured by the gospel imagery of tiny seeds, of the non-important (non-invited to the kingdom banquet), of unnoticed compassionate behavior, of hunger and thirst for justice, of these and so many other small signs of the unlimited Basileia of God. These signs of hope promote an alternative globalization.

Thus, we face, on one side, symbolic forces of destruction that have idolatrous elements, and on another side, symbols of life-for-all due to God's gracious salvation. In other words, globalization is not the object of our theological discourse; nor do we place the global versus the local. Rather, the task is to assess realities full of contradictory symbols. Our major concerns are to uncover masked gods present in the midst of positive global factors, and to acknowledge life-bearing tiny seeds of universal salvation.

For this task we turn to resources in the Gospel of John. Salvation is seen through ordinary earthly and human realities. JesusChrist is presented as water, light, vine, bread, door, road, worker, shepherd (6). We can say that these symbols of salvation are not anthro-logo-centric; rather they are concrete-

holistic. Moreover, in John's so called book of signs (2:1-12:50), seven ways of explaining Jesus' significance for believers rely on corporal, festive, social imagery.(7) These representations are in opposition to dehumanizing forces: poverty and hunger, sickness and lack of faith in salvation, stealing and injustice. So, today we may discern what is evil and what is life giving throughout "lo cotidiano", people's historical pilgrimage.

In reading the "signs of our times", particularly the global and the local in ordinary existence, we find signs of hope and also denials of life. For example, success stories (highlighted in education and in means of communication) show social and racial discrimination and the material as absolute; and the gamut of fundamentalism, where the condemnation of others is sacralized. The other side of reality shows, for example, gender reciprocity, systematic and very democratic healing through natural means, strength of marginalized identities, and so on. Each of these are local/global realities. The local is not holy; nor is the global satanic. We rather look at different signs in each dimension of reality.

Thus, a theology of signs and symbols, in the context of global/local ordinary existence, offers a deep understanding of faith-hope-love. I consider incomplete and unilateral a theology that is mainly analytical (however critical of global evils) and centered on a western *logos* (8). Theology that pays attention to symbols in today's world, and dialogues with human sciences and philosophies, does allow a radical critique and may propose realistic alternatives. Moreover, an understanding of symbols in today's global and local processes is like a framework for inculturation. Within and beyond such processes we have the interaction between christian faith and human cultures.

2) In the world and not of this world

Basic christian communities that are reading the Word and being led by the Spirit, constantly ask if today's world can be a good place for all. I listen attentively to their answers. With a realistic *sensus fidei* they usually affirm that creation and historical progress are good. At the same time, corruption, forms of violence, unjust social conditions, lack of opportunities for the youth, etc., are seen as opposed to God's plan. Most persons disagree with a "spiritual neutrality" concerning this world. Moreover, a christian is neither optimistic nor pessimistic about globalization. This implies that inculturation does not consecrate each mode of living, but rather transforms it.

Concerning these issues, many biblical resources are relevant, and in a special way John's message about the world (9). In a sense it is positive: God loved the world ...all who believe in Christ have eternal life (Jn 3:16; the world is saved, cf. 1:29, 4:42, 6:33,51, 10:36, 12:47, 17:21). Yet, in the context of

jewish and then gentile disbelief towards Jesus and opposition against the christian community, the "world" is theologically seen as a negative reality. John emphasizes that kosmos (not in a cosmic and historical sense) is opposed to Jesus and the community of disciples, it is the realm of sin and Satan.(10) What can be done? The disciples are in but not of, and sent to the world (15:19, 17:11,14-16, 17:18). I do not intend to examine these texts. Rather the question is their importance for the debate over globalization.

Obviously John's message regarding *kosmos* cannot be translated into a rejection of this century's global phenomena. Nor does it move us to take refuge in a christian oasis, nor to be irresponsible regarding modern history. Rather, it theologically warns us not to be naive; being aware of opposition to the church's message of liberation and to Jesus' saving presence. It also gives theological criteria (and not a political program) for action. Believers are within a sinful realm that is saved by God. This implies, in a hermeneutic of today's signs of the times, that global/local factors (the dominant ones, and the alternatives) have to be questioned and challenged. As a follower of Jesus one is not owned by, nor belong to, these factors, since they tend to become absolutes. One can affirm a missionary praxis in this global/local world of today, so that humanity and the cosmos continue responding to God's loving salvation of all. Thus, we are in, not of, and sent to, the world. We say this symbolically, in a theological language about the world.

