

108. The Global Economy and Climate Change

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What we have heard from Sir John Houghton is at the same time: crystal clear, alarming, but also moving. I use the word 'moving' here to express that from the deepest level of our Christian faith it also brings to us a willingness and courage to move, personally as well as socially. Serious developments like these, signals like these, do not belong elsewhere, to some other world than the one in which we are all called by our Creator to be good servants and stewards. It is also the same world in which we adore Him by our hymns and say our prayers. The Bible is often more realistic than we are ourselves. The prophets spoke regularly about ecological disasters and related them to human misbehaviour. And that also seems to be the case in the New Testament.

May I give one example?

In the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse, several natural plagues and disasters are mentioned, like the pollution of rivers and the plague of locusts and the devastation wrought on the soil, and often they are accompanied by the comment that the people are not, were not, willing to repent. The standard commentaries to those texts usually point to repentance in only a spiritual or supernatural sense. But is it not more probable that those plagues or disasters have their roots or causes in forms of concrete human misbehaviour? Perhaps, these texts are even written pre-eminently for times like ours, and thus ask for some kind of willingness of all peoples to repent in very natural terms, that is in terms of changing patterns of use, of sharing, and perhaps even in patterns of production and consumption. This view confirms in any case that we should not see the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse, as a kind of closed or fatalistic book. It keeps open the possibility for change and conversion, also for a change of human economic and political styles and attitudes.

From this background, I wish now to follow the course of some theses, which you have been given as a handout.

1. *The global economy is deeply influenced by the dynamic of globalisation, which is turning the globe into a platform for the launch of numerous new technological and market-oriented activities, world-wide both in intention and effect. Globalisation thus tends increasingly towards an autonomous movement, like that of a satellite in its own orbit.*

The first thesis starts with what is happening now in our global economy. *The*

world-economy is deeply influenced by an over-all dynamic process, the process of globalization. This process is turning the globe, as it were, into a kind of platform, from which numerous, new, technological and market-oriented activities are launched; activities which are world-wide in both their intention and their effect. Let me put this another way. Only a half century ago, almost all international actions and movements started first from the national or regional scene and finally reached the scene of international coalitions or institutions, like the international Red Cross or the United Nations. But nowadays a huge amount of economic and technological activity starts simply at the global level. We are therefore right to speak of trans-national corporations instead of only national or multinational corporations, and we speak about global capital, which is capital encircling the globe in its search for the highest, short-term, capital profitability. Trans-national corporations no longer have a deep loyalty to any nation; they belong to the globe, and the same is true for global capital. *TIME WEEKLY* recently spoke quite correctly of a kind of 'global awakening of mankind', as if a new layer has been added to our way of existence. Globalization looks therefore very much like the autonomous movement of a new satellite which stays in its own orbit around the globe. It is influencing almost every one on earth, but it can be influenced or changed in its present course only with very great difficulty. Even national governments, most of them, have, for instance, become anxious over what the dynamics of global capital, the capital flows, might do with their societies and economies. They are often reducing their taxes on capital and capital-movements, just out of fear for what this new Big Brother might do with them and their economies - as if it had and has a life of its own.

This brings me to my second thesis, about the way we look at all these exceptionally dynamic events. And we will see that this also includes, or at least touches, our way of looking at issues and items like sustainability and climate change. Our views of these matters is, no doubt, coloured by the way in which we look at the process of globalization.

2. *The extremely dynamic character of globalisation fosters two possible views of our present reality:*

(a) *the dynami(sti)c view or look from within: characterised by infinitude, optimism about the elimination of barriers, and the need to adapt for everyone who ,or everything which tends to stay 'behind'; instead of*

(b) *the realistic view or look from the outside: characterised by the awareness of finitude, and the concern that the load-bearing capacity of humans, nature and culture may be undermined. The concern of several the peoples and churches of the South is narrowly related to this view*

The first possible perspective (a) I would like to name ***the outlook or view***

from within. Just imagine that you travel in a high speed train, in which everything looks quite stable. If you then look outside, through the windows, you will perceive everything there as staying behind, as moving backwards from you, rapidly for those objects which are still near to you, slowly for what is near your horizon. I use this metaphor to make clear that the more we (that is you or I, or our society) identify our selves with dynamic processes as if we are placed within a dynamic reality, so much the more will we perceive what is not moving as rapidly as ourselves as simply staying behind, and therefore to some extent as abnormal. For dynamics is normal, and remains normal, because it is seen as naturally infinite, without any limit.

