

104. The Awakening Hope Economics of Bob Goudzwaard

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Part One:

A few years back Christian students gathered in Surabaya, Indonesia, to consider their responsibilities in the new millennium

"We declare TINA, the motto that there is no alternative for our economies, to be a lie." They affirmed their belief in TATA. "There Are Thousand of Alternatives for peoples and nations who want to act responsibly".

Bob Goudzwaard is a Christian economist who promotes TATA.

This series of interviews is to give readers an glimpse of who this TATA economist is, what he has been doing, and the Christian vision that motivates him.

Thanks Bob for being willing to be interviewed. Welcome to the pages of the Fiji Daily Post! Maybe this interview can prepare the way for a visit here one day?

Thank you Bruce. I hope so. I saw Fiji only once - there it was far away below me, as I flew over on my way from Sydney to Hawaii. Seeing Fiji's islands lying there in the midst of that vast blue ocean I felt a deep desire that one day I should visit. I'm not "here" yet but maybe now I'm on the way. A first step. Since you are interviewing me from Point Lonsdale, in Australia, maybe you and I should visit together!

I've been looking at a list of things you've done in your career. Recently you chaired some 'encounters' between the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, on the one side, who together requested contact with the World Council of Churches. And it says you set up meetings in Washington and Geneva.

The report from the initial encounter in February 2003 has been published by the WCC. It is edited by Rogate Mshana. It's title is "Wealth creation and justice, the WCC encounters with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund." On the WCC website is a report of what was agreed and where disagreements still exist.

You were born in 1934 and you are a native of Delft in the Netherlands where lovely teapots and crockery come from. From 1967 until 1971 you served as a representative of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Dutch Parliament. You were then 33.

Yes I was educated at the Rotterdam School of Economics and before my stint in Parliament I was on the staff of the Abraham Kuyper Foundation. That's a political research centre sponsored by the party I represented in parliament.

But then you gave up politics and political research. Why?

In 1971 I became professor of economic theory and policy at the Free University of Amsterdam but I didn't exactly give up politics. I kept my relationship with the national political scene, and I was active in giving support to the unification process between the two major protestant parties and the one catholic political party. Today that is the Government party known as the Christian Democratic Appeal. My initial publication on political economy was my PhD thesis. It is titled Non-Priced Scarcity and it examines the problems economists face in valuing the environment for which a neat price tag cannot be found. The partial answer was, of course, that there are more and higher economic values than what can be expressed in a price.

So can we say you are a critical or an alternative economist?

Yes, truly so. But my desire is not just to be critical. I am critical and seeking an alternative to the standard economic theories which are simply too narrow to all the economic aspect of reality to be grasp clearly. Politically I was part of a "radical-evangelical" wing of the party.

Then can we say that your recent work in consultation on an international level began with getting 'encounters' set up within your home country?

I have been part of a post-World War II political movement in the Netherlands that emphasized principled co-operation. The work at that time emphasized norms for economic development. For instance the first joint program by the three Christian parties in Holland to a Bible text as its banner: "Not by bread alone!" Economic stewardship must involve a careful administration of all that is, and that must include all who are entrusted to us. And so that implies the need for social safety-nets but alongside of those conservation and avoidance of waste. Industry - companies and unions - must find ways to co-operate to help protect the creation for the future. We need a new restrained sense of urgency. We need to learn how to rein in our material desires, to take steps backwards in them in order to be truly economic, in order to reduce our wastefulness.

What about your view of justice?

The judicial norm for economic development is addressed to all, both the powerful and the weak, the rich and poor. It is, moreover, a living norm: Let justice roll down like waters as an overflowing stream, said Amos the Old-Testament Prophet who knew how to look after his herds and his sycamore trees in that parched land. Justice has to permeate the whole of society, and that includes the poor and the rich. Somehow those who are rich and those who are poor have to find their responsibilities for each other.

Once again, can I say, I hear you saying that people should be brought together

We need to seek creative ways of doing so ... otherwise people remain isolated and alienated from each other. Those who cannot properly fulfil their God-given responsibilities as families, as workers, as communities, need to be given public space in order to be set free. Emancipation is the good word. In Roman law it referred to the freeing of a slave, usually a son, who could no longer be sold into slavery by his father. He was then accorded adult standing.

And emancipation reminds us of our place in history.

Yes, Church fathers, like Chrysostom, taught that rich to view their property as a social mortgage, as a means of serving the neighbour. We need to develop ways in which poor neighbours can make their rightful claim on us and our property. It's no use building a society built on possessiveness. I've come to see that economic theory must emphasize participation and cooperation as social norms.

