

80. Perspectives of Christian Higher Education: the Social Sciences

Bob Goudzwaard

*in Natalia Pecherskaya ed Higher Education in XXIst Century
Russian Culture: A Christian Perspective SRPH St Petersburg 2000*

This paper was delivered at a Conference on May 24-25 1999
organized by the St Petersburg School of Religion and Theology and sponsored by
the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education.

1. Introduction

In this conference we are all wrestling with the same question. What could and should be the contribution of higher education to Russian culture of the twentieth-first century? And further, we are wondering how this contribution should be viewed from a Christian perspective. It is a well-chosen conference theme. From the outset the conference theme presents us with two underlying presuppositions. The first is a deep respect for cultural values and with that a clear recognition of the Russian cultural identity. This will also have to function as an undertone of my own contribution. Secondly, this theme also presupposes that the Christian world-and-life-view really matters, at least as far as education is concerned, and particularly for students who have to be formed and trained in the social sciences.

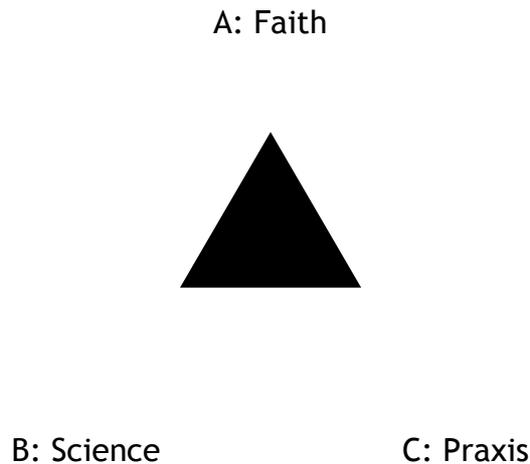
But what is the real basis for such a positive expectation? One could say: that basis is the broadness of the Christian world-and life view itself as it comes to us from its sources, from the Bible and the Christian tradition. And indeed, these sources refer also to social and political life, to economic problems, to the care for nature and the formation of culture. But is that also true for the social sciences in their present form? Is that central to sociology, or political science, or the theory of law, and for, last but not least, economics? I do not know how you see this, but my perception of those sciences is that they are carried on within structures and paradigms that are very restricted. This means that they are, to a large extent, closed off from any meaningful appreciation for culture and for input from faith into the exercise of scientific reasoning.

In my view, this fact poses a huge problem for any kind of Christian higher education and, in particular, for the responsible development of university courses which we may wish to develop. In the twenty-first century, the challenges to our curriculum will surely increase. Most Christian teachers and professors in the social sciences the world over, in Russia as in the South or the West, are no longer sure about how to rightly educate their students. Often they are in doubt as to how or to where they should begin: do they start from the current textbooks, from their own insights, or is there perhaps some other way to launch their teaching?

2. Four Educational Paths

Let me therefore begin by trying to explore the heart of this deep embarrassment. My exploration will present you with an educational triangle by which I have tried to better explain to myself the possible ways in which Christian faith, learning and praxis interact in the process of teaching social sciences at the university level. You see **faith** at the apex of this triangle (A), where it indeed belongs, and

science or learning (B) and praxis (C) are the two lower corners. Now, with the aid of this triangle, we can distinguish various education paths: I will expound four of these.



I. **The Standard Method.** The first path to be discussed, I will call the standard-method, and it runs from B (the social sciences) via C (social praxis) to A (faith). It starts from the present state of science and learning, as can be found in the dominant text-books, and it tries to see and explain present social-economic, political or legal realities in those terms. Faith is only added as a comment or concluding spiritual reflection; it is so to say the addition of grace or metaphysics to an already given natural reality. This method is followed in almost all schools and universities. But our sense of uneasiness with this path is, I think, one of the main reasons bringing us here to discuss the teaching of the social sciences. This standard-method is completely uncritical about the presuppositions of science and learning in their form. It may be one-sided in its view of reality and certainly undervalues the real significance of faith in life. This view even tends to imply that students are merely learning machines; the only difference however seems to be that you now substitute the previous Marxist textbooks for present western standard-textbooks. Therefore, we have to go on and look at some other possible alternatives.

