

From “Common Goods” to the “Common Good of Humanity”

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Alongside the initiative for a referendum on water in Italy, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation has decided to organize a conference on the concept of the Common Good of Humanity, in order to promote reflection on the links between the two notions and to integrate the demands and social struggles for a change of society.

1 Why associate the notion of “common goods” with the concept of the “Common Good”?

2. The defence of the ‘common goods’ is, these days, an important priority for many social movements. The phrase includes both the indispensable elements for life, such as water and seeds, as well as the ‘public services’ that are today being dismantled by neoliberal policies, both in the South and in the North. The struggle consists of opposition to the wave of privatizations that are affecting many public utilities and networks, from railways, electricity, water, transport, telephones, woods, rivers and land to health and education. What used to be called in England, before capitalism, the ‘commons’, has been gradually reduced in order to give rise to an economic system which transforms all aspects of life into merchandise – a necessary step for the accumulation of capital, now accentuated by the dominance of finance capital.

3. Let it be clear that the primary purpose of revaluing ‘common goods’, in whatever form, has been to break away from that lengthy period when economic logic emphasized the private and the individual, in order to promote the development of the productive powers and freedom of personal initiative – so eliminating most of the public from its objectives.

This new economic logic has taken hold of the political sphere, as became obvious during and after the financial crisis of 2008, through the operations put into effect to save the bank system without nationalizing them, leaving them in the hands of those who were responsible for the crisis in the first place (and only indicting a few criminals). Such policies have led

to national-wide austerity measures, making ordinary citizens pay the price for the crisis, while neoliberal policies have been maintained.

4. The defence of public services and of 'common goods' forms part of the resistance to these policies, but it risks becoming a rearguard struggle if these are not seen in a broader context, that of the Common Good of Humanity, of which they form part.

5. To embark on this concept might seem overly theoretical, considering the social and political concerns that now confront us. Nevertheless it can serve as a useful working tool in dealing with contemporary problems, like the multiple crises that face us, as well as the convergence of the initiatives and struggles against a system that destroys nature and societies.

6. Let us start with the crisis and all its aspects, showing how systemic it is and how this places the problems of the Common Good in a new light. We shall then move on to the need to revisit the paradigms of the collective life of humanity on this earth, emphasizing practical measures for the revision of national and international economic and social policies, and concluding with the proposal for a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity.

7. 'The Common Good' is that which is shared in common by all human beings. Already Aristotle, in his Politics, believed that no society could exist unless it shared something in common, even if he thought this should be reduced to a minimum. However, we do not intend, in this document, to develop the philosophical aspect of the issue, but rather to look at it sociologically - in other words to study the way in which the Common Good of Humanity is posited today. The concept is different from 'common goods' because of its general character, involving the very foundations of the collective life of humanity on this planet: our relationship with nature, the production of life's necessities, collective organization (politics) and the interpretation, evaluation and expression of reality (culture). It is not a question of a collective patrimony like 'common goods', but rather of a state of well-being, of buen vivir that results from the way parameters combine to govern the life of human beings on this earth. The notion of 'common good' is also to be distinguished from 'individual good', as it is defined in the construction of a State, because it tackles the question of the production and reproduction of life on the scale of humanity.

8. Clearly, the concept includes the practical notions of 'common goods' and of 'common good' as currently interpreted. If we are starting out with some reflections on the current crisis, it is for the simple reason that this crisis is jeopardizing the very survival of human life on the planet and its capacity to regenerate itself. Thus such a review becomes urgently necessary. If we are to find solutions we must tackle the problem at its roots: in other words we must redefine the Common Good of Humanity today. So let us first illustrate the fundamental nature of the crisis by looking at some of its principal elements.

9. When more than 900 million human beings live below the poverty line, with that number on the increase (UNDP, 2010); when every 24 hours tens of thousands of people die of hunger or its consequences; when, day by day, ethnic groups, ways of life and cultures are disappearing, endangering the very heritage of humanity; when the climate is deteriorating: when all this is happening, it is simply not possible to talk only about the current financial crisis, even if it exploded brutally.