Since you retired in 1999 you have continued writing and publishing and attending conferences. Your work is known outside of Holland. Some of your books are translations like A Christian Political Option (1972) and Capitalism and Progress (1979). There is collection of your articles Aid for the Over-Developed West (1975). And you've also published Idols of our Time (1984), Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care (1991), Globalization and the Kingdom of God (2001). You also made a contribution to the 1994 Welfare Responsibility conference in Washington. What is your next book about?

It is about hope and the future with the provisional title, "Awakening hope, Unmasking the idols of our time." The way to contribute to a better world involves unmasking false hopes and opening ourselves to a new obedience to God-given norms like dynamic justice and faithful stewardship .

One of the things you over and over again in your books, is that Christians should always try to find ways of working together politically as well as in others kinds of ways. Is that really biblical?

Paul in Ephesians Chapter 3, verse 18, teaches us about the process of learning God's will. It is only with all God's people, with all the saints,

that we begin to understand something, not everything yet we are still learning, of the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the Kingdom of God and of the love of Christ. One person or one culture can not grasp the full glory of that Kingdom which is still on its way to us. There is no monopoly on wisdom; we need each other to know the dimensions, the deep dimensions of the way God has created us.

What is special about working together? Why isn't it enough for each person to "do their own thing" to God's glory?

I wonder if Fijian choirs are like African choirs. The African choirs I have heard contrast with European choirs. Africans sing as a community while in European choirs individuals sing together and try to produce harmony. The famous orchestras of Europe are known for their conductor, that individual who brings all the other individual musicians together in one symphonic harmony. But who will say that European music is more musical than African? In Africa music sounds and looks like it has just been born again every day as the breath of a living whole community. The community perspective is a legitimate perspective of God's creation; the self-perspective is typical of the West. Yet it is in communities that we are to show the richness of God's creation, even if we do some things "on our own". We'll soon realise that we've needed others just to be ourselves ... and I'm looking forward to hearing some Fijian singing some time to keep my imagination alert and alive to new ways of doing thing....

Part Two

In the first part of our interview with Professor Goudzwaard of the Netherlands he told us something about himself and his contribution to economics and economic thinking. He is an enthusiast for TATA - "there are thousands of alternatives!" but knows that any alternative to TINA - "there is no alternative!" - requires renewal of responsible economic management. As a Christian Bob is committed to walking the path of discipleship, a path that brings people together. In this second part of our interview we ask him to explain his views of the massive problems confronting our globe.

Bob, you say that being a Christian is about being together in society. This means that working in an ecumenical way is more than just a matter of churches co-operating. Being a Christian is not just living within a church sphere. You seem to be saying that people, whoever they are, should co-operate to display their talents, their God-given riches for all to see.

Yes. As the book of Revelation states: all the nations will bring their specific treasures into the Kingdom and its new capital city, the New Jerusalem. For me, these treasures should not primarily be seen as

material but as spiritual, the distinct gifts of each culture .Every culture has its own dignity. Professor Onvlee, the cultural anthropologist at the Free University, reminded us that such a statement is only true if you are also willing to admit that every culture has its own lack of dignity. That's the bible again. "All alike have sinned and show a diminished sense of the divine splendour." It is in that double awareness that we can begin to communicate with each other, whoever we are, because it creates an openness to listen, to engage in a search for correction of our faults.

I suppose this interview could be an example. Me the interviewer in Australia, typing up this email exchange, you in Holland answering and editing the questions, and the readers in Suva reading it after the Fiji Post editor has published it? That sounds like globalization to me. What are your views?

Globalization can be seen as the highest expression of the will to modernize, as modernization going world-wide. It continues on and on in the same modern way we have come to expect. But modernity itself clearly expresses Western culture, and shows the limits and preoccupations of us in the West. Modernity assumes that human rational insight provides the best possible structures to meet our needs, for human life, for our welfare and security. Modernity says the exploitation of nature is OK because it allows this self-first-perspective to base itself in reality. Constructing things rationally, following your own designs as if the world is just empty and waiting for your efforts is the main billboard of modern Western culture.

But then we all know that things are not as secure as we would like them to be. Why are things, all things apparently, so wobbly?