II. **The Method of Religious Principles.** The second path is what I would like to call the method of religious principles. This path runs from A via B to C. It starts by presenting students with an exposition of the Christian / Orthodox world-and life, and then tries to build on that base alternative structures for science and education. This is done in the hope that, sooner or later, there will alternative and better academic textbooks will become available. And so with programmes that teach from this new starting-point, a better understanding of daily life and the practice of various social, economic, legal and political responsibilities will in future gradually develop.

Most of us, and I do include myself here, will certainly prefer this approach to the standard method. It openly recognizes that science and learning cannot exist outside a specific world-and-life-view. It is undeniable, for instance, that the dominant standard method of western sociology and economics leans implicitly upon the mechanical world-and-life-view of positivism or operational pragmatism.

The method of religious principles also has its beneficial side. From the outset it encourages students to study in a critical way. In my own education I was partially formed and educated by means of this method, and it taught me to be open for

alternative ways of thinking, including the possibility of studying economics from a standpoint that was more Christian in its approach. But I also became aware of the weaknesses in this approach.

One of these weaknesses is the assumed role of doubt. There is an almost continuous insecurity about whether the correct scientific principles have been derived and can in future be derived from our Christian / Orthodox faith. One question simply doesn't go away: Can these principles lead us to a consistent scientific framework?

There is a second weakness and it is related to the first one; such over-riding concern with consistency to principles makes the relationship with complex practical issues very vulnerable indeed. As it turns out, the chosen principle will often be far too limited to cover the entire complex reality we are faced with; and that factual complexity will certainly not diminish in the forthcoming XXIst century. But if we follow this method then as lecturers we will revert back to the standard method to help us account for those complex cases our principles cannot explain. And so the existing textbooks will serve as a kind of secondary help. But in my experience as a lecturer that reversion can deeply disorient students. They may even feel very much that their guides have left them alone in the midst of a bewildering forest.

III. The Contextual Method. Therefore we come now to consider a third path, which runs from (C), the practice, via faith (A) to science and learning (B). We can call it the contextual method, because it starts from the experiences of reality itself. It begins with noticing the conditions in which people live and work; it begins with how they behave politically and socially, positively or negatively, legally or illegally. The contextual method then tries to evaluate all these observations and experiences directly from a Christian or biblical perspective (A), and then looks finally for those scientific tools and theories which make the present situation most understandable for their students (B).

I also prefer this method above the **standard-method** which was mentioned first. For it takes the practical situation, the praxis, with utmost seriousness. Moreover, the artificial separation between faith and science, grace and nature is no longer operative here. Religion is allowed to enter into the classroom; students are not left alone by their teachers.

But there is also an important weakness in this method. I hope that we are all aware of it. It is that in the last stage of the process, from A (faith) to B (science), an eclectic approach is unavoidable. The presumption is that you will have to choose between the existing available theories, and of course one will be inclined to accept those theories which best suit the pre-set purposes. That implies that science has not become a kind of tool or instrument to prove what you already thought was valid from the outset.

And that reminds us all of what happened in the classrooms where Marxism-Leninism was taught. In the long run it can also make ordinary people extremely sceptical about the use of any kind of theory. For how does one know that you are not being manipulated, even with the best of Christian intentions?

In my opinion, this approach tends opinion to undermine the respect that is due to the scientific calling. It tends to undermine the distinctive character or dignity of science. In my view, science is given the divine calling to search for truth and truth alone, even if some social groups, governments or business people don't like these outcomes.

Reformed Christian thinkers like Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd spoke in this way about the distinctive integrity, (the sphere sovereignty) of science, and thereby underlined the fact that every scientist lives and works directly *Coram Deo*, before the face of the living God, Who asks from all schools and universities obedience to the law of truth and integrity.

IV. **The Method of Trust.** I mentioned four methods. One has not yet been discussed.¹ My fourth method runs from practical observation and experience (C) via science and learning (B) to faith. It is this method to which I am increasingly inclined. This method, I believe, holds out a promise for a culturally-sensitive and faith-oriented form of higher education in the Russia of the XXI century. Namely, it is this method which leads directly to a guided communication with your students about all the complexities of our turbulent society. It is moreover a method which also respects the distinctive integrity of science, the sovereignty of science in its own sphere. I call it the method of trust, and will explain the reason for that.

We namely already along the paths of the other three methods, that the weakest element was always in the last phase, along the concluding path of the process. The **standard-method** ends in a kind of depreciation of faith, because it has no other choice than to degrade religion into a metaphysical component. The **religious-principles-method** has problems with a rapidly changing complex reality. And the **contextual method** tends to finally depreciate the value and character of science. So also in this last and fourth educational path we may expect that the real difficulty comes in the final phase.

