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Globalisation, Violence and Religion

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Abstract

After analysing the historical origin and consequences of the process of globalisation, the author presents the challenges posed by globalisation. This presents a serious challenge to the Catholic Church. She commands a vast network of social service institutions, schools, colleges and establishments of higher learning and research across the globe. Can any other organisation boast of such an army of allegedly committed and dedicated women and men, scattered all over the world, many in positions of power and decision-making? An international Synod of Bishops, not too long ago, declared that the ministry of faith must go hand in hand with action for justice. The Catholic Church is convinced of being one of the recipients of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Millions of qualified and professional persons make up her faithful followers, all sharing in the priestly, prophetic and pastoral office of Christ. And Pentecost may be seen as God's approval of authentic globalisation. In spite of all this, if she is not prepared to take any greater involvement in the great discernment process for freedom and unity and diversity the world over, she would not be worth the price of a shoe-lace.

Keywords

Globalisation, Catholic Church, violence, WTO, GATT, UN, NIKE.

“Fundamentally, there is something extremely positive about the whole movement of making the world one. It’s an expression of creation, God’s creation. But, in creation there is also sin. The whole thing can be used to dominate people.” Ricardo Fall sj.¹

The Birth of Globalisation

In 1999, Merrill Lynch ran a series of full-page ads in several newspapers and journals worldwide, heralding the birth of Globalisation and trying, thereby, to win popular support for ‘the Market Economy’. Dating the inauguration of that Brave New Age from the collapse of the Berlin Wall, ten years earlier, it hailed the death of the Old Order of Cold War confrontation between two super-powers that had put the whole world on its collective toes. We were assured that a New World Order was a-dawning, an era of peace and prosperity for all, a ‘free global system’. “The world is Ten Years old”, it was proclaimed in banner headlines. Then it went on:

It was born when the Wall fell in 1989. It’s no surprise that the world’s youngest economy - the global economy - is still finding its bearings. The spread of free markets and democracy around the world is permitting more people to erase, not just geographical borders, but also human ones. It seems to us that, for a ten-year old, the world continues to hold great promise. In the meantime, no one ever said that growing up was easy.

Excellent copy. But note how, among other things, ‘democracy’ is casually (and causally?) linked with ‘free markets’, as if to say you can’t really have the former without the other. Indeed, ‘globalisation’ sounds like a nice, friendly word, holding out the promise of a Paradise on Earth. However in practice, as we shall see, the kind of globalisation we have. makes all this true for the rich among the Americans and the Europeans (especially the big business tycoons and their families) and for their allies and hangers-on, elsewhere.

Globalisation's Roots

Globalisation is championed by the WTO (World Trade Organisation), based in Geneva, Switzerland. It had originally been called GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), the name given to it way back in 1949, when it was founded. The new name was bestowed on it at Uruguay, in 1995. World Trade Organisation sounds more 'open', inviting and non-partisan.

And, right away, the WTO began to argue that its nascent offspring, 'globalisation', would be the surest and swiftest way to combat world poverty, promote sustainable growth and establish peace, prosperity and justice for all. Third World diplomats were, at first, impressed. They were assured that their countries would be the biggest gainers, for free trade would allow them to corner the world market with their cheaper priced goods (due to lower production costs). Some were not convinced, however. Since when, they asked, have the wealthier, stronger nations really sought the good of the Third World?

And it was not long before Asian economists began to suggest that there were 'vested interests' hiding behind the 'globalisation gambit'. An article of Joginder Singh, former Director of the Central Bureau Investigation of India, is a case in point. Backing his charges with well-researched facts and figures, he argued, "the rich nations, with [their] high standards of living [had] reached the saturation point in developing their countries and their economies," He went on,

The goods and services they produce, in the region of \$ 900 billion, are so huge that they have to find other markets, failing which their industries and financial institutions would either be in serious trouble or have to be closed down. ...

Good business sense suggested to them a simple expedient, whereby they could extricate themselves from the mess they had landed themselves into; do it at the expense of the weaker nations!² And, to add insult to injury, they would do so, all the while projecting themselves as unselfishly committed to helping the poor of the world to improve their lot.