When self-realisation becomes the goal of our life then a dynamic is set up, a program which proves very difficult to stop without bringing everything crashing down. And even without any attempts to slow the process down shocks do occur. Compare the globe now to the situation within a space ship. After "lift off" life inside is stabilized and the environment from which it has been launched is viewed as lagging behind. This is the "other world", the world which is not so developed. As so, from within the accelerating spaceship, those in control of the machine try to reach back and drag the so-called less developed world - which in fact is often not underdeveloped at all, but has developed in a different way with a different outlook and style - into the rocket's flight path. As so wobbles occur because the so-called less developed is still seen to be lagging behind even though they are being dragged along by the dynamic process. In this way old cultures are seen from the viewpoint of modern Western culture as less developed, because development itself has become the final yardstick.

And some wobbles are developing within the space ship, within Western society?

Yes. Consider the way elderly persons are usually seen in the West. They are the so-called 'in-active' people, less in worth because they are less productive, and do not contribute anything to the growth of the GDP. Is this happening in Fiji? Then maybe this interview can help some Fijians give thought to their life-styles and reflect upon the way elderly people are seen and treated. Maybe in Fiji you should ask whether you have a chance to keep things **better** because your cities are not as sprawling as say Sydney or Rotterdam or Berlin or New York and you can maintain this respect in positive ways. But that's for you to say.

But big cities in Europe and North America also have had to take account of the environment. The disastrous floods in New Orleans surely tell us something?

What comes out clearly in the aftermath of hurricanes like Katrina is the extent to which they not only could grow in intensity because of the gradual warming-up of the water, but also because of the elimination of protective natural and constructed barriers at the shoreline, just to cut expenses and to promote the prevalent Western materialistic consumption-styles. So you see, that in this, our created reality, not caring for creation itself can have and often has enormous 'boomerang effects'.

This reminds me of the Club of Rome's "Limits to Growth" study of the 1970s.

The biblical view of stewardship is no soft idealistic norm. It is an obligatory path for all to be able to survive. We need to develop a perspective in which "Limits to growth" burns on our consciousness like the sign written on the walls in Belshazzar's banquet hall told the King what time it was. "You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." These days nature is no longer seen as a life-giving mother, but primarily as something that constrains us and so in reaction we feel impelled to dominate it. Families and communities are often treated as hindrances for real progress. This simply illustrates that Western culture promotes a lack of dignity and stewardship. We can see that this is basic to the current dominant style of globalization.

Are you saying that growth has become an idol?

Yes. Especially when Governments and Business and Churches and Schools demand that growth is what has to be achieved at all the costs. As a Christian I worry about the extreme goal-orientation that dominates our lives, as if our self-set goals produce 'meaning' for our lives. Meaning does not originate from self-chosen goals but from walking on God-given ways, like the way of Love, Peace, Justice and Stewardship.

This sounds very important. Can you explain this further?

We Christians should remember that our first name, the first label

given to us by others, was not "Christian" at all. If I read the book of Acts I am told that the first label applied to followers of Jesus was "people of the Way". I have come to see this as a very important teaching that might help us get out of a fix.

Howso? Please explain?

Well, all too easily we assume that self-generated growth is the way ahead. But "the people of the way" see themselves as sent on their way. In our western liberal culture we are told that we need to send ourselves, to keep on extending ourselves further and further, pushing the limits of our comfort zones. Such growth has become idolatrous. "People of the way" on the other hand implies a relativity of all self-set targets, and that includes the targets of growth and development. It is God who has sent us on His way.

Tell us more about this 'way-orientation' as you see it?

The orientation on a Way or a Road is not blind for where you may end up. But it is nevertheless different from the usual projects to construct a better world. For it is primarily listening and considering how to be or to become more obedient in this moment in relation to what are sometimes very complex situations. The first step is crucial. It is to listen to what justice and God's love asks from us in our current situation, also in the current global setting.

It sounds like you are saying one step at a time rather than the ends justifies the means. Is that it?

Yes. I think so. The first step we take gives us information which adds to our stock of knowledge and thus makes the next step and maybe a few more possible. Therefore a real Way-orientation always implies going step by step. Why? Because we believe Someone is guiding us on that way. That is different from the logic of this world. The logic of the Way-orientation is: trust that if you begin in justice and love, then a follow-up will be possible as justice and love grow.

So how can this apply to some of the really big global problems we have?

Let me give an example here. The reduction of the debt of the poorest nations is more than merely a moral obligation of the rich countries. These societies can not continue as they are. They are captive to burdens, the pressure of which seems endless and it is destructive of the life they should be living. Rich countries are therefore called to provide space for these other countries, and they can begin by just taking a step backwards, stopping their ongoing rush for more.

Can you give us practical examples here?