And indeed it is true. For if you as a teacher start with the factual side (C), building on the direct life-experiences of your students and yourself in relation to present society, and than begin to ask together questions about these facts and experiences in a truly academic way (B), then in this process of trying to understand and explain you are of course passing through different levels of knowledge. Some of these levels are elementary, but some of them may be of a philosophical character. So, sooner or later, this process of searching and questioning together will reach the moment in which the root-causes or depth-layers have to be discussed of present social, economic, political or legal problems. But will what we have to say as teachers and educators at that deepest level be in correspondence with our Christian faith? That seems indeed the weakest element in this entire approach. At this decisive moment it may even turn out that our Christian faith has in fact nothing to say, that at that crucial educational moment it proves to be completely irrelevant.

That indeed seems to be a risky path. But here the element of faithful trust enters. If we believe that our Lord has created heaven and earth and everything in it, and that He still holds human history in His hands, then this faith in the Triune God should be so wide and, in fact, so all-encompassing, that we can trust and should trust that our faith in the end will hold and stand, also in discussion with our students

¹ In the logic of the triangle, there are also two other possibilities which could be explored. There is ACB, going from faith via practice to theory, and BAC, going from theory via faith to practice. The first option is closest to the way in which many Christian students begin to study, but it is unsatisfactory because it 'ends' in theory. Theory, even Christian theory, can never be a goal in itself. The other option (BAC) is near to the position which Nicholas Wolterstorff took in his book Reason Within the Bounds of Religion Alone in which faith is primarily active as control-belief, testing the structure and outcomes of science as it is. I see the merits of Wolterstorff's approach, but doubt if this is also the best educational method or device. To some extent it comes close to the nature/grace scheme: starting from science as it is, and adding faith to it where and when corrections are needed.

and colleagues. We proceed in the faith that it will show itself to be relevant. And that it may even turn out to be the decisive factor, especially for those students who want stick totally, fully and honestly to the facts. But there is of course also a pre-condition for such a positive result. This is that the students can trust their teachers. Such trust is connected to their respect and loyalty to the real facts, a trust they have begun to develop as they have been guided in the academic way as young scientists.

It may be a good idea to warn students in advance that if we follow a genuine academic path, and follow through with questions related to everything we experience, then we may ultimately come to that depth-level where our deepest convictions are tested. We should not exclude the world-and-life-view of their teacher from this.

Perhaps you are interested in my own experiences with this method; I have applied it to my teaching over many years. Overall, I have found not only that students like this approach but also that as a teacher I was never disappointed about the relevancy of my Christian faith. Maybe that is simply because the dimensions of the Kingdom of God are indeed insurmountable in height, as well as breadth, as much as depth. But however that may be, the great merit of this method is that it makes students aware that Christian faith is relevant in the midst of the most complex scientific discussions about our present society. When the failures of existing theories gradually become more evident to students, then they just feel that a higher truth than ourselves has to enter the class-room. So there is also a real excitement in following this path. Faith is the beginning of all wisdom, says the Bible, but surely it stands also at the end.

3. Looking Into Concrete Problems.

Until now I have only given an exposition about possible paths of learning, but the real thing is of course whether a chosen method will also work in practice. Therefore I now want to discuss with you at least one important problem of a societal nature, which I expect to be of real concern of your students and also on your hearts. I have chosen the problem of poverty and its possible solutions in teaching social sciences. After that, I will try to make some remarks about the issue of globalization (with localization as its counter-pole), because in my opinion this theme will at least partially determine the agenda of the social sciences in the coming decade of the next century. But I begin with the educational question: how should we teach students about the issue of poverty on the basis of a method of religious trust?

