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NEW PARADIGMS IN ECONOMY

By Jakub S. Trojan

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This essay deals with a theme discussed in the wider ecumenical community with increasing urgency. The issue is a new world economic order, a change in the guiding principles of the global household, in other words, new paradigms in political, cultural, and socio-economic areas.

These questions are being raised in a situation in which one system of political, economic, and cultural administration in Central and East Europe has exhausted its potential. The branches which exist in other continents (Cuba, Vietnam, China) cannot survive unless they are willing to undergo a substantial transformation.

Now the question is: is this historical situation an ambiguous confirmation of the victory of the capitalist market system on a worldwide scale? Undoubtedly, this question would be answered in the affirmative, if all the countries which had chosen that type of administration had reached roughly the same prosperity rate as the leading rich countries. This, however, is not the case. And we know why it is not. Moreover, what we do know is that this wide discrepancy between the poor and the rich within the "victorious" block is tantamount to a social timebomb.

In such a situation, a far-reaching and immediate solution is the top priority. The same can be said about the issue of environmental protection, another alarming aspect of the whole issue. In this regard the balance on account of the capitalism is far from being an "Ode to Joy."

There are many reasons to be worried. The ecumenical family, particularly that part of it comprising Christians from the Central and Eastern Europe, is asked by the other part of the ecumenical "polis" (which is critical to the Western type of
society) a number of challenging questions. First: where is the reason for the collapse of socialistic patterns to be sought? Second: was socialism not a genuine alternative to capitalism? And if not, why did the representatives of the socialistic countries who attended ecumenical meetings for decades, not express their doubts unambiguously? Third: did socialism not achieve more social justice? Fourth: was it not closer to Christian motives as we discover them in the message of the Old and New Testaments? Fifth: was not more mutuality found, and/or were not wide differences between poor and rich removed within socialist countries? Sixth: did socialism not satisfy basic human needs, and did it not provide more social security for people? And, last but not least, was socialism not, to speak still more theologically, in some respect an approximation of what Christian faith associates with the vision of the Kingdom of God? And this because in socialism human beings were neither opposed to one another in a competitive struggle, nor were they alienated from one another and society, and socialism, as we all know, posited the ideal of a more human and responsive reciprocity for all people.

Following the collapse of socialism, Christians in our area are responding to the challenge and fundamental reflections are emerging. We will try to formulate them in several points which may be instructive in our search for new paradigms.

I) Socialism did not cope with the issue of power. Instead, it attempted to bring about all the above prerogatives by coercive pressure. In all countries of our region the leaders came to power by coercive means. This applies to the Russian Revolution in 1917 and is no less true about the ruling groups in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, former G.D.R., Romania, and Czechoslovakia. We are aware of the fact that the European history is a history of revolutions, violent revolts. From the very beginning of the communist revolution there was a misunderstanding of power as a neutral instrument. Socialists completely underestimated the feedback of totalitarian power on the users of it. The inclination to resort to authoritarian measures, even after the opponents had been destroyed, became ineradicable. It was our [Czechoslovak] first president, Thomas G. Masaryk who lucidly proclaimed that states maintain their historical existence by clinging to the ideals they were based upon. Unfortunately, socialism, this great ideal of human togetherness and brotherhood, maintained itself by one of the most oppressive systems in the history of the humankind. A system with persecution, torture chambers, and Gulags. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Consequently, all alternative patterns should from the very outset be conceived of as systems with division of power. Power is irremovable from history. We are challenged by its accumulation. Ideas of social justice, equal opportunity,
human mutuality, and stewardship collapse if they are not brought about by means of a checked and divided power. All who take the sword die by the sword.

In a panel discussion after the Convocation in Seoul in 1990 someone asked a Lutheran pastor from South Africa, "Where do you discern the signs of hope?" His reply was, "Whenever somebody puts a bomb I see a glimpse of hope. It means we have not surrendered. We are fighting." My own reaction is that such a laying of bombs is counterproductive to the construction of a new society. Similarly, ideological canvassing is counterproductive. This is the experience of those of our generation who passed through the Communist revolution. All who take the sword during the battle become accustomed to it after the battle is over as well. There is nothing else they have learned to do. This is the dilemma of all revolutionaries and coercive revolt-makers. They become avoiders of any creative thought, they become routine and bureaucratic in their lives, they are but an incidental phenomenon of the cancer of untamed power. Consequently, the first rule of any genuine, noncoercive alternative system is a strict division of power. This ought to be an axiom of any dissident movement opposed to the process of becoming stunted in thought and action and refusing to prepare itself as executor of a new reign of terror.