The WTO: For and Against

<i>The TEN BENEFITS the WTO claims to offer the world at large</i>	<i>The TEN DRAWBACKS of the WTO, as per; the charges of its critics:</i>
it promotes peace	it promotes exploitation of the Third World
it handles disputes constructively	it allows environmental degradation to go unpunished
it makes life easier for all	it permits dumping of harmful goods.
it cuts the cost of living through free trade	it props up corrupt governments, through increased trade flows.
it allows for greater choice of products	it blocks countries trying to ban imports of chemically modified food.
it stimulates economic growth thru increased trade	it jeopardizes US jobs by letting in trade cheap III World labour.
its basic principles make business more efficient	it operates in secret and is unaccountable.
it protects governments from lobbying	it furthers the 'americanisation' of culture.
it encourages good government	it's a cover-up for ruthless business.

The Seattle Protest

The first rumblings of popular discontent with the way globalisation was unfolding were heard when thousands of people protested outside the venue of the WTO ministerial talks at Seattle, USA, on November 10, 1999. Riot police had to be called in and curfew imposed while minister-delegates from 134 countries (including ours) tried to get to the closed-door discussions.

The WTO believes in, and calls for, FREE TRADE and a FREE MARKET. The protestors, on the other hand, were calling for FAIR TRADE and a FAIR MARKET. Granted, the protests were somewhat blunted for a whole congeries of widely disparate complaints jostled together to voice their grievances under a huge umbrella. We concentrate on the anti-globalisation charges.

For one thing, all kinds of problems arise when one country doesn't want to import, from another member state, beef which has been treated with suspiciously unhealthy hormones, or when a wealthy nation wants to sell its steel to another poorer country at such a cheap rate (temporarily, of course), so that no one would want to buy the more expensive local variety. In such a case, of course, the smaller, less powerful steel-producers of the poor country would be driven out of business. For every signatory to the 2000-odd page GATT agreement – still upheld by the WTO – is also bound by Article XVI (paragraph iv) which stipulates that, “Every member shall ensure conformity of its laws, regulations and administrative procedures with its obligations, as provided in the annexed agreements.” Tucked among these is a rule that declares, in effect, that any local or national requirement that calls for the protection of cottage and small-scale industries, or demands a ban on certain foods on the grounds of health or environmental standards of the important-nation, could be over-ruled as in contravention of the provisions of the agreement.

US ‘bully-beef Tactics

An instance to illustrate what we have just talked about. Europeans, as a whole, hate US beef. This is because about 90%

of US farmers, as a whole, rear their cows in cramped, confined spaces that allow them little movement. In addition, they feed them a diet of hormones. All this makes them grow fatter and faster (besides being rather cruel for the poor animal). This also raises fears among Europeans that eaters of such meat would become more susceptible to certain diseases, such as cancer. There is yet no conclusive evidence in that direction but experiments are going on to check that out. Europeans, to be on the safe side, insisted that – until conclusive evidence, one way or other is in – the US export to them only hormone free beef and the Americans gave them a written undertaking to that effect. Imagine the horror and anger of the Europeans when they found that they had been deceived: sample tests revealed that imported US beef contained hormones! When they charged America with fraud and perjury, the US, without batting an eye-lid, retaliated by claiming that the European beef-ban was against WTO rules. In order to further pressurise the continentals, it drew up a list of some \$ 900 million of European imports that would henceforth be banned in the US (including scooters and strawberry jam). On top of that, US farmers began to lobby for some \$ 500 million compensation from Europe for their lost beef trade. If that is the way how the US can -and does - throw its weight about with wealthy industrialised nations, one shudders to imagine how it would treat poorer, powerless people, who cannot afford the expenses of international disputes at World Courts. The reality is actually a good deal worse than we'd imagine.