The amount of international money, which, for instance, is created day

after day by Western banks, is not only far beyond what is needed for the growth of the so called 'real economy', it is also distributed in such a way that all the benefits accrue to the western already rich societies; all other societies and nations are expected to "borrow" that money, without receiving any direct share from it. This is a deep injustice that has to be stopped. The growth of world-money should be re-linked to the fulfilment of real needs instead of being generated by linking it to the unlimited desire to have more of those who are already too rich. This is not only an element of a healthy economic logic.

Can you expand on that please?

Yes 'the Christian way' means living according to norms of justice and care that withhold and restrain - these were highly visible in the life and work of Jesus Christ. He was willing to give his life to us. Therefore this has also to be the style of Christian persons and nations.

Part Three

In parts One and Two Professor Goudzwaard explained how he has developed an alternative economic theory based upon his Christian understanding of living in God's world. In this third and final part of our interview we consider Christian responsibility for economic planning and management not only at our local personal levels but how this relates to our contribution to all of the our around the world..

Bob you have said you are worried about Christians, as well as all others, being driven along by their worship of this idol called "self-growth."

Our extreme goal-orientation in the West, is not a strength at all. It is a profound weakness. It pops up in all our dominant ideologies. The Church should advocate a thorough-going Way-orientation in all social, economic and political affairs and should avoid idealism. She should be found at the side of a realism, warning against the dangerous risks, the damaging boomerang-effects, that result from the ruling development ideology.

Maybe you can tell us about some trends that you believe are signs of better things?

Yes, in several international organizations and multinationals we see a desire for a lifestyle ruled by firm principles and a commitment to bring everyone into fruitful interaction with each other. Some companies have become aware of their inescapable social responsibility. This is now more common than it was, say, a decade ago. Several firms are willing to open themselves up to criticism from outside. In the General Assembly in Canberra of the World Council of Churches, the world-wide ecumenical movement, committed itself to "mission in foreign structures" and so they said that the Christian path was leading them to

participate in such organisations, instead of simply standing outside and protesting, instead of adopting an approach that is confrontational to all entrepreneurial activities.

So how should we try and develop a more constructive, patient, humble perspective on life?

The most important point, I think, is to take steps to think along with others about how we can take distance from the destructive processes we see in our society. We need to find partners to talk about how far we should keep separate. After all we are talking about our neighbours. My first reaction to the question of life-style is that, however controversial it may look, some degree of real distance from our acquisitive societies is needed in this time.

And as a Christian, as one who is following Jesus on the way, how do you see your own religion in this?

The gospel has come to western culture. It has had one thousand years to show to the world what it could do. But as a consequence Europe has not only become a continent promoting good medical care, democratic government and beautiful music. It has become a continent where two disastrous world wars were fought. It was the place where colonial imperialism was born. So we have to say that the gospel not only mobilized possibilities for good but also, by creating freedom and liberty, deepens the possibilities for evil.

I think this needs to be explained a bit further. You seem to be saying Christians need to take some distance from the results of their own religion.

Well, the primary question for western Christians should not be: How do we now contribute together to the coming of a somewhat better world and to produce the plan to bring that about. After a thousand years we have first to start with confessing our guilt. There is, and has been, ongoing solidarity in sinning, which Christians share with all others. We can not only point to Renaissance and Enlightenment and "Ha ha that's the root of our problems!" Christianity may have been given the gospel but did it really listen? If you are not including yourself in this situation, you cannot find a solution.

So is repentance needed politically as well as spiritually?

Without a doubt. There is simply no reason for pride. Western culture received a thousand years of possibilities to form a responsible God-and-man-answering culture but failed in so many ways to fulfill that task. We are invited to see Christ not only as the saviour of Christians, but as a saviour for the whole world.

Is it a matter of rich and powerful being embarrassed when they realise how much their wealth and energy have cost?

Maybe. C S Lewis wrote the book *Till We Have Faces*. In this book someone wants to accuse the gods of all that they have done wrong in life. However, at the very moment that she gets the chance to make her accusation she realises that she needs a face in order to deliver such an accusation to the gods. You need a face to be able to address God. In my opinion, Western society has lost most of its face. To be an adult, to be emancipated, means to have a face, to stand mature, to be willing to suffer the consequences of all your actions. Western people and western society live in a face-denying culture. They try to escape the consequences by saying things like: "The market has done its job" or, "It is the wrong structures of society that we should be angry at." But in such responses we hide our face, our responsibility.

The way you explain it means that world poverty and pollution are linked. The link is our responsibility. The key is finding our face?