If we relate this view to the present pattern of globalization, which indeed is seen by many people, mainly politicians, as a kind of dynamism from which we cannot escape, and as a context in which we just have to live and to behave, then of course it implies a view of nature and even of other more traditional countries as entities which are lagging behind what we ourselves need or what is 'normally' needed. Like we also tend to look at poor people as those who stay backward, which also then has the smell of some kind of abnormality. But at the same time, this view, which I will call the **dynamistic view**, has also an optimistic dimension. For dynamic progress is in this view always with **us**, technologically, economically and scientifically. And that progress will always enable us to overcome possible limits as barriers which you either remove or just have to take and build into your own concept of development. What lags behind or tends to lag behind has in fact only one moral obligation, to adapt to what is dynamically normal in our ongoing progress to a better future.

The second view or way of looking is the **view or perspective from outside** (b). Just imagine again our high speed train, but now having your own position in the open air, only meters away from this vehicle. What will be my, our, first impression? Yes, of course: **how fast it goes, passing us in just one fleeting moment!** Perhaps you will look, if you can still see it, to some spot just ahead of the train, to see if it is travelling safely, and not threatening some children who are trying to cross the track. The characteristics of the **view from outside** are thus not of infinity or the absence of limits, but include the awareness of the possibility of a sudden or a later end.

If, again, we transpose this metaphor to the process of globalization, we can think here of the prevalent view among the people living in the South, confronted again and again with new demands to raise their exports, or to invite ever more foreign short term capital, and who are then asking themselves: **will this new type of dynamism not demolish our own culture and history?** But we can and should think here also and even more of the growing number of indications that several human and ecological limits are now reached, limits which are related to deep vulnerability of human beings themselves, and to the vulnerability of many ecosystems and of the limited load-bearing capacity of the earth. For if the train of production, consumption,

energy use and agricultural mass cultivation, forges ahead with such extreme momentum and velocity, what can and will remain, what can still survive? In a special edition of *FUTURE* (1994) Corson described some developments which have occurred in just forty years from 1950 to 1990: the world population has doubled, the use of energy has risen by a factor of 5, and world industrial production has grown by a factor of 7. Combined with the growth of the world population in the same years he calculated an approximate **six-fold** increase in the impact of the human activity level on our entire ecosystem. Can, will the world's ecosystems survive, if this process of multiplication goes on for the next forty years? Most experts are now simply saying 'No' and I would join with them. But let me come back a moment to the specific concerns of the people of the South and of the churches of the South about the way in which we, westerners are looking to the world, and what we tend to see as "our" world ... Allow me to quote some parts of a declaration, written in Bangkok in 1999, in the heat of the Asian Crisis, by the delegates of the churches of the South and which was formulated as a separate letter to the churches and the societies of the North. They wrote:

Is there not in the western view of human beings and society a delusion, which always looks to the future and wants to improve it, even when it implies an increase of suffering in your own societies and in the South? Have you not forgotten the richness which is related to sufficiency? If, according to Ephesians 1, God is preparing in human history to bring everyone and everything under the lordship of Jesus Christ, his shepherd-king - God's own globalization! - shouldn't caring for and sharing with each other be the main characteristic of our lifestyle, instead of giving fully in to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?

This is another perspective "from the outside" at our societies, and implicitly also at us as Western Christians. How should we deal with it? Can we just escape by retreating into the first view, the dynamistic view, which has become our accustomed way of viewing the world?? I seriously doubt that, not only for moral reasons but also because of concrete factual developments.

Let us from this viewpoint go briefly to two important contemporary reports, the ***Stern Report*** and the ***Millennium Ecological Assessment Report*** of the UN. How do they stand in relation to this dilemma; is their main approach the first or the second view?