2 The multiple facets of the crisis

2.1 The various crises

The financial and economic crisis

10. It is a fact that the social consequences of the financial crisis are felt far beyond the borders of its origin and that it is affecting the very foundations of the economy. Unemployment, rising costs of living, the exclusion of the poorest, the vulnerability of the middle classes: the number of its victims is expanding all over the world. This is not a matter of some accident along the way, nor is it only due to abuses committed by some economic actors who ought to be sanctioned. We are dealing with a logic that has persisted throughout the economic history of the last centuries (Fernand Braudel, 1969, Immanuel Wallerstein, 2000, István Mészáros, 2008, Wim Dierckx, 2011). From crisis to regulation, to de-regulation to crisis, as events unfold they always succumb to the pressure of profit margins: when these increase, regulations are relaxed; when the profits diminish, the regulations increase – but always in favour of the accumulation of capital, considered to be the engine of growth. What we are seeing now is nothing new. It is not the first crisis of the financial system and there are many who say that it will not be the last.

11. The financial bubbles created over recent decades – thanks, among other things, to new information and communication technology – have increased the problems beyond measure. As we know, the crisis exploded with the phenomenon of the sub-prime mortgages in the United States: i.e. the insolvency of millions of people, which had been camouflaged by a whole series of derivative financial products (Reinaldo A. Carcanholo and Mauricio de S. Sabardini, 2009, 57). In the industrialized countries, consumption has increased more rapidly than incomes (Joseph Stiglitz, 2010, 12). However, the phenomenon is much older, dating from the time when the virtual economy became more important than the real economy: in other words, when financial capital began to be more profitable than productive capital (Jorge Beinstein, 2009, 29). One of the original causes of this process, according to Joseph Stiglitz (2010, 22), was the decision of President Nixon, in 1972, to suspend the conversion of the dollar into gold, which initiated new monetary policies within the framework of increased international economic interdependence (globalization).

12. Capitalism has experienced financial crises from very early on. The first was at the end of the 18th century, and they were to reoccur over subsequent years, the most recent one, at world level, being that of the years 1929/1930. This was followed, after the Second World War, by regional crises (Mexico, Argentina, Asia, Russia). In the countries at the centre of the system, the new world financial crisis of 2008 triggered a series of specific policies: indebtedness of the State, restriction of credit, austerity measures, etc. But the countries of the South were also affected, through decreases in exports (China) and in remittances (Central America and the Andean countries, the Philippines), and through rising oil prices, etc. They were less affected by insolvencies, and in fact many benefited from the rise in the prices of natural resources, although this created, as far as energy was concerned, an imbalance between the countries that produced oil and those that did not. As for food products, the rise in prices particularly affected the poorest consumers.

13. The fundamental cause of the financial crisis lies in the very logic of capitalism itself (Rémy Herrera and Paulo Nakatani, 2009, 39). If capital is considered to be the engine of the economy and its accumulation essential for development, the maximization of profits is inevitable. If the financialization of the economy increases the rate of profit and if speculation

accelerates the phenomenon, the organization of the economy as a whole follows the same path. Thus, the first characteristic of this logic, the increase in the rate of profit as a function of the accumulation of capital, becomes very evident in the process. But a capitalist market that is not regulated leads unavoidably to a crisis. As the report of the United Nations Commission states: This is a macro-economic crisis' (Joseph Stiglitz, 2010, 195).

14. The context is similar to the crisis of the 1930s. However, the main difference is that the current financial and monetary imbalance is now combining with other kinds of crises, in the fields of food, energy and climate: all of which, though, being linked to the same economic logic.

The food crisis

15. There are two aspects to the food crisis. One is a conjunction of short-term factors, the other is due to (structural) long terms factors. The former is manifested through the sudden rise in food prices in 2007 and 2008. It is true that this can be attributed to several causes, such as dwindling reserves, but the main reason was speculative, with the production of agrofuels being partly responsible (maize-based ethanol in the United States). Thus the price of wheat on the Chicago stock exchange rose by 100 per cent, maize by 98 per cent and ethanol by 80 per cent. During these years appreciable amounts of speculative capital moved from other sectors into investing in food production in the expectation of rapid and significant profits. As a consequence, according to the FAO director-general, in each of the years 2008 and 2009 more than 50 million people fell below the poverty line, and the total number of those living in poverty rose to the unprecedented level of over one billion people. This was clearly the result of the logic of profits, the capitalist law of value.