If we Christians would take responsibility for what is now going on in the world, and acknowledge what is now happening with our natural environment, we would be willing to see the relationship between the increasing poverty across the globe & the destruction of our natural environment and the continuous enrichment of the richer nations. Then we would begin to realise why living according to "the way" is obedient to life. Then we would see that we must help promote a life spiral rather than the opposite. We are now in a death spiral: the environmental problem deepens the poverty problem, poverty leads to migration, migrations leads to destruction of the environment et cetera.

So you do have hope?

Yes, if we can find a willingness to open our ears and hearts to hear the cries of the poor then we may find a path that has beneficial effects also for the real wellbeing of the rich and for the solution of environmental problems. If in our thinking problems are linked, then their solutions will also have to be linked. By taking one step on the way at a time we learn to give support to each other. It is together that we must find the path out of the present global-to-local impasse.

So in a nutshell what is it in our lives that stops this way-orientation?

The basic problem is a lack of affirmation. There is no inferiority in creation. The mainstream of modernism implies that nature is to be controlled. It states that women as a part of nature are in need of guidance by males. Christ speaks in a language of affirmation. The way-orientation implies an enormous relief because the outcome is I wonder if Fijian choirs are like African choirs. The African choirs I have heard contrast with European choirs. Africans sing as a community while in European choirs individuals sing together and try to produce harmony. The famous orchestras of Europe are known for their conductor, that individual who brings all the other individual musicians together in one symphonic harmony. But who will say that European music is more

musical than African? In Africa music sounds and looks like it has just been born again every day as the breath of a living whole community. The community perspective is a legitimate perspective of God's creation; the self-perspective is typical of the West. Yet it is in communities that we are to show the richness of God's creation, even if we do some things "on our own". We'll soon realise that we've needed others just to be ourselves ... and I'm looking forward to hearing some Fijian singing some time to keep my imagination alert and alive to new ways of doing things... guaranteed by Someone other than myself. I have only the responsibility for the first step I take. The way is under control. I do not own my walk. It is not our way.

And how should we view the future then?

In the new Church in Delft the Dutch royal family is buried. During Queen Wilhelmina's funeral service, the pastor, Reverend Forget preached a sermon explaining that our belief in Christ falls short if we only speak about the past and the present. Jesus is the King of the entire Earth and stands now and will stand at the end of all of our ways.

And Jesus Christ, who is He?

He is not only the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, but He is also the Arché and the Telos, the Source and the Fulfillment of all our earthly ways and modes of being. There He stands - the Horizon of Life Himself - standing on the personal and the political, economic and social horizons. King Jesus calls us from His Future to follow Him now, and in His way. He is the beginning and the end.

So Jesus sheds His light on the problems we face too?

The unity provided by the present style of globalization is different from that. It is mainly oriented to self aggrandizement, which tries to close and to restrict the future so that patterns of human self-realisation prevail. But Philip Potter, the former secretary general of the World Council of Churches, once indicated that if the Bible speaks about a future and a history, in which God is continually busy to bring all peoples and powers under the coming Headship of the Good Shepherd and Pastor-King Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1), then we are entitled, indeed invited, to speak of God's own globalization, which is not characterized by the survival of the fittest but by the rescue of the sick, the vulnerable and the weak.

Would you say you are motivated by your positive hope for the future?

Yes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed it also his Ethics: we are living in the time before, the penultimate, the last but one, "das Vorletzte". We should be living from the meaning coming to us from the end; not just trying to live in terms of the Beginning. The coming Shepherd King

comes not to ensure the survival of the fittest but the rescue of the weakest. This is the stronger globalization which will conquer the world once and for all with love. This is the light we have been given to live here and now in Holland, Australia and Fiji.

And for me, I'd say from my flight over Fiji's islands that on the morning of creation, God, must have looked over everything, and seeing Fiji attached a special diamond to it - that is its natural beauty. Fiji as the finishing touch of creation itself. I'm looking forward to seeing it on the ground one day.

Thankyou Bob. Thank you so much.

Professor Goudzwaard, TATA economist, looks forward to God's Kingdom as the complete rescue of the vulnerable. But in the meantime he advocates responsible economic planning and management that avoids materialism, idealism and the cynicism that's "there is no alternative!" Christians should engage hopefully in shaping the world economy by an orientation that honours the cries of our poor neighbours and looks to God for ongoing guidance. It is in that kind of joy, in this kind of situation, that Christian economic responsibility must examine the problems that face us.

Readers who would like to discuss these matters with Professor Goudzwaard are invited to write to him at bob.goudzwaard@ext.vu.nl His books and writings can also be accessed via the web. The Fiji Daily Post is seeking ways to make some of Professor Goudzwaard's lectures available to our readers. Watch out for them!