- 3. The Stern Report is focused on the evil consequences of rising temperature, caused by the growing emission of greenhouse gases (GHG's). The report is courageous and realistic in its analysis and proposals, (e.g. the carbon tax) but is still mainly orientated to a dynamic or dynamistic view, built around the need for a continual rise of GDP and honouring the growth aspirations of also the richest countries.*

The Stern Report is indeed strongly and correctly focused on the evil consequences of the rise in temperature, caused by the growing emission of greenhouse gases (GHG's), mainly caused by the still increasing use of fossil forms of energy. Every type of growth of human production and consumption has an energy use component, but most energy use implies the emission of greenhouse gases, as already explained eloquently by Sir John. The Stern report insists very clearly on the urgent need to cut back the level of those emissions and the use of fossil energy per product. I think that the report is courageous and realistic in its analysis and proposals (like the installation of a so-called carbon tax). But at the same time it strikes me, that no critical question is raised, for instance, about the increasing volume of industrial production in especially the richer countries. I quote:

Tackling Climate Change is the pro-growth strategy for the longer term. And it can be done in a way that does not cap the aspirations for growth of rich or poor countries.

It is an important observation. Of course, I can read this statement in this way, that if all efforts are made economically and politically to improve the so-called carbon-efficiency, as well as the energy efficiency per product, then a long-term stabilisation of the global temperature is possible without interfering in any way with either the world's population growth or its industrial growth. But what makes the undisturbed continuation of industrial growth in rich countries so important, so essential, that those aspirations may never be discussed? For industrial growth per capita in the rich countries is undoubtedly one of the main sources of GHG emissions. Is the Stern Report not at least partially led by the first view, the dynamistic view from within? It seems as if the report looks primarily to technological advances and new market- or taxing- devices, just to make sure that we as rich countries can continue our long term economic growth.

4. *The UN Millennium Ecological Assessment Report is broader: highlighting three major problems : the dire state of many fish stocks, the extreme vulnerability of two billion people living in dry regions, and the growing threat to ecosystems from climate change and pollution. It is therefore more open to the second approach, starting from a creational view. Though this report is very good in its warnings it is however not far-reaching in its concrete proposals.*

The UN Millennium Ecological Assessment Report is in my view indeed not only a deeper, but also a broader report. This already comes to our notice in the title of Report "*Living beyond our means*". That sounds indeed like the second view, the view from the outside! The Report also starts with the remark that, at the heart of its assessment, is a stark warning. I quote: "*Human activity is putting such strain on the natural functions of the earth that the ability of the planet's ecosystem to sustain future generations can no longer be taken*

for granted ... Human activities have taken the planet to the edge of a mass wave of species extinctions.” Three major problems are indicated: the dire state of many fish stocks, the extreme vulnerability of two billion people living in dry regions, and the growing threat to ecosystems from climate change and pollution. The report also upholds a creationist view in its reference to the services or functions of nature for mankind which must be preserved and maintained. But what strikes me, while I am open to be convinced otherwise, is that also the Report is not really critical about, for instance, the exponential material growth in the Western world, and also not far-reaching in its concrete proposals in this matter. A kind of hesitation seems to come here to the fore. This report reminded me of the recent discussion among technological experts, initiated by the Wuppertal Institute in Germany as to whether, in the future, instead of a 25% reduction of energy use per industrial product, also a reduction per product of 90% could be enforced. Experts always seem tempted to lean towards even more far-reaching technological or market-solutions, rather than consider any solution requiring the limitation or restraint of the pattern of economic output itself. But what could be behind their hesitations? Or, to put it differently, what turns the desirability of continued material economic growth in rich countries into an ultimate necessity, putting a kind of taboo on every form of lower economic growth?

I hope that you now feel with me that this question compels us to discuss the real, deeper background of the first dynamistic view, the view from within. For that view has obviously become almost self-evident in the West for most politicians and citizens.

5. The possible role of Modernity as cultural and spiritual background of the dynamistic view on reality has to be fully recognized, also because it determines the main trends of the present process of Globalization. Its characteristics are not only Individualism but also a mechanistic world-and life view, which is moreover channelled into the faith or ideology of self-made progress as the meaning of life. This leads to over-emphasising both the forces (economy, technology) and the institutions (market) of human dynamic progress, which can even appear as ‘saviours’ or ‘idols’. The proof of the presence of such a possible general illusion is the rise of several economic or societal paradoxes.