16. The second aspect is structural. Over the last few years there has been an expansion of monoculture, resulting in the concentration of land-holdings – in other words, a veritable reversal of land reform. Peasant and family agriculture is being destroyed all over the world on the pretext of its low productivity. It is true that monoculture can produce from 500 and even 1,000 times more than peasant agriculture in its present state. Nevertheless, two factors should be taken into account: first, this kind of production is leading to ecological destruction. It eliminates forests, and contaminates the soil and the waters of oceans and rivers through the massive use of chemical products. Over the next 50 to 75 years we shall be reating the deserts of tomorrow. Second, peasants are being thrown off their lands, and millions of them have to migrate to the cities, to live in shanty towns, causing urban crises and increasing internal migratory pressure, as in Brazil; or they are going abroad, as in many other countries in the world.

17. Together with public services, agriculture is now one of the new frontiers for capital (Samir Amin, 2004), especially in times when the profitability of productive industrial capital is relatively reduced and there is a considerable expansion of financial capital seeking sources of profit. Recently we have witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon: the land grabbing by private and State capital, particularly in Africa, for the production of food and agrofuels. The South Korean corporation Daewoo obtained a concession of 1,200,000 hectares in Madagascar for a period of 99 years, which provoked a serious political crisis in that country. Countries like Libya and the Gulf Emirates are doing likewise in Mali and various other African countries. European and North American mining and agro-energy multinationals are securing the opportunity to exploit tens of millions of hectares for long periods, as Chinese State and private enterprises are also doing.

18. There is very little concern for the ecological and social implications, which are considered as 'externalities', i.e. external to market calculations. And this is the second aspect of capitalist logic, after the rate of profitability. It is not capital that is having to deal with the negative effects, but

local societies and individuals. This has always been the strategy of capital, even in the countries of the centre, with no concern for the fate of the working classes, or for the peoples in the peripheries under colonialism. There is no concern, either, for nature and the way of life of local populations. It is for all these reasons that the food crisis, in both its circumstantial and structural aspects, is directly linked to the logic of capitalism.

The energy crisis

19. Let us now look at the energy crisis. This goes well beyond the present explosion in the price of oil and forms part of the drying-up of natural resources, which are being overexploited by the capitalist development model. One thing is clear: humanity has to change the sources of its energy in the coming 50 years, moving from fossil fuels to other sources of energy. The irrational use of energy and the squandering of natural resources, have become especially evident since the Second World War and in particular during the recent era of the Washington Consensus, i.e. the generalized liberalization of the economy which is the hallmark of the neoliberal epoch of capitalism.

20. The individual consumption model (in housing and transport) is voracious in its energy requirements. And yet the liberalization of foreign trade is causing more than 60 per cent of our merchandise to cross the oceans, with all that this entails in terms of energy use and the contamination of the seas. Each day, more than 22,000 ships of over 300 tonnes, are navigating the seas (Malen Ruiz de Elvira, 2010). This traffic ensures a desirable exchange of goods, but it is also perpetuating the principle of unequal exchange with the peripheral countries that produce raw materials and agricultural commodities. It enables, too, the utilization of 'comparative advantage' to the maximum. Products can be sold cheaper, in spite of having to travel thousands of kilometres, because the workers are more heavily exploited and because laws to protect the ecology are weak or non-existent.

21. The precise years when the oil, gas and uranium peaks will be reached can be debated, but we know that these resources are finite and that the dates are not so far off. In some countries, like the United States, Great Britain, Mexico and various others, the process has already begun. As these resources begin to run out, the prices of their products will increase, with all the social and political consequences. International control over the sources of fossil energy and other strategic materials becomes more and more important for the industrial powers and they do not hesitate to resort to military force to secure it. A map of the military bases of the United States indicates this clearly: the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan confirm it. The role of the United States as the universal guarantor of the global system is fairly obvious, in view of the fact that its military budget amounts to 50 per cent of the military expenditure of all other countries combined. No country - not Great Britain, nor Russia, nor China - spends a quarter of what the United States spends in this sector. Clearly this is not only to control the sources of energy, but to ensure the perpetuation of the whole model.