Case Study No 1: The Plight of the Igorot People

The Igorot (literally, 'Mountain People') are an indigenous folk of Bengu Province in the Philippines. For centuries, they have practised 'pocket mining' of the rich gold reserves found on their ancestral lands. The men, traditionally, dig - by hand - small, round caves into the mountains and the women and children, from time immemorial, hammer the lumps of gold - bearing rocks into less bulky, more portable sizes. Now, globalisation has stepped in and set up the Benguet Corporation,

with shares equally divided between rich Filipinos, the Philippine government and US investors. New hi-tech machines now cut deep gashes into the mountains, strip away trees and topsoil, dumping piles of polluting waste into riverbeds. The Igorot people, despoiled of their mining grounds, find their water resources destroyed and can no longer grow their rice and bananas. Now they have to trudge long distances to obtain water for washing, bathing and cooking. Furthermore, instead of using water to separate the gold from the rock, as the Igorot once did, the mining company uses more 'efficient' toxic chemicals (including cyanide compounds) to do the job and flushes by-products (at little or no cost) down the river, poisoning the water and killing not only the fish that the people had once used for food but also any of their cattle that come there to drink. Investing in proper waste disposal would hardly make a dent in the billion pesos that the Company makes every year. Instead, poor rice farmers and Igorots have to lose 250 million pesos a year as their yields decline and they add their numbers to the rural exodus. Once more the poor are called to foot the bills of the rich, with a massive energy transfer from the former to the latter.³

Case Study N. 2: The NIKE Story

Finer NIKE products sell for about \$ 100 in the US and Europe. Most of its outsourced production takes place in Indonesia, where it is manufactured at a cost price as low as \$ 5.60 a pair, by hundreds of young women and girls, who are paid about 15 cents an hour. They are housed in militia like barracks, unions are banned and overtime is mandatory. In the event of protests, the army is regularly called in to enforce obedience. Cynthia Elone⁴ reports that the \$ 20 million paid to basketball star, Michael Jordan, for promoting NIKE shoes, exceeded the entire payroll of all the Indonesian factories that make them. When questioned about conditions in NIKE's Indonesian factories, the General Manager of NIKE, Indonesia, gave a typically evasive answer. Yes, he had heard reports of labour problems there but, No, he had no details. He added, "I don't need to know. It is not

within our scope to investigate.” What apparently was within his scope was to ensure the bucks came in, no matter what.

Case Study No. 3: The Avon Success Story

Avon is a brand name in cosmetics, popular among society ladies in the US and Europe. On August 2, 1994, TV Nation documented a very successful Avon campaign to market a product among some of the most miserable and impoverished women of the world - the thin, exhausted, prematurely aged and wrinkled women in the remote Amazon village of Santarem, Brazil. First hundreds of models were roped in to make a series of TV commercials, along side dashing handsome young men. The campasinas, bent and wearied long before their time, due to demanding years of child-bearing and back-breaking toil in the sun, were told that, by using a single jar off a miraculous product called ‘Renew’ (cost: \$ 40), they would be able to slough off their cracked skin to release the light-skinned, sensuous woman trapped within. Indeed, special effects depicted - in a TV ad – a typical campesina peeling away years from her face and becoming magically younger and sexier and the poor women fall for it. Rosa Alegria, Communication Director of Avon, Brazil, exults, “Women do everything to buy it. They stop buying things like clothes, like shoes. If they feel good with their skin, they prefer to ... buy something that is on TV, It’s a real miracle!” It’s certainly the kind of miracle that globalisation allows Avon and those of its ilk to perform, though it might also rank as one of the most aggressive and unethical efforts of all time to universalise consumer culture. So what if it dispenses false hopes and deprives indigent families of their basic needs? And when the campesinos realize they have been had, Ms. Alegria would probably quip that all’s fair in love, war... and business!

And elsewhere...

In India, large-scale development projects displaced over 20 million people in 40 years. In Brazil, the switch-over from

agriculture carried out by small holders, who provided enough for domestic consumption, to capital-intensive goods for export, drove some 28 million peasants onto the road between 1960 and 1980. These schemes were launched by the World Bank with the alleged aim of helping the rural poor to become self-sufficient. However, when questioned by social workers, not a single WB staff member was able to cite a WB-inspired project in which the lot of the displaced people had, in anyway, improved. A recent NGO Conference gave the following bleak report on various World Bank funded projects

In Thailand, 10 million rural people face eviction from the land where they live, so as to make way for commercial farms. Ground water is depleted and mangroves continually destroyed by export-oriented shrimp farms. Tribal people struggle for the recognition of ancestral rights in the forests of Eastern Malaya and Indonesia. In the Philippines, the government's land reform programme is systematically eroded by the conversion of prime agricultural lands into industrial estates and other non-agricultural uses.⁵

The list can go on. No doubt, these projects will bring development and gain - not for the poor peasants they are supposed to benefit, but for big business and the wealthy. The *costs* of all these programmes would be borne by the lower income-groups and the impoverished. One can scarcely maintain that the World Bank and its crony, the International Monetary Fund, know nothing of all this!