Going back to our own roots in Western culture is not easy; it may even look like a painful experience. But sometimes we just have to do it, because it reveals so much of our own man-and-world-views. They may appear to us as self-evident but are often rooted in deep faiths, beliefs or our civilizational past. Here for a moment I wish to choose to examine the origins of what we really mean when we speak about a modern world, about a modern economy, and what we intend if we speak about globalization as an effort to bring the

blessings of ongoing modernisation (a dynamic term) to less modern societies. The origins of that kind of speaking and thinking go back even before the time of Enlightenment, to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, when the western man or woman was plagued by a whole spectrum of deep insecurities. Just imagine that you do not know to which state you belong, because of the many political struggles being fought in that time. Or reflect upon what it would be like to not know what to believe, because Catholicism and Protestantism each claims its own view of final truth. Or, perhaps even more horribly, that you have heard of guys like Copernicus who say your own senses just betray you if you see with your own eyes that the sun comes up and goes down, and so moves around the world. What do you think, what do you believe, who do you trust, with that kind of insecurity? But it was from within that deep, very deep, insecurity that modernity appears. For thinkers like Descartes then arise, and in their writing assert that there is one thing which you can still trust and believe: that you think and thus, no doubt, exist. He is followed by Hobbes, who looks at the striking developments of the natural sciences in finding and formulating unconditional, natural laws, and so begins to look for parallels in a new structuration of human societies, built on the gravitational powers of attraction and repulsion. It is the birth of a new, mechanistic and even individualistic view of human societies. But it bears also an element of deep hope, which comes especially to the fore in the later time of the full Enlightenment. For there, indeed, we find the firm belief or faith that it is possible to structure within every human society a dynamic path of eternal progress which inevitably leads to a better future. Such a path can be found simply by trusting the feed-back mechanisms of our own rational making like the democratic mechanism and the market-mechanism, and by following the paths of the relentless ongoing efforts of science and technology.

But is it really true that this is the core, the kernel of the first dynamic view on reality? Is there no way to become more sure that the prevalent view which also guides most of the present process of globalization has indeed such deep historic and also non-neutral grounds? We must indeed look for more certainty, for it is a thesis of wide implications. For, if it is true, and as far as it is true, it would imply that indeed the dominant view of the solution of major present world problems is influenced by looking mainly from the inside to the outside. And as dominant view is also so much coloured by the surely not-neutral presuppositions of Western modernity, then we can no longer exclude the possibility that some kind of general delusion has taken hold. If so, then it is a delusion which is even partially capable of blinding us, misleading us and even paralysing us. For here indeed we enter the realm of what comes before or goes beyond pure scientific reflection.

Said otherwise: the existence of such deep spiritual and civilizational roots could even imply that the solutions for which we are looking, also in speaking about climate change, will indeed fail if they do not contain or encompass a spiritual component, perhaps even an element of repentance from the very

beginning. For, to be very clear: it is of course not by accident, that the second perspective I listed, the view from outside, starts not from what is given to us and from what needs to be preserved. Only the distinctive view from the outside does not come by accident, but is intrinsically creational. For, only by putting what is given us by our Creator first, and therefore acknowledging what needs respect and care, can we begin to relativise the work of our own hands, and start to question our involvement in the dynamic progress itself. That progress is, for so many secularized people in the West, though not for the churches of the South, the holy shrine of our entire existence and civilization.

The last time I spoke here in Leeds for WYSOCS, I referred to the existence of a lot of economic and/or societal paradoxes in our modern society. Indeed, for me, they form the core of the proof that indeed some kind of illusion or delusion is present in our modern western mind, and leads in practice to a growing number of unsolved problems. Of course I cannot now repeat in full what I said before, so I restrict myself to two general remarks. Firstly, that there is clear evidence of a significant number of paradoxes in our modern societies, which to a great extent also accompany the present process of globalization. I mention here the paradox of growing poverty in the world and even in the midst of the richest societies; of diminishing care for people, even while and where there is more material welfare than ever before; of growing scarcity while less scarcity was predicted; of increasing haste in a time in which we expected a more relaxed way of life with more leisure. But paradoxes like these do not grow by themselves. They all are rooted, and this is my second remark, in the tension between the dynamic and the less-dynamic part of human society, the part to which also nature, time, human care and most of our cultures belong. These components or categories are all usually seen as staying behind, or lagging behind in productivity or efficiency. But if you try, in that same logic, to heal or to cure them with just more dynamism, whether of money, or of economic growth or technology, you may even intensify them in their all too evident limitation and therefore run into insurmountable problems. And indeed: most modern poverty is, for instance, the poverty of those who cannot satisfy the demands of our extremely dynamic society. It is the main reason for their falling behind and for the growth of inner-city ghettos. And as for Africa, it is mostly so deeply suffering because it is treated as a continent that it is almost entirely falling behind and cannot reach the levels of increased exports and expansion which we determine as normal for them in this time of rapid globalization. Indeed, the paradoxes teach us that we all, as western citizens, are probably caught in a kind of *dynamistic universum* from which we look at the world. So that we can even become irritated that the earth does not offer us more, does not sustain us better, does not cooperate more fully with our important efforts to find solutions in our own dynamic way.