(2) Where are inspiring ideas to be taken? The ecumenical movement, particularly in the Third World underlines solidarity with the marginalized, persecuted and lawless. The focus is on the poor in society. What we often hear is that genuine theology generates from the grass-roots level. By this very fact is allegedly committed to change because theologians are sharing the common experience of people living in inhuman conditions. And this, so it is argued, is only the theology of people which is becoming a universal theology, theology of liberation on a global sense.

Here we must offer a warning. Let us use biblical imagery: What we need is a Moses-theology, not that of Aaron: a theology brought down by Moses from the mountain, not that one generated by the passing needs of the people at the foot of the mountain. I have enough imagination to hear an immediate objection: that is the spirit of European superiority, of academic theology that has become the ideology of conservative church circles, a weapon of a gang of exploitative and persecuting structures. To be sure, that is indeed the temptation which theology had constantly to overcome. But neither is theology of "the people" free from a number of temptations. In Europe during the Nazi-madness Christians in the Confession Church experienced what a theology of "the people" can be like; what a horrifying distortion it may assume and how the whole nation can become obsessed by it. Against such Populist Theology, Prophetic Theology is to be proclaimed, following
those solitary prophets who frequently had to become witnesses of the sovereign Word of God against the collective of the pseudo-pious. Without this, corrective Populist Theology is likely to become ideology, equally as dangerous as the theology of the hierarchy, the rich, the self-assured. God has no favorites. There is respect neither of persons nor crowds with God (Rom 2:11). The preferential option for theologians is first of all the Word of God and openness to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows where it wills and we do not know where it comes from, or where it is going (John 14 and 16). Such a theology of the Spirit who defies our wishes is protected against the ideological stereotypes far more effectively than a theology that is tantamount to an established power or power that is about to become established. It is the Spirit who has come to guide us into all truth, and it is not until we are in his light that we can see what genuine justice is. And the light of the Spirit makes Christ’s way to the cross and resurrection visible—in this sense, the Spirit is christologically bound. Is not this message the safest barrier against the ideologizing of our faith? It is a perspective disclosed by the Spirit, by which we are no more likely to fall victim to the peril of all nonconformist groups, the peril of dilettantism.

3) All great revolutions, including the Glorious, French, and American revolutions, are scrutinized prior to their accomplishment. The decisive period is one of preparation of conceptions, thoughts, ideas. Less important is the period of their actual realization; indeed, it is often by bringing them into existence that the ideals of the revolution first begin to deteriorate. The search for an alternative to market economy cannot, therefore, be reduced to a number of moral postulates. It does not suffice just to point out some biblical motives sketching the paradigms of a new household, nor is it viable to underline values and perspectives opposing the dehumanizing aspects of the world order. The nonconformist movement should not become subject to dilettantism. Just imagine for a moment that we who are critical of the market system would overnight be appointed to govern. How could we cope with the unimaginable complexities of life in our respective societies and in international context? Would we ever manage them? Along with the temptation of power, that of dilettantism is as dangerous as the former for the dissidents. Yet the Holy Spirit is no dilettante. The Holy Spirit will teach us everything. Thus, the crucial task is ahead. All of our doctrines, experience, knowledge have to be reexamined thoroughly in a discussion not only among ourselves but in a dialogue with our opponents. To love our enemies means to sit down with them around a table and have a panel discussion with them. They differ from us in seeing everything differently; yet only thus can we be helped. Blessed are our opponents because they are exactly what we need if we are to escape our stereotypes. Formulae
and slogans are useless, we must devote ourselves to systematic intellectual work. We need a searching and discerning mind exploring all interrelated issues. Let us reconsider the debt crisis, new international terms of trade, the relationship between the authenticity of regions and their cultural background, issues of nationalism (so vital in our area), environmental problems, and all other issues.

At the moment in Czechoslovakia we are immensely troubled with dilettantism and amateurism in policies, economy, and culture, despite our attempt in the beginning of the 1960s, and a long time before the November Revolution 1989, to accumulate as much knowledge as possible about the fabric of societal life. The leading representatives of the nonconformist movements in the Third World countries and particularly their intercessors in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe have an even greater duty to study the issues in depth. In this regard, the latter are unfortunately feeling guilty, consciously or unconsciously, for colonization and exploitation. As a result, while they feel comfortable in expressing sympathy and emotional participation, they seem reluctant to criticize the brothers and sisters who are challenged by oppressive power and are tempted to resort to power themselves. So Christians of the so called First World have failed to rethink the experiences the Europeans had with revolutions. What a failure! Here we have to achieve genuine participation. In a short summary:

a) We have to cope with the issue of POWER, its control and division.

b) We have to find out the point of departure of genuine theology, in order to avoid any kind of ideology: a theology of the unrestrained freedom of the Holy Spirit is one such starting-point.

c) We have to overcome the dilettantism and the false guilt-feeling which compels us to abandon the bearing traditions of our European history, so vitally needed in the process of creating a new world order.