A. The Issue of Poverty

Poverty presents itself in many forms in today's world. There is the deep and permanent poverty in the South, the undeniable emergence of the so-called "new poverty" since 1990 in Eastern Europe and Russia in particular, and also the unexpected outburst of harsh forms of poverty in the midst of rich western societies. I would remind you that one out of every four children in the USA now has some direct experience of hunger, and the life-expectancy of a child born in Harlem, New York, is now lower than of a child born in Bangladesh. Poverty has some general characteristics, but it is often also the result of specific situations. So if you invite your students to share with you some of their own basic experiences about poverty with what we know of the poverty of others - and so start from our immediate raw experience or practice (C) - you will hear about the many dimensions of poverty, and it is important to register these with your students from the beginning. So we might expect that several students will relate to the economic side of reality (like being

unemployed and having no money), others to social situations (like exclusion, discrimination of race and gender, alienation). Other students will stress mainly the juridical or political character of poverty (like the abuses of government officials, the role of organised criminality, or the lack of legal protection), and some students will certainly also add the historical dimension, the transformation of a plan-oriented to a market-oriented society and its consequences in the lives of people. Also the impact of external political and economic influences - as with the role of the IMF and the World Bank - may be mentioned. Drafting such a list of aspects or dimensions helps from the outset to make two things clear to all students.

First, you may emphasize that as far as social problems like these are concerned, it can never be correct that just one science, for instance political science, sociology or the science of economics, to suggest that it can clarify, or even solve, the entire problem. Then such a science is obviously overstating its own significance. It can be emphasized that "economism" is often present in political circles.

But there is also a second lesson to draw from the drafting of such a list. It is this: in relation to such a deep and multi-faceted problem, it is far too easy and simply superficial to go directly to possible solutions. There is the dignity of the poor people themselves to consider. Basic human respect requires from every student and researcher take time to go step by step to the real roots of the problem. This is an important facet of academic discipline. It sounds like a principle that everyone would instinctively accept. But it is not. For just like most contemporary politicians, contemporary Western political scientists and economists give far more attention to the symptoms of social and economic problems than they do to their real root causes. The reasons for this are not hard to find. If you restrict yourself to the study of correlations you find in the empirical data and to the practical applications of political measures, then this looks like it is a purely objective and unbiased effort. But if you have to dig into the analysis of the real roots of poverty, then this involves the possibility of categories which sound far less scientific and objective, like "abuse of power", the presence of greed, and even blatant forms of injustice. We note that concepts like evil and sin are usually seen as taboos within Western social thought. But such a narrowed type of social analysis, which assumes that evil and misbehaviour should not be included in the realm of theory, has awful consequences. The possibility of addressing social, political, legal or economic forms of evil and finding ways to correct these is, in principle, excluded. In that way there may even be attempt to artificially exclude the powers of God's liberation and redemption for an entire society. So the first advice for your students has to be: we will no stop questioning together in a honest and academic way until we have reached the level of the real causes of poverty, even if these causes are related to abuse of power or cruel forms of injustice. For there is a legitimate place for what we could call scientific value-judgments. They are but the expression of the conviction that scientists should never evade the claims of truth itself.

But how do we developed that point? Let me just suggest that we imagine a class of students in economics or in political science. Then, after the enumeration of the various aspects and possible causes of poverty, especially in one's own country, the existing social, economic and political theories have to be introduced (B). We ask: Can they explain what is happening? They are then brought in to perform, as it were, a kind of parade in the front of our students, who shall together form the grand jury.

In an economics class first the Classical, then the Marxist and finally the Neo-Classical or Liberal theories march in and present their various cases. And please, let

them have their honest chance. Each theory needs to have its best advocate. For instance, I just loved it to play the role of devil's advocate - for instance defending the case of the unrestrained and pure market - liberalism. Poverty, as I would quite bluntly state it, is finally always a question of people getting enough work and receiving a good income. Now work, paid work, in a market-oriented economy is directly dependent upon a well functioning labour-market, which regulates wages as well as prices. Now, if markets are free, wages will correspond with the equilibrium between supply and demand in the labour market. Which implies that in a really free economy every one who wants to work can also receive a job. So the first hard but quite logical conclusion is, that only the distortions of the free market are now causing un-employment. And if students now begin to revolt, that this so called equilibrium wage level is far too low to give poor workers a decent income, then a teacher can react by saying: OK, but then you have to agree that in such a case the productivity of labour has to increase to make higher wages possible. And is that goal not best realised by the presence of dynamic modern market-oriented enterprises and their technology? Then also poverty will diminish automatically thanks to a rapid economic growth.²

All this might sound quite familiar to you, I suppose. But students should understand that this way of reasoning has indeed its strength. It is even thoroughly logical in its own way. And so it is not by accident that it is the dominant Western way of looking at economic realities. In my view therefore every social teacher has the duty to creep into this world-and-life-view and even to try to defend it as a lion against all logical attacks from the students - until, that is, they begin to surrender.