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, theology is deeply involved with history, confronts the status quo, and works for a new society and humanity (11). However, we have shortcomings. One is the issue of a holistic project. Both some internal evaluations and some who claim liberation theology has died, say that we lack a human alternative (after the fall of a type of socialism). But theology may not be tied up to one socioeconomic proposal; and our dreams may not be reduced to those european events. A holistic project is within and transcends human history and cosmic reality. Another crucial issue is the micro and macro dimensions. Both are significant for liberation; and it starts with small everyday events as well as with global concerns. However we are being seen as if only structures and radical changes are important. The tiny hopes, organizations, signs of tenderness, alliances (and so on) in ordinary lives are most important in latinamerican theology.

Different strands, of a liberational understanding of faith/hope/love, have in common a critique of today's reality and also a commitment to life. Each has its own accents and contributions; but I underline that these reflections are in/into this world although not belonging to this world.

Allow me to briefly mention basic insights in each theological strand.

Work done by latinamerican women focus on ordinary/holistic events, symbols, relationships; drawing a line between what is life-giving (concrete signs of Mystery) and what has to be transformed (since one is not owned by patriarchy and other evil structures). Afro-american theologians confront this world - slavery, modern discrimination, etc., reflect on God in terms of black sacredness, pray and struggle for the land of milk and honey. Indigenous theologies, in the midst of a garden of flowers, challenge modern poison - materialism and so on-, affirm true change and construction of a global house where all peoples may live, and acknowledge God as the only owner of a garden that is cared by women and men (12). Grass-roots biblical theology is a "caminhada" (journey); it critiques principalities and idols within our world; it reads and worships the Word with the eyes of the poor, with historical and transcendent hope. Moreover, systematic liberation discourse is rooted in conditions of dehumanizing sin, and in struggle for justice and joy, where the music of God reveals the human paths towards life. So, all our theologies are within and beyond this world.

Since divine creation and human history are good, however damaged and wounded by local/global realities, christian inculturation and its theology are carried out within and transcending work, love, thinking, celebration. Inculturation corresponds to each people's journey and spirituality. It is not a socio-cultural conquest nor an alienation from one's roots and utopias. As churches: is that done with evangelical zeal and courage?

3) Community of hope today

We are members of local churches, and part of a universal oikumene. How, as a community of hope, do we deal with global/local realities? Primarily by being community; and thus a sign of communion that defies global inequality and exclusions; and by daily, hopefully, transforming earth and enjoying heaven. This is a way of defining church; not as a ghetto of truth and righteousness, but rather as a faithful, ecumenical community dedicated to love and hope in today's world. May I now comment on urgent church responsibilities.

First, specific contribution to a global/local alternative. We are not called to be sectarians, building a christian space or reconstructing it (as planed by nostalgic europeans and latinamericans). The specific task is public witness of human alternatives; that is, of tiny and large, different and complementary, planned and marvelous, plants and flowers of a new humanity. This political task questions a world-order that denies qualitative change (and naively expects "the end of history"). Such a political witness is urgent, since planetary means of communication control everyone's mind and heart.

For example, in tiny Central America, victim of imperial interventions, a christian network has drawn up their local/global options.(13) It heralds economic, socio-political, cultural possibilites vis a vis globalization; it also greets a human history (not centered in Europe); and underlines the personal qualities needed by those who build a new world.

Such a witness implies, theologically, that as church we are a humble and most meaningful sacrament of God's universal salvation. Not the spiritual center of world events, nor a moral caretaker of victims. We rather give witness and worship to the living God, present in the midst of ambivalent events, and among all peoples and religions who seek peace and justice. Thus, our discipleship of Christ, the unique sacrament, becomes Good News with no boundaries.

Second, inter-religious dialogue and action, for the sake of humanization, ecological wellbeing, and spiritual growth. Here I touch only on Christian responsibilities (as we interact with other faiths and religions, a pluriform agenda is drawn up). In today's world, some ideological and inter-christian barriers are lowered, but between world religions -and inside each of these, between the ruling structure and "people's religion"- barriers and non-communication are increasing. Some of us draw a clear line between universal salvation by Christ, and christendom's series of biases and at times destruction of other religions (especially of colonized or subordinated groups).