22. The question of agrofuels has to be seen in the context of the future scarcity of energy. Because of expanding demand and the foreseeable decline in fossil energy resources, there is a certain urgency to find solutions to the problem. Since new sources of energy require the development of technologies which are not yet sufficiently advanced (like solar and hydrogen energy) and since other solutions (like wind energy) are interesting but marginal or not economically profitable, agrofuels appear attractive (Francois Houtart, 2009). They are often referred to as biofuels, because the basic material is living and not dead as is the case with fossil fuels. However peasant movements in particular contest this terminology because the massive production of agro-energy actually destroys life (nature and human beings).

23. For a while the agro-fuel solution was supported by ecological organizations and movements, while it was dismissed by business leaders. Around the middle of the 2000s, the attitude of the latter changed. Experience in the production of ethanol based on cane sugar in Brazil and maize in the United States proved that the technology was relatively simple. The same went for agro-diesel based on oil palm, soya and other oil-producing plants, like jatropha. In Brazil the beginning of the ethanol wave coincided with the 1973 oil crisis, making it possible to reduce the importing of very expensive crude oil. In the United States the problem was to reduce its dependence on external sources of oil, as it did not consider the countries concerned very reliable. This justified the production of ethanol assisted by large State subsidies, with maize yielding less agrofuel than cane sugar.

24. Many countries are starting to legislate the use of a certain percentage of 'green energy' in their overall consumption. The European Union decided that it should be 20 per cent by 2020, with 10 per cent in green liquid, that is, agrofuels. These plans meant it would be necessary to convert millions of hectares to cultivation for this purpose. In fact, Europe in particular (but also the United States) does not have enough land to satisfy the demand, given its enormous consumption. As a result, towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there has been a growing interest in the continents of the South that possess a lot of uncultivated land.

25. Agrofuels are produced as monocultures, that is, by the utilization of huge areas of land to grow a single crop. In many cases it entails the elimination of enormous forests, as is happening in Malaysia and Indonesia. In less than 20 years, 80 per cent of original forest in these countries has been destroyed to make way for plantations of oil palm and eucalyptus. Biodiversity has disappeared, with dire consequences for the reproduction of life. Not only is a great quantity of water needed to produce these crops, but large amounts of chemical products are used as fertilizers and pesticides. As a result the underground water and rivers flowing into the sea are heavily contaminated. Furthermore, the small landholders are being expelled and many indigenous peoples are losing their ancestral lands, which has led to numerous social conflicts, and even violence. If current plans are implemented between now and 2020, tens of millions of hectares will be dedicated to agrofuel monoculture in Asia, Africa and Latin America - continents that contain most of the nearly one billion hungry people on the planet. All this for a marginal result in terms of energy.

26. What we are seeing is, on the one hand, financial and speculative capital entering into this sector and, on the other, a wave of land grabbing, especially in Africa. In Guinea Bissau there are plans to convert 500,000 hectares - one seventh of the country's territory - to jatropha cultivation to produce agrodiesel. The capital will be coming from the casinos of Macao (where Portuguese is spoken, as in Guinea Bissau). The Prime Minister is the principal shareholder of the bank responsible for this operation. Up until now peasant resistance and the doubts of several ministries (including that of the Prime Minister) have halted the project, but this may not be possible for long. Dozens of similar projects exist in many other countries, such as Tanzania, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Congo and Kenya.

27. In October 2010 an agreement was concluded between President Lula and Mr. Herman Van Rompuy, President of the Council of Europe and Mr. José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, to develop 4,800,000 hectares of sugar cane in Mozambique (this also represents one seventh of the country's territory), using Brazilian technology and European funding in order to supply Europe with ethanol. This will enable Europe to achieve its plan to use 'green' energy but there is little concern about the effects for the natural environment and the population of that country.

28. The development of agrofuels overlooks the ecological and social 'externalities', following the characteristic logic of capitalism. It is based on short-term calculation, which does not take into account the costs that the market will not carry and which will be borne by nature, societies and individuals. These practices also correspond to the laws of accumulation and the immediate interests of financial capital. In other words, it is a typical capitalist project.