For at that moment other theories or paradigms can be brought in; Keynesian theory for instance. For the historical origin of Keynesianism was precisely the deep mistrust of John Maynard Keynes against one of the most hidden basic pre-suppositions of classical and neo-classical thought, namely the identification of market-equilibria with the common good. Why should these be identical? Here we see the impact of presuppositions on the analysis provided by the liberal free-market viewpoint.

Of course, one can identify the presuppositions by examining the usual pep-talk by those defending or criticizing the free market approach but, more to the point, students can be helped immensely to become aware of the significant role of presuppositions in social sciences by the use of the simple whiteboard illustration that shows how a full equilibrium between savings and investments on the capital-market can, in a market economy, coincide with huge unemployment and deep poverty.

The Keynesian paradigm has limitations, but its great merit is that it has clearly falsified the opinion that in all circumstances a free market is the best compass for an entire society.³ After Keynes, it is widely accepted that scientists who still hold that

² Sometimes these neo-classical theories also suggest that the poor people are simply not willing to offer their services to earn their own income. Then the conclusion is reached that the incentives to help people accept work should be improved, which leads to a workfare-type of social policy. And if the international dimension comes in, the neo-classical argument runs as follows: are the bankers not correct in asking that loans should be paid back? And should international agencies not try to assist a national economy on its path towards debt-credibility and a higher degree of growth? That is, in the long run, also in the best interests of the poor.

³ In relation to the analysis of poverty, the Keynesian theory, for instance, stresses that when the so-called natural wage correspond directly with a low income level of the masses across the society, and therefore with a low level of aggregate demand, production and employment. A government which takes good care of a social security

opinion, can only do so because they *believe* in the market, because it has become for them an issue of faith.

In relation to teaching on poverty, I would also introduce an important third paradigm in current social thinking. It is related to the work Amartya Sen, who recently received the Nobel Prize for Economics. His main research was the study of the causes of poverty and impoverishment in India and Africa.⁴ In his work Sen openly criticises what he calls "the eschewal of deep normative analysis" by most economists, and he proves that in his study about the origins of poverty and hunger. For he relates those origins not only to *what* markets are doing, but also to what economic and political *actors* are (or were) doing. He has proved in a quiet, but academic, way that in India it was especially the local authorities who caused poverty because they excluded the poor from some of their most legitimate claims, and that in Africa it was mainly the landlords who were depriving the poor of their rights. So finally, we meet here an economic analysis of poverty, which does not escape from questions of evil and injustice!

The difference is indeed enormous. In closed social theories it is only the "what" questions which may be asked when something has to be explained: *what* has caused this poverty to occur?; *what* causes unemployment? By that artificial methodological restriction, the suggestion has been maintained for centuries that economics was purely and simply a value-free science. But an honest social theory of course can never, and should never try to, avoid the 'who' question, the question of who has caused and is accountable for the rise of poverty. And if we refuse to simplify reality by merely speaking about the capitalists who, by definition, exploit the entire working class, than human accountability and responsibility will inevitably re-enter into social theories when we seek to understand social, economic, legal and political causality. It is therefore also an academic question, a research question, how far, and to what extent, the present poverty and impoverishment in Russia can be seen and analysed as a consequence of actions or non-actions of the government, of criminal organisations, or by actions of the previous political and economic establishment, the so-called *Nomenklatura*. Or maybe poverty has been caused by the excessive claims of labour unions, by western banks, or the economic policies of the United States. These are not just ethical questions. They are also problems for a genuine economic, social and political analysis, and the entitlement approach of Sen can help us to answer those questions.⁵

But let me conclude here by pointing to the deep relevance of faith in issues like this. If students are asked to choose between those existing theories in terms of their respective nearness to truth and explanatory power, then I am sure that also in Russia most of them will intuitively choose for Sen's approach to poverty. But then the

system therefore also upholds the buying power in society which is needed to produce enough goods and create enough employment.