I place an accent on dialogue with ordinary religion. In Asian contexts, for example, one can share hindu feeling and understanding of shakti, "energy...awe that people have towards the universe" (14). One can also interact with peoples' faith, that Felix Wilfred characterizes as "open to pluriformity and diversity in experiencing God, to the language of symbols, signs and icons, and to diversified ways of worship" (instead of naming it polytheism, due to ethnocentric and political biases) (15). It seems to me that this dialogue is urgent, within the global dynamics of cultural differences and plural spiritual languages of liberation. These and other inter-religious bonds strengthen a community of hope in today's world.

This second reponsability entails an ecclesial re-visioning of her relationships and commitments. Brazil's Pedro Casaldaliga and other visionaries call it macro-ecumenism: it involves churches and different religions, and intertwines ecology, culture, politics, spirituality. In a local catholic context, I show how people bring together different religions when they do healing, celebrations, etc.; it seems that a pluri-religious church has *christo-pneumatic* foundations (16). Many presuppose that the church is mono-

religious. Since its origins, the christian church has included jewish, samaritan, gentile factors; and during two thousand years we acknowledge many processes of in-culturation and what may be called in-religionation.

Third, community of women and men. This is also an urgent responsibility. Both women and men have their own ways of experiencing and naming God, of being humanly faithful and constructive. When we link together these different inputs, the world is transformed and all grow in holiness. Since the church continues to be androcentric, and denies the different contributions of men and of women, all remain spiritually and personally deprived. As we build an alternative globalization of life, the gender perspective and action is the cornerstone. (Take note that this presentation is particularly masculine; it does not speak out of every human experience.) It is urgent that the voice and work of one gender be not imposed over the other. In positive terms, everything and everyone is renewed when as men and as women we join hands and take care of the earth, our common house.

Holistic action and thinking offer images of hope. For example, African theologies done by women and men have a moving mystique. Anne Nasimiya-Wasike says: "as christians and as women who have seen the liberating power of Christ, we have two functions to fulfill: first of all to witness to God's love and care for the universe; and secondly to give testimony to the continued human responsibility of creating a new world".(17) It is a global, alternative power, in communion with God-creator and in discipleship of Christ-liberator. However, principalities and dominions in our times make us reread the gospel message. Kwame Bediako says: "the Cross desacralises all the powers, institutions and structures that rule human existence and history...stripping them all of any pretensions to ultimacy" (18). In so far as men and women continue to develop each one's theological insights and place them in the common thrust towards life, a new humanity becomes possible and desirable.

Conclusion

We have been reading the signs of the times: hegemonic global factors that test our faith, and emerging alternatives that kindle cautious hope. We interpret global/local realities, experienced from the underside of history, from the perspective of victims who are wise and joyfull. Inspired by John's gospel, christian discipleship and mission today is seen in/into the world, but not belonging to the status quo. Latinamerican, Asian, African theologies draw lines in the human quest for life. According to these theologies, the church has urgent responsibilities, work and worship are inter-religious, and women and men utter holistic, spiritual proposals.

In terms of inculturation, it can no longer be reduced to an ethnocentric concern; since it is globally/locally contextualized. The task of inculturation acknowledges that the Spirit is moving events, religions, human structures and hearts in the direction of Life. But, cautiously we allow the development of evil plants and of wheat (cf Mt 13:24-30), that grow together in the fields of history. One can say that some global/local factors will go through fire, and some other global/local realities are shared and enjoyed by all. Evil is not replaced magically (in a revolutionary way!) by goodness. Rather, good realities are in the midst of evil ones.

We are moving through the crisis of modern civilization. Some of its global factors are challenged and replaced by new seeds and plants, by small and realistic utopias that need to link together. Common people's symbolic actions, particularly pilgrimage and celebration, are a strong cry for life and global meaning. May our theologies be part of this hopeful movement.

Footnotes:

*Essay published in M. Amaladoss (ed.), Globalization and its victims, seen by its victims, New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999, 160-170.