The climate crisis

29. The climate crisis is well recognized, and every day information becomes increasingly precise, thanks to the various conferences of the United Nations on the climate, on biodiversity, on glaciers, etc. Here we shall just briefly sum up the situation. While the present development model is emitting greenhouse gases (especially CO₂), the carbon sinks - that is, the natural places where these gases are absorbed - are being destroyed. The warming of the planet continues, the level of the sea rises. Our ecological footprint is so great that, according to estimates, by about the middle of August 2010 the planet had exhausted its capacity to reproduce itself naturally. As we have access to only one planet, this means that the model is unsustainable. Furthermore, according to the report by Dr. Nicholas Stern to the British Government, it was stated already in 2006 that, if the current tendency continues, there would be between 150 and 200 million climate refugees by the middle of the present century (Nicholas Stern, 2006). More recent statistics give even higher figures.

30. All this is unfolding within a landscape in which wealth is concentrating, including among the economic and political decision-makers. Twenty per cent of the world population, according to the UNDP, consumes 80 per cent of the planet's economic resources. It is true that there are many millions of people who, over recent decades, have attained a certain level of consumption. These people represent a purchasing power that is very useful for the replication of capital and provides an outlet for derivatives. The rest of humanity are considered, as Susan George has said, 'superfluous billions' (S. George, 2005). Even the World Bank recognizes that the distance between the rich and the poor continues to increase (World Bank Report, 2006). As a result of these upheavals, the development model is globally in crisis. Some talk of a crisis of civilization, which can be seen in uncontrolled urbanization, the crisis of the State, the increase in violence to resolve conflicts and many other manifestations of the same kind. To extricate ourselves from a situation that is globally so disturbing, we clearly need solutions. The different opinions on the question can be classified in three categories.

2.2 What solutions?

"Change the actors, not the system"

31. Some people, preoccupied mainly with the financial crisis, are in favour of castigating and replacing those directly responsible for the economic mess - 'the chicken thieves' as Michel Camdessus, former director of the International Monetary Fund, calls them. This is the theory of the capitalist system (the neoclassical theory in economics) that sees favourable signs in all crises, since they make it possible to get rid of weak or corrupt elements in order to resume accumulation on a sounder basis. The actors are to be changed, not the system.

"Establish regulations"

32. A second view proposes regulation. It is acknowledged that the market does not regulate itself and that there should be national and international bodies that take on the task. The State and specific international institutions should intervene. Michel Camdessus himself, in a conference with Catholic entrepreneurs in France, talked of the two processes: the "invisible hand" of the market

and that of regulation by the State – and charity for the victims who do not benefit from either of the two hands. One of the main theorists of this position was John Maynard Keynes, the English economist. For this reason the term ‘neo-Keynesian’ is being used in the current context. To regulate the system means saving it and thus redefining the role of the public bodies (the State and the international institutions), so necessary for the replication of capital, a fact that neoliberalism seems to have forgotten since the 1970s (Ernesto Molina Molina, 2010, 25).

33. Nevertheless, there are various practical proposals. The G8, for example, proposed certain regulations of the world economic system, but of a minor and temporary nature. In contrast were the much more advanced regulations presented by the United Nations Commission on the Reform of the International Financial and Monetary System (Joseph Stiglitz, 2010). Thus it was proposed to set up a UN Global Economic Coordination Council, at the same level as the Security Council, as well as an International Panel of Experts to monitor the world economic situation on a permanent basis. Other recommendations involved the abolition of tax havens and of bank secrecy, as well as greater requirements for bank reserves and a more stringent control of the rating agencies. A far-reaching reform of the Bretton Woods institutions was included, and also the possibility of creating regional currencies, rather than the US dollar being the world’s only reserve currency. In the words of the Commission’s report, all this would aim at promoting ‘new and robust growth’. These were fairly strong measures in opposition to the current neoliberalism in vogue, but the United Nations conference that took place in June 2009 passed only a few cautious measures which were soon interpreted in a minimal way by the big Western powers.