⁴ Amartya Sen 1981/1992 Poverty and Famines: an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation Oxford: Clarendon Press. Also of great interest is his 1987 booklet On Ethics and Economics Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

⁵ Sen's frame of reference is namely this: who or what has reduced the entitlements of the poor on the available food, directly or indirectly? every action or even non-action which diminished those claims or entitlements is seen by him as the real economic cause of their impoverishment. From this point of view there are, for instance, clear elements of injustice and even greed present behind the ruling inter-national monetary system, in which the rich countries give enormous privileges to themselves, excluding all non-key currency countries from any fair part in the creation of international liquidities: an aspect which will be ignored if only the 'what' question is asked.

teacher should ask them and himself: how is that possible? what is the standard for such a choice?

Amartya Sen speaks about economic entitlements or claims of poor people. But what are in fact entitlements? Why should all people be entitled to share in the goodness of this earth? And what gives us the right to analyse the behaviour of banks, governments, business-people and landlords in terms of causality and accountability? Who has said or declared that they should be responsible? Did we just do that ourselves? I hope that you hear where I am pointing to. In every real explanation of a social evil like poverty, somehow the presence of a higher authority than our own is pre-supposed. The neglect of all norms of justice, *oikonomia* and humanity leads in every social science to either closed circularities or tautologies. On the other hand, real accountability for one's deeds even presupposes that all men will have to render account to the Highest Court. Only heteronomous (non-reductionistic) social theories can help us in relation to those questions.

So in dealing scientifically with social problems like poverty and exclusion, two forms of faith finally stand over and against each other.⁶ The one form stresses the autonomy of man, and it leads to a closed mechanical system of thought, which however is often implicitly combined with a deep faith in mechanisms: in the belief in either the plan- or the market-mechanism. The other faith accepts a world which is given to us (heteronomy) and even entrusted to us. But this view leads spontaneously to a far more open and normative type of social analysis, which is accompanied by the rejection of any human institution as the final compass for a responsible human society.

B. Wounded Societies in a Globalizing World.

My second, and last theme, is as promised the issue of globalization. I have seldom come across a topic which has aroused so many and varied interpretations. There are many people who welcome the present rapid changes in world-wide technology, economy and culture - they see as a completely positive development. But others predict that it will lead to a fragmentation, or even a dissolution, of almost all existing human cultures, including the Russian culture. But there is, yet again, another group which comprises politicians, businessmen and academicians who believe that all those opinions whether *pro* or *con* do not really matter much at all. For they see the process as an undeniable fact, a fact with which all nations sooner or later will have to come to terms. The new slogan of the World Trade Organisation in Geneva is therefore TINA, which stands for: There Is No Alternative. You have to adapt to survive.

But what is the truth about globalization? And how should we choose a position as researchers? And then, how are we to teach our students about these matters and

⁶ That is also the case if poverty is analysed from the sociological side. Here the different approaches all turn around the basic question of how to see the human being; as autonomously choosing; as determined by external circumstances; or as called to and gifted for responsibility and community. See, for instance, for the deterministic, so called sociological approach as outlined by Lawrence Mead [Beyond Entitlement](#) Free Press New York 1986 p. 54ff. The persistency of poverty within the US has partially its roots in the far too narrow presuppositions about the human person, made by the political and social scientists who advise the policy-makers (the so-called academocracy). See for a further discussion, also about the controversy between Republicans and Democrats about workfare and welfare Stanley W Carlson-Thies & James W Skillen [Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis](#) Eerdmans Grand Rapids 1996.

these choices? There are currents in Christianity, which stress God's condemnation of the entire present world, and that includes all forms of globalization. But is that not a kind of escapism?

If we look to the analysis of globalization in present literature⁷ it is stressed, and I think correctly so, that globalization is more than a growing openness of almost all national economies to the international market, and also far more than an emergence of innovative global technologies like Internet. These processes are, as it were, not more than the rockets, which together have pushed globalization as a new satellite into its own orbit. Think for instance of the many so-called transnational corporations (TNCs) which now increasingly dominate the world-economy. We have known about multi-nationals for years, but those are corporations where the mother-company still had a permanent home base. But a TNC is by definition footloose. It can have its main site everywhere; its only home is the world-wide orbit. And the same is true for what we now call 'global capital'. Its size is about 98% of the capital flows of the present world, but it can leave your country within minutes if higher profits and interest-rates are waiting elsewhere. You may imagine that you have trustworthy international capital residing within your borders; that was what the Asian countries thought, but they were wrong. Within days huge capital-sums left to go back to their global orbit, leaving these national economies in deep disarray. So also a country like Russia is confronted with crashing currencies and unpayable debts.