Market Ideology: Fiction and Fact

Globalisation exhorts us to give up out-dated nationalities. We must see ourselves as 'peoples of the earth', true cosmopolitans, whose commitments transcend native place and homeland. In itself, this is quite an attractive proposition. But could it be one more cover-up for global-and the 'growth model' of development on which it is based?

The 'free trade' and 'free market' touted by Merrill Lynch are presented as authentic precursors of true democracy. The half truth behind this sophistry is that people best express their will by voting with their bucks than their ballots. People manifest their sovereignty not so much by voting conniving politicians into power, as when they do it through their purchases. This is appealing logic, given today's distrust of politicians and political parties and their scams and schemes to stay in power at any cost. But one key factor is being overlooked. In the market, every dollar, every euro gets a vote - not just each person, as in a traditional democratic set-up - and the more money you have, the more votes you get! Markets are inherently in favour of the rich and the big corporations, who often command more clout than governments. As markets become more global, our futures rest more in the hands of huge multi- and trans-national companies than our governments. No wonder David C. Korten entitled his distressing and devastating study, *When Corporations Rule the World*.⁶

Foreign Aid - Who Helps Whom?

"\$ 146 billion: the combined income of the 528 million people living in the 43 least-developed countries of the world in 1999. \$ 1 trillion, the combined income of the 200 richest people in the world in 1999."⁷ These astronomical figures illustrate the yawning - and increasing - gulf between the haves and the have-nots in today's world. It boils down to saying that 200 people have almost 1000 times more money than over 500 million others altogether!

The disparity is devastatingly consequential in what William Dugger calls 'corporate libertarianism'.⁸ He shows us why market-players are so drawn to corporations. Their legal nature is able to shield decision-making executives from the effects of their irresponsible actions and policies. A corporation is, thus, able to "create its own culture... [and] focus on corporate size and power."⁹ Unlike real people, who are all ultimately rendered equal by death and whose accumulation of wealth can be restricted by

taxes and other controls, corporations can apparently grow and exist forever as well as amass power and wealth infinitely. Thus, as the *New Internationalist* of March 1980, tells us:

An assessment of the largest 100 economies in the world show 53 to be countries and 47 multinational corporations. More significant for the next decade, the growth rate of these companies will be three or four times that of the industrialised countries.¹⁰

In 1985, General Motors already had a growth sales larger than the GNP of every African country or of every Latin American country (except Brazil and Mexico), or every Asian country (except Japan, China and India) or even of some European countries (like Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium and Austria.¹¹ Recently, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR), a giant conglomerate in the food industry, made the colossal bid of \$ 24.88 trillion to swallow up RJR Nabisco - an amount equal to the combined fortunes of the six richest men in the US. That would have been enough to fund all Central American governments for a year, or sponsor 80 million destitute children over the planet for the same period.¹² These mega-giants, with their tentacles in every nation, unlike governments, cannot be voted out of power to give an opposition party a chance to reverse trends. They, more than any political party, run our lives, nowadays, as Barnett and Muller notes:

In developing a new world, managers of firms like General Motors, IBM, General Electric, Volkswagen, Exxon and a few hundred others, make daily business decisions which have more impact than most sovereign governments, on where people live what work – if any - they will do, what they will eat, drink and wear... and what kind of society our children will inherit.¹³

It is dangerous to allow so much wealth and power to accumulate in the hands of such profit-seeking, unaccountable megalomaniacs. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are UN-backed organisations, established precisely to ameliorate the conditions of poorer nations and streamline fiscal

services at the international level. However, as knowledgeable social activists testify:

If measured by contributions to improving the lives of people or strengthening the institutions of democratic governance, the World Bank and the IMP have been disastrous failures - imposing an enormous burden on the world's poor and seriously impeding their development.¹⁴