1. See S. Coleman, Elsner, J., Pilgrimage, past and present in the world religions, Cambridge: Harvard, 1995. In today's world, on one side, travel, tourism and other secular activities have some elements of pilgrimage; and on another side, religious pilgrimages are "gaining in symbolic significance in some societies" and they "resonate with social processes...in the increasingly globalised, plural societies of the world" (pg. 213).
2. Women rediscover "lo cotidiano" as a theological category; it refers to "processes of people's lives"; "we as liberation theologians appreciate...how the poor and oppressed see reality in a different way from the way it is seen by the rich and powerful", Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "The present-future of EATWOT: a mujerista perspective", Voices XIX/1 (1996), 96-97 (Bangalore, India).
3. B. Kearn says it bluntly: capitalist economy "systematically leaves fundamental reality out of account", "natural resources...the social field, the political institutions and the cultural world are also systematically 'consumed'" ("A colossus with clay feet", Concilium 1997/2, pgs. 11-12).
4. Rosa Khuno, in a dialogue in Corpa, Bolivia, 12/11/97.
5. Julio Lois comments: today we focus on "small utopias", linked to global alternatives and to the final utopia of new heavens and new earth (J. Lois in Utopías y esperanza cristiana, Estella: Verbo Divino, 1997, 240-241).
6. This is John's language. There is no clear evidence on how Jesus called himself, except "human being" in the galilean expression bar nasha (ho hyos tou anthropou, son of man). Other titles: Messiah, Son of God, etc., belong to the post-resurrection community. The church creates theology. The johannine tradition made powerful symbolic contributions.
7. Seven events hold concrete signs of the Glory of God, present through Jesus'

- ministry: John 2:1-11 (marriage feast in Cana, water becomes wine), 4:46-54 (healing of the son of an official), 5:1-15 (the paralytic in Betzaida), 6:1-15 and 6:16-21 (needy multitude is fed, Jesus walks on water; both events refer to the Jewish history of liberation), 9:1-41 (blind person is healed, by Jesus light of the world), 11:1-44 (the resurrection of Lazarus).
8. A crucial question today is the role of symbols and of concepts in theological discourse. Juan Carlos Scannone favors analogy "that assumes the structure of symbolic mediation...and places it in the speculative field of the philosophical logos" (Nuevo punto de partida de la filosofía latinoamericana, Buenos Aires: Guadalupe, 1990, 239). Thus symbol is subordinated to logos. It seems to me that these -symbol, logos- are different and complementary modes of understanding (and relating to) reality. One is not superior to the other.
 9. I draw from R. Brown's The gospel according to John 13-21 (New York: Doubleday, 1970, 763-765) and The community of the beloved disciple (New York: Paulist Press, 1979, 63ff). For Latin American insights on the "world", according to the New Testament, see essays by Elisa Estevez and Raul Lugo in Revista de interpretación bíblica latinoamericana, 21 (1995), 89-98, 108-120 (Petrópolis: Vozes); and Pablo Richard, "Crítica teológica a la globalización neo-liberal", Pasos, 71 (1997) 31-34 (Costa Rica: DEI).
 10. Mostly in John (and Paul; but not so in the synoptic gospels) it is a matter of fallen humanity, that is against God. The "world" is incompatible with Jesus, the Spirit, and the disciples (14:17, 16:8-11,20, 17:14-16, 18:36). It hates Jesus and his followers (7:7, 15:18-21). So, Jesus judges the world, does not pray for it, overcomes it (9:39, 12:31, 16:33, 17:9); it belongs to Satan (12:31, 14:30).
 11. See systematic essays by R. Oliveros, C. Boff, G. Gutierrez, I. Ellacuría, J.L. Segundo, P. Trigo, J.B. Libanio, in Mysterium Salutis, two volumes, Madrid: Trotta, 1990.
 12. Excerpts of Final Message, III Latin American Workshop of Indian Theologies, Vinto, Bolivia, August 1997.
 13. "Compromiso hacia una nueva sociedad. Opción en tiempos de globalización", workshop in the Jesuit Centro de investigación y acción social para Centro América, CIASCA; published in Pasos 71 (1997) 1-10 (Costa Rica: DEI).
 14. A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, The sacred in popular hinduism, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1983, 23.
 15. F. Wilfred, "Faith without 'faith'? Popular religion: a challenge to elitist theology and liturgy", in P. Puthanangady (ed.), Popular Devotions, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1986, 606. In this Seminar, a workshop concluded that in India's socio-political context, popular devotion is alienation, it does not "elicit creative power in people" (op.cit., 695). Wilfred places the problem not on the side of people's alienation, but rather on elitist, rational discourse that is alienated from symbolic language (op.cit., 598-601).
 16. See my "Trenzado de religiones", Allpanchis (Cusco, Peru), 48 (1996), 81-106.
 17. A. Nasimiyu-Wasike in Jesus in African Christianity (ed. by J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa), Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1989, 133.
 18. Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa, Edinburgh and New York: Edinburgh University Press and Orbis Books, 1995, 245. His hermeneutics: it is "by paying attention to the resonances of the biblical categories into the African primal world-view, that the desacralising impact of the Gospel is experienced afresh" (245).