Speculative global capital floats over the globe every day in billions of dollars, and now takes on about 80% of all international capital flows. And these simple facts create in the hearts and minds of almost all politicians a kind of fear. For this sounds indeed as if a new big brother has risen who is watching over you from day to day. If you are willing to privatise, to reduce production costs, and to lower the taxes on profits, then you have a chance that global capital will come to you and stay in your national economy. But if not, then you can forget it; it will not stay, and you will be excluded from its domain.

But if all this is true, where is there a place or residence from which to hope for positive developments of local or regional culture? Do we have to teach our students that adaptation to what is, and what is yet to come, is indeed the only possibility for survival?

At this point it is my opinion of utmost importance that students learn to see, that no view on globalization exists which is just neutral. It is always coloured by at least some presuppositions. Usually globalization is presented to us as a mere fact. You cannot fight against it, you have just to accept it as a reality. Then indeed there is no other way than to adapt your economy, culture and society continually to this new reality, otherwise you will certainly not survive.

But is this indeed the only possible view on globalization? No, of course it is not. This so called neutral view is in fact fully coloured by the presuppositions of

⁷ Some of the best present sources are : Manuel Castells [The Information Age](#) 3 vols Blackwell Oxford 1998; The Group of Lisbon (Ricardo Petrella ed) [Limits to Competition](#) MIT Press London/Cambridge 1995; John Gray [False Dawn, the Delusions of Global Capitalism](#) Granta Books London 1995; Hazel Henderson [Building a Win-Win World, Life Beyond Economic Warfare](#), Berrett-Koehler San Francisco 1995, and David C Kortzen [When Corporations Rule the World](#), Earthscan, London 1995. Three recent publications from an ecumenical point of view are Rob van Drimmelen [Faith in a Global Economy, a Primer for Christians](#) Geneva: WCC Publications 1995, Bas de Gaay Fortman en Berma Klein Goldewijk, [God and the Goods, Global Economy in a Civilizational Perspective](#) Geneva: WCC Publications 1998, and Bob Goudzwaard & Harry de Lange [Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care](#) Geneva:WCC Publications 1995.

Western economic thought. For in that type of thought the concrete world is indeed continually reduced to a world of dynamic economic and financial flows, a world which always goes, moreover, in the good direction so long it is guided by the market-mechanism and safe-guarded from any form of public intervention. In such a world there is indeed no other logical alternative for survival than being extremely competitive, for only the strong will be able to survive. The report Limits to Competition, which was published by the so called Group of Lisbon⁸, states therefore quite correctly that present forms of globalization are mainly driven by an ideology. It is the ideology of competition, which it based in a faith in the progressive powers of free and tough rivalry. Faith, and faith again! Slogans like TINA are indeed not neutral. In my opinion, they even have a distinct hypnotic element, an element which is consciously misleading people away from reality.

To see that, however, requires we seek a somewhat broader and somewhat deeper world-and-life-view than the standard one. For of course an enormous reduction of life and reality takes place if the essence of economic and social life is seen in the maximum continuation of economic flows of growth, production and investment. Such a one-sided dynamistic and mechanistic interpretation of reality in fact threatens any kind of preservation of the stocks of nature, culture and morality which have been entrusted to us. They become too easily, and too rapidly, depleted and in that way they also undermine all economic flows in the future. Moreover, it can be clearly shown that stringent market competition usually implies that only the desires of the rich have a chance to be met. It is especially Herman Daly, the American Christian-economist, who is stressing these aspects which powerful arguments⁹. So you see, that also in the matter of globalization, other theoretical paradigms come in and should come in for consideration. But not only that. It is especially here that we confront in the midst of the debate the direct relevance of our Christian faith.

It is remarkable for instance, that in the New Testament scriptures - I think particularly of the letter of Paul to the Ephesians Chapter 1, that the apostle Paul refers to something very much like globalization. It is there where he is writing about the one mystery which still has to be fulfilled in world history, namely that God, according to his own design, according to his own administration of times - the Greek word here is *oikonomia* - will recapture everything under the Headship of the coming Messiah-King. That is a kind of globalization, no doubt; but it is in a style which differs deeply from the idea of the survival of the fittest. For this style of globalization, or redemption, is that of a Shepherd King. A Shepherd who takes especial care for the weak sheep, and preserves them from being trodden on or pushed away by the mighty.