This is no more blatantly obvious, perhaps, than in the system of foreign aid to developing countries that they have established. Whatever be its pretensions, the whole scheme boils down to the poor nations paying back to their rich donors much more than they receive from them. In effect, it is the developing countries who are giving foreign aid to the opulent industrialised first world! Thus, Third World nations might have fared better off had the so-called First World nations *not* come to their aid at all. "Far from playing the Good Samaritan," notes Paul Vallely, "the rich world has developed a new role. Today we are Bad Samaritans."¹⁵ And he goes on to point out that "latest figures show that the debt and interests due from the Third world are three times more than all the aid they currently receive."¹⁶ In other words,

To repay it [i.e. their International Debt] Third World governments are being forced by the international authorities to cut food subsidies to the poor and their health and education budgets. After decades of improvement in levels of child nutrition and literacy, the situation of the Third World has begun to decline. The United Nations' Children's Organisation, UNICEF, has worked out that, as a result of these budget cuts a total of one million African children have died in the last decade. Throughout the developing world an additional. 500,000 children died, from this direct cause, in 1988 alone.¹⁷

The foreign debts of many developing countries are immense. For instance the debt of Sub-Saharan Africa is over \$ 220 billion. At \$ 365 per capita it is higher than the average GNP per capita which is just over \$ 308. Taking India's population to be one billion from January 2000, at the current rate of exchange,

every Indian - including the very young, the aged and the infirm - carries an external debt of Rs 10,000 on his/her shoulders. And let us not forget that 40% of our people still subsist below the poverty line.¹⁸

Can the WTO, WB and IMF be Fair?

The WTO makes the rules by which the 'free' market works. It is controlled by the US, designed in the West and custom-built to serve the interests of the World's seven richest nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and US). These nations control half of the world's revenue and two-thirds of its trade. The least developed lands represent some 20% of the world's population, but generate only 0.03% of its trade. No wonder they are at a disadvantage when the former lay down their conditions.

To begin with, the Almighty Seven (and their Corporations) want a 'free market' that is, a set-up which best enhances their profits. This means no protection of local markets as this would limit the freedom of action that they would like to have, while functioning in the local economy. As globalisation is upheld, local rules, customs and regulations are pushed aside as prejudicial to the same understanding of globalisation (read big business). Such vast multi-, or trans- nationals can thereby take advantage of their poorer, less-equipped local competitors, driving them out of business with a few efficient moves, over-ruling anti-pollution laws, offering better perks and higher wages than any local firm, while still paying out much less than would be required on home soil.

This means arranging its global, operations to produce products where costs are lowest, selling them where markets are more lucrative and shifting the resulting profits to where tax rates are the least burdensome. The ability to shift production from one country to another weakens the bargaining power of the locals.¹⁹

These organisations, as they stand now, merely establish better and quicker means for the rich and powerful nations to

become ever more so - at the expense of the very nations they are supposed to be helping. Hence, they must be scrapped altogether, to make way for new ones, better equipped to realise their pristine goals of helping the poorer nations, or they must submit their functioning to drastic revision. Very specially must they stop demanding that all nations be bound by the same rules and that disputes be settled by world courts that involve an extremely costly and tedious process that only wealthy nations can afford.

Then there is the questionable practice of converting private debts into public liabilities that they have sanctioned. This began with Latin America in the 1980s and, after the Asian currency crisis of 1996 - 8, entered Thailand and then spread to Malaysia and South Korea, India is not unaffected. Putting it bluntly, the IMF forced the governments of all these countries to accept liability for private debts incurred by individual bankers, financiers and business groups in those countries who, for various reasons, were unable to pay back loans they had borrowed. Now the normal procedure in such cases, upheld by all banking institutions world-wide, is to require such defaulters to plead bankruptcy and the greedy lenders – who had thrown caution to the winds by advancing such loans (lured perhaps by the high rate of interest) would have to pay the price of their reckless loans. But thanks to the machinations of the IMF, traditional banking theory was bypassed and wealthy loaners were able to make good their losses at the expense of the already over-burdened citizens of the poorer countries!

The Either/Or Fallacy

A common sophistry of the ‘growth model’ advocates that globalisation espouses the best of only two possible choices. Either we must cast our lot in with the ‘free market’, unencumbered by governmental restraint and open our borders to all the world, or we must settle for the grim totalitarian model of the old Soviet States behind the Iron Curtain, where the State would decide everything, leaving us with no personal, let alone, economic,

freedom, with perhaps another Wall to seal us off from the world around. If this were really the case, perhaps we would do better to opt for the present model of globalisation and 'free markets, after all.