Obviously, said somewhat differently we, in the modern West, are so deeply

oriented to, perhaps even obsessed by, what we have to preserve and reach via our ongoing economic and technological dynamics. And that includes economic growth, but also what we have to safeguard for ourselves in terms of our national security. These absolutized goals seem to be the main reason that we have lost, at least to some extent, our freedom to relativise the material means that we need to realize these as final and absolute goals. And that, in my view, has elevated the progress of our material production and consumption as a new "untouchable". Such progress is seen and valued as sacrosanct. For from its dynamics depends our happiness, our future, our health. However, when means are elevated to reach absolutized goals they tend to blind or narrow the mind. They usually create obedient followers instead of critical observers.

I put this deliberately as a question: Is that not the deepest crisis of our time? Have we not bowed before the means which now have to secure our own future progress, and so have we not deliberately made them dominant? Is that perhaps also the deepest reason why, in the process of globalization, the world of money and money-creation, centred in highly dynamic financial markets, has now taken a dominant place determining the course of almost all real economies? We become enslaved to what we think will make us free - is that perhaps not the deepest paradox of all?

6. In looking for possible solutions the relevance of breaking through the existing illusions about economic growth needs to be underlined. A Way-oriented restructuration of our economies is in fact inevitable. This has to be realized in a step-by-step approach which is oriented to the principles of a blossoming economy, and should be based on the outcome of regional and national dialogues between responsible economic actors or political agents.

But what should we then do? Some final remarks about this extremely serious question:

a) What immediately comes to mind is the need to challenge those existing world-and life-views which do not start from respect for what is given us by the good Lord to care for and to preserve, also for future generations. Instead these ruling world-and-life-views almost always begin with the pride in what we can do and what we can make, if, for instance, we just produce more economic growth or receive more money. The order of thinking and acting has to change radically, also in politics. Especially Christians, Christian churches, have in my view a task here. For they, God willing (and they themselves willing), can lay bare the deep roots of our present illusions, and break through the lie that more material consumption will lead us to more happiness, to more shalom. For just the opposite is true. The more we continue

on our present path of unlimited material expansion, the more we need to rob the earth, to overburden our vulnerable ecosystems, and the more we have to engage ourselves in a rat-race to obtain the final dregs of the depleted supplies of the energy-reserves in this world, even if the price is making war and fighting in remote areas.

Is it really impossible to teach young children and adults that in always striving for more there is a deep lie, a hidden enslavement? I do not think so. But Christians especially should then remember to tell their children and the politicians that the meaning of life, either of personal life or of a community's life, never consists in any kind of utmost or absolute goal orientation. Real life is always deeply Way-oriented; it is a matter of walking in the commandments of love, justice, peace and stewardship. This is to follow Jesus, just as he once led the way, and kept the way even through his death and resurrection by sticking to an unconditional love for God and the utmost care for his disciples. Also for us there is in fact no other way.

b) My second remark is that there is real hope. It may even already come to the fore in taking the very first steps, for instance the step of accepting a general kind of ceiling for further material consumption in the west. But it will shine even more clearly if, because of the seriousness of our time, there grows a general awareness that 1. we need to invest more in the preservation of our vulnerable natural capital; 2. that we have to share, really share, with the poorest countries, and 3. that employers as well as employees must begin to see that it has become a *fata morgana* to seek their horizons in ever higher profits and wages. On that basis, an economic restructuring of our economies becomes possible, not unlike the war economy which Britain adopted in the 1940's, but now oriented to the development of an orchard of blossoming economies in the world as a whole. Let us not give in to fears about more poverty and less employment. I am convinced that measures like these can actually strengthen our economies and create more meaningful employment than the strongest economic growth is able to do.

For there is, however strange it may sound, a strong relieving economic power in the will to share and to exercise restraint. It opens up a number of trade-offs, also with the nations of the South, which at this point now fully out of sight. Put in other terms, an economy of self-restraint is not far from the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom as it was explained already for this reality by our caring and sharing King-Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. That Kingdom will one day become a full reality when He will return and will ask all nations to render an

account for their deeds, also their economic deeds.

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