It is this Kingdom-view which, in my opinion, changes the entire scenery. For it implies that the crucial question for us as citizens and scientists should not be whether we are for or against globalization, but to which style of globalization we want to adhere. Is it going to be adherence to the present style of the survival of the fittest, or to the Kingdom style which does justice to the weak. And that style does not only reject ultimate claims coming from the side of any kind of global capital, but it also opens the way for responsible and sustainable ways of economic and social localization.

⁸ *Op cit*

⁹ [Herman E Daly & John Cobb *For the Common Good, Redirecting the Economy towards Community, Environment and a Sustainable Future*. London Free Print 1989.](#)

At this point and place, it is highly appropriate to cite openly from the life and work of Nicolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) who, as you will know, once held the chair of Philosophy in the University of Moscow, but was expelled and banned because he resisted atheism. In his book on the new Middle Ages (*Das Neue Mittelalter, Betrachtungen über das Schicksal Russlands und Europas*¹⁰) he wrote about the presence of a sense of infinity (*Unendlichkeit*), which dominated Capitalism as much as Communism, rejecting any idea of finitude (*Vollendung*). "The economism of our time", so he wrote, "stands for the loss of a spiritual centre. It is the Mammonism which has become the decisive power of our time, which honours nothing more than the golden calf."¹¹ But after this sharp and deep analysis Berdyaev also speaks of the presence of another way, which has to be considered. He calls it the way of the restriction of greed, the withholding of a too excessive growth of needs and numbers of population. And he connects this with what he calls a new asceticism with the willingness to come to concrete forms of cooperation, to prevent in his terms "our technical civilization developing itself to extreme forms of black magic".

An idealist of more than half a century ago? I do not think so, because I hear in Berdyaev's words a kind of realism which makes it directly relevant for the wounded societies of our days.

This is firstly so because the present style of globalization is simply not realistic. It is in fact idealistic, built on a truly secularized concept of endlessness and infinity. Because of that style, it is now jeopardizing almost everything which is finite and vulnerable on this earth, from our global eco-system on the one side to the life and life-conditions of billions of God's people on the other. These people are excluded from sharing and reaping the benefits. Therefore now huge numbers of people from the South and the East have already begun to move to the rich countries, disturbing the feelings of comfort of the rich and destabilising these societies. For greed has long-run boomerang-effects which in fact make globalization in its present form simply unsustainable. Sooner or later this wave of one-sided globalization will end in a deadlock for the western countries themselves. This is also true because no one of the earth's inhabitants (to put it in Hannah Arendt's terms) can live continually outside his or her own given social, natural and temporal context. So we can expect, and see it already appearing, that a kind of global revolt rises up as soon as this context is fundamentally challenged. In our time this becomes for instance visible in the presence and growth of thousands of new world-wide civil movements and organisations, which express the concern of millions of people about the violation of human rights, about the lack of care for health and for the natural environment, and about the ongoing exclusion or amputation of the poor limbs of the organic body of mankind. Civil movements like these have already combined to prevent endorsement of the treaty on Multilateral Investments (MAI) which intended to give free access for business-investment in all countries of the world. These organisations will no doubt grow in influence in the coming century.

But there is a second reason to listen to Berdyaev. Cultures themselves can act as a powerful sources from which alternative forms and expressions of economic life can come. And that is especially true if people begin to cooperate and work together with the understanding that it is not good to be always demanding for always more. When people realize that such a demand is evidence of enslavement they know that it prevents us from seeing and enjoying abundance. For abundance means literally to have even more than enough. So you cannot have a sense of abundance in an

¹⁰ Tübingen: Otto Reichl Verlag.

¹¹ Quoted work, page 37.

economy, if you have not first developed a common cultural sense of enough on the base of some restraints.

4. Conclusion

Let me conclude. Just two years ago, the students of the Petra University in Surabaya, Indonesia held a conference about globalization. And their common conclusion was this: "TINA is not our motto - Ours will be TATA - There Are Thousand Alternatives." And I think they were right, deeply right. For in the openness of the coming of another Kingdom, some cultural trees can even now begin to blossom socially and economically on the basis of various forms of restraint, mutual care and cooperation. The way is still open for a worldwide obedience to the rule of genuine stewardship, to the *oikonomikè* which adheres to the coming Kingdom. And it is still my hope, that Russia will take the lead within the world community to show us that way in these last times.

Bob Goudzwaard ©