But are we really caught up in such a Catch-22 situation? Why can't we opt for the system of Corporate Free Markets, but require them to function within a framework of responsibility? What we have now is a set-up that grants impersonal, profiteering corporations rights and freedoms above those of human persons ... and lets them get away with it! This permits them to seize all the advantages of success and make the poorer countries pay the cost!

Sheer Growth is NOT enough!

Those who champion the growth model of development, on which today's globalisation schemes are based, assure us that if we merely produced more goods and services, all our problems with population, poverty and the environment would be solved. The fact is that, since 1950, global output has increased five-fold. The major effect of this was, as we saw, a glut of unsold goods in the hands of the rich nations - a problem they were only able to solve by the present day globalisation formula. In other words, unrestrained growth created more problems than it was supposed to solve. Of course, while world production increased, so did the population, but the former went up five-fold, while the latter merely doubled (So there was no Malthusan population growth outstripping production). At the same time, the percentage of those living in absolute poverty also doubled. Meanwhile, the assets of the world's richest 20% doubled, too, while those of the 20% poorest plummeted. In all honesty, we can't lay the blame for all this at the door of economic growth, but it just goes to show that mere growth cannot save us from our economic woes.

Unless we make some very radical changes in our production and distribution methods, the future of our ailing world will remain bleak. In the short run the rich will go on getting richer and the

poor will become more impoverished. In the long run, even the rich will begin to feel the pinch, for they will either pollute the world and themselves out of existence or they will have to set drastic limits to their extravagant lifestyles. Let us also not forget that the world's resources of fuels and natural wealth are not infinite; we cannot go on wrenching wealth from Mother Nature's ample bosom forever.

Even on the "home scene" the growth model hasn't helped improve things for the common man and woman. New York, centre of the world's most successful proponent of the growth model of development, is already beginning to manifest many of the external signs of a typical Third world city; wandering bands of homeless and hungry rubbing shoulders with the bold and beautiful lifestyles of the rich and famous, sparks of random violence, an overburdened police force caught between the mafia on the one hand and corrupt politicians on the other. The same can be seen in seedy localities of Paris, London and elsewhere in the First world. At times one wonders whether he or she has not suddenly been miraculously transported back to the slums of Kolkatta or the backwaters of Bogotá.

To sum up: the 'growth model' and its agents, the WB, IMF and WTO, coupled with the kind of globalisation they are championing are no help to the poor. In fact, they are a form of violence let loose upon the defenseless, however cynically and hypocritically its perpetrators try to portray themselves as social workers, healers and saviours of the down-trodden. It's time to call the bluff.

Proposing Alternatives

The remedy is not to close the door to globalisation; a FAIR market and FAIR trade do not require that. It's not globalisation in itself that is to be blamed but the kind of irresponsible version of the same that the WTO and its cronies are defending. In place of 'the same rules for all', for the giants and the mites, the latter should be concretely assisted, rather than restricted by WTO rules.

Nor should we forget that growth is not necessarily a good thing. As the British economist, Paul Elkins,²⁰ has shown, there are certain conditions which decide whether it is or not.

a) the goods or services that are being increased should be inherently valuable and beneficial to society at large;

b) their benefits should be widely distributed throughout all sections of society;

c) any good accruing from them must outweigh all possible detrimental effects that might be unavoidable in the process of their production.

Mention could be made, here, of Gandhiji's advice to Nehru soon after Independence. One should ensure that resources be devoted to providing the poorest of the poor with their basic necessities (clean water, a non-harmful working environment, proper housing and hygiene. etc) before they are diverted to making more sophisticated playthings available for the rich (colour, rather than black and white TV and more opulent shopping malls and gilded arcades).

As Viktor Papanek, international planner and designer, who has worked closely with the UNESCO and other such bodies, put it, "The fact of the matter is that today there is more than enough to go around, if only it is properly planned."²¹ In other words, instead of launching ourselves onto another round of frenzied production, let's concentrate on the HOW of production and distribution. This reminds us of the words of the Mahatma, "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

Actually, studies carried out by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), have shown that quality of life is not necessarily related to a high GNP. Saudi Arabia's average GNP is fifteen times that of Sri Lanka, but its literacy rate is far lower, Brazil's per capita income is twice as high as that of Jamaica, but its child mortality rate is also four times as much! It is not HOW MUCH, but HOW that matters, not GNP but quality of life.

Small is Beautiful

Dr. E F Schumacher, former chief economist of the British National Coal Board, urges us to rid ourselves of the obsession with size and bigness. In his controversial *Small is Beautiful*, he suggests that we replace the system of 'mass production' with 'production by the masses'. The former, "based on sophisticated, highly capital intensive, high energy input dependent and human labour-saving technology, presupposes that you are already rich" before you can use it. On the other hand, production by the masses "mobilises the priceless resources which are possessed by all human beings, their clever brains and their skilful hands, and supports them with first class tools". Furthermore, it is compatible with the laws of ecology, gentle in its use of scarce resources and designed to serve the human person rather than making him or her a slave of the machine. There may be some point in the objections of idealism and 'back to nature' that have been levelled against Schumacher, but this shouldn't lead us to reject wholesale all that he is pointing at. Of course, agreeing with his thesis would oblige us to try and break free from the increasing pressure of the big industrial nations who are determined to foist on us their model of development. And our own educated elite, from whom our ruling cliques are drawn, studied, for the most part, in such lands and have imbibed their principles, so they add to the pressure. It'd be even more difficult to make them alter their patterns of thinking. Are we prepared to exert alternative pressure which is not necessarily in favour of Gandhiji's back to nature rural economy and the spinning wheel?

Towards an alternative, Rural-based Model

We are familiar with the urban-based, high-tech model of development, but it is not the only one. Ivan Illich, an educator who has worked along with Paolo Freire in Latin American villages and favelas, calls for a rural-based model of development, ideally suited for countries like ours, where the majority of people still live in far-flung villages.

Instead of investing the usual \$ 100 million to construct yet another speed way between two big Indian cities, he would recommend we use that princely sum to construct a latticed work of small trails between villages, which could be traversed by ‘mechanical donkeys’, traveling at 5 mph and carrying loads of about a ton. If 50,000 miles of such ‘kaccha’ roads were laid between thousands of Indian villages, a whole network of trade and exchange would be established between previously isolated centres. This would encourage exchange, increase the quality, quantity and income of villages, promote indigenous handicrafts and cottage industries, reduce the movement to cities and move the entire rural population a step closer to self-fulfilment.

Illich denounces the kind of development that Latin America is being subjected to by big American cartels, to the detriment of other models:

Traffic jams in Sao Paolo, whilst a million Brazilians flee a drought by walking 500 miles. Each car which Brazil puts on the road denies 500 people good transportation by bus. Every dollar spent by Latin America on doctors and hospitals costs a hundred lives. ... Had each dollar been spent on providing- safe drinking water, a hundred lives could have been saved.²²

He could have been writing of India, we’re back again to the industrialised nations, basked by our urban elites, championing a form of development that is good for the city conglomerates of our land (“India”) versus the needs of our rural-based majority (“Bharat”). Little consideration is given to the ‘refugees from Bharat! who crowd into India’, looking for a job and a meal and having to eke out a miserable existence in slums and shanty-towns.

Two Gospels

Globalisation, as based on the Corporate Free Market Economy in today’s world, is preaching the Gospel of Having More. It affirms that all that we seek, deep down - happiness, meaning, fulfilment - call it what you will is to be found in accumulating things and by limitless material gratification, even

if it involves depriving certain people (deemed insignificant) of the little they have. This approach is on solid ground for it appeals to the undeniable and demonstrable capacities for greed that lurks within us and against which all of us, like St Paul, have to contend with. It engenders competition, violence, hatred and racism. But there is, admittedly, something “deep down” in us that responds to the Gospel of Having More.

There is also in us humans another - equally undeniable and demonstrable - capacity, equally “deep within” us and it provides the basis for the Gospel of Being More. It focuses on enhancing the quality of living of everyone (not just a few privileged and insensitive bloated plutocrats), is sensitive to the environment and to the millions yet unborn, our children and grand-children of tomorrow.

It is up to us to decide to which of these capacities to respond. Which is the Gospel we want to build on? Healthy societies are built on love and compassion and sharing and they thereby create an abundance of those things that are important for the quality of life for all people. Unhealthy and dysfunctional societies nurture greed and competition. They cause scarcity, deprivation and ecological imbalance and sow the seeds of their own destruction. We must choose.

And this means that religions must choose, too. For it is especially the role and responsibility of religions to make us more human, to foster authentic human and social values. However, if our religions prefer to waste their time, energy and vast reserves of money on sterile doctrinal disputes or ritualistic arguments, if they continue to nurture intolerance and divisions on earth, if they promote conflicts and terror-tactics or let themselves become the stool-pigeons of conniving politicians and their vote-banks, then they will be rejected by the people. For those who want mere opium for the masses, well, there are cheaper and more attractive versions of the same than the religious one.

And what of the Catholic Church? She commands a vast network of social service institutions, schools, colleges and

establishments of higher learning and research across the globe. Can any other organisation boast of such an army of allegedly committed and dedicated women and men, scattered all over the world, many in positions of power and decision-making (priests and religious)? An international Synod of Bishops, not too long ago, declared that the ministry of faith must go hand in hand with action for justice. The Catholic Church is convinced of being one of the recipients (if not *the* recipient) of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Millions of qualified and professional persons make up her faithful followers, all sharing in the priestly, prophetic and pastoral office of Christ. And Pentecost may be seen as God's approval of authentic globalisation. In spite of all this, if she is not prepared to take any greater involvement in the great discernment process for freedom and unity and diversity the world over – then, to paraphrase Nietzsche – she would not be worth the price of a shoe-lace.

Notes

1. In a personal conversation with the author (on record), during an interview at the Vienna International Centre on May 4, 1998.
2. In an article in the Maharashtra Herald, Pune, July 20, 2000, p.4
3. See David C Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, (Mapuca (Goa) The Other India Press, 1998, p. 43.
4. Cynthia Enloe, "The Globetrotting Sneaker", in *Mainstream*, March-April 1995, pp. 10 – 15; see also Richard J Barnet and Johann Cavanagh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and New World Order*, New York : Simon & Schuster, 1994, pp. 325 – 329.
5. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, p. 62.
6. Cf No. 03.
7. Time Magazine, quoted by Ambrose Pinto. Editorial to *Social Action*, Volume 50, No. 2, April - June 2000, pp. iii - iv.
8. In his book *Corporate Hegemony*, New York: Greenwood press, 1989.
9. Ibid.
10. Quoted by I John Mohan Razu, *Transnational Corporations as Agents of Dehumanisation in India*, Delhi: Cambridge Press, 1999, pp. 7-8.

11. Cf. *The Marxist Review*, January-February, 1987; quoted by Razu, *Transnational Corporations as Agents of Dehumanisation in India*, p.8.
12. Cf. *The Multinational Monitor*, March 1969, p. 4: quoted by Razu.
13. George W Ball, partner of Lehman Brothers and former US Under Secretary of State (1961 - 66) went on record admitting that multi-nationals and transnationals "have the power to affect the lives of people and nations." Cf. Razu, *Ibid*.
14. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, p. 171. According to World Bank Debt Tables, corroborated by the Reserve Bank of India Report on Currency and Finance, 1998 – 99, India's external debt has escalated alarmingly, from US \$ 20 billion in 1970, to US \$ 77 billion in 1980 and further to US \$ 97 billion in 1999 - that's a debt burden something like Rs. 300 on every Indian, young or old, healthy or infirm. And let us not forget that India's per capita income is about US \$ 310.
15. Paul Vallely, *Bad Samaritans: First World Ethics and Third World Debts*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 4.
16. *Ibid*.
17. *Ibid*.
18. Arun Ghosh, "External Indebtedness, Capital Flows and the Problems of Financial Integration", *Social Action*, Volume 50, No. 2, April-June, 2000, p. 111.
19. Korten, p. 126.
20. Cf. Korten, p. 39 - 40.
21. Quoted by Adam Daniel Pinnerty, *No More Plastic Jesus: Global Justice and Christian Lifestyle*, Maryknoll New York, 1979, p. 2.
22. Quoted by Finnerty, pp. 48-49.