34. Although the regulations proposed by the Stiglitz Commission to reconstruct the financial and monetary system made a few references to other aspects of the crisis, like climate, energy and food and, in spite of using the word ‘sustainable’ to qualify the growth to be restored, there was not enough in-depth consideration about the objectives. “Repairing the economic system”: for whom? Was it to develop, as before, a model that destroys nature and is socially inequitable? It is very probable that the proposals of the Commission to reform the monetary and financial system would be effective in extricating us from the financial crisis, and much more so than all that has been done so far – but ... Is this enough to solve our contemporary global challenges? The solution is still being sought within capitalism, a system that is historically worn out, even though it possesses all kinds of means to adapt itself. The transition to a system that is built on different bases evidently requires regulations, but not of any kind: in the sense of creating another situation, rather than adapting the system to new circumstances.

“Seek alternatives to the prevailing model”

35. This is why a third approach seems necessary: one that questions the development model itself. All the crises that have become acute in recent times are the result of the same fundamental logic: 1) it conceives of development in a way that ignores ‘externalities’ (that is, environmental and social damage); 2) it is based on the idea of a planet with infinite resources; 3) it prioritizes exchange value over use value; and 4) it equates the economy with the rate of profitability and the accumulation of capital, creating enormous inequalities. This model, which has resulted in a spectacular development of global wealth, has reached the end of its historical function, through the destruction it has wrought on nature and the social inequity that it has brought about. It cannot replicate itself or, in contemporary parlance, it is not sustainable. ‘The economic rationality of capitalism’ comments Wim Dierckxsens, not only tends to deprive large majorities of the world population of their lives, but it destroys the natural life that surrounds us’ (2011).

36. The Argentinian economist Jorge Beinstein states that in the last four decades capitalism has

become decadent on a world scale (a drop in the productive sector) which has only been disguised for a while by the artificial development of the financial sector and huge military expenditure (J.Beinstein, 2009, 13). For this reason therefore, let it be clear that we cannot only talk about regulation: it is necessary to think of alternatives. These should not be confined to purely theoretical reflections, but should necessarily lead to practical policies with long-term objectives, as well as for the short and medium-term.

37. To talk about alternatives to the capitalist economic model that prevails today through its globalization and its social, political and cultural dimensions means reviewing the fundamental paradigms of the collective life of humanity and of the planet and debating about what kind of society we should build. These paradigms are: 1) the relationship with nature; 2) the production of the material basis of life - physical, cultural and spiritual; 3) social and political collective organization; and 4) the interpretation of reality and the self-involvement of the actors in constructing it, that is, culture. Each society has to achieve this. Modernity, which was the result of a profound transformation of European society, defined its own paradigms. Undeniably, it represented an advance (Bolívar Echevarría, 2001) but it also led to the over-exploitation of nature. It gave birth to the capitalist market economy; in politics to the centralized state; and in culture to an outburst of individualism. The concept of the limitless advance of humanity, living on an inexhaustible planet and capable of resolving all contradictions through science and technology, has oriented the development model - including that of the socialist societies of the twentieth century.

38. The global dominance of this project became apparent early on, through the destruction, absorption or submission of all pre-capitalist modes of production, through the various colonial adventures, through the establishment of unequal exchange between the centres and the peripheries, and through what has recently been called 'globalization', which finally brings together the concepts of growth and Westernization, that is to say, the spread throughout the universe of the latest forms and dominance of capital.

39. There was a reaction against this model, expressed in 'post-modernism'. However, this mode of thinking, which developed in the second half of the twentieth century, also incorporated a particularly ambiguous critique of modernity, which was generally limited to the cultural and political fields (M. Maffesoli, 1990). The idea of history as something constructed here and now by individual actors, the refusal to acknowledge the existence of structures and the denial of the reality of systems - defined exclusively in vertical terms - as well as the explicit desire not to accept theories in human sciences, has turned this current of thinking into the bastard child of modernism itself, so that people have become depoliticized. Post-modernism has transmuted itself into an ideology that is pretty convenient for neoliberalism. At a time when capitalism was building the new material basis of its existence as a 'world-system', as Immanuel Wallerstein has termed it, the denial of the very existence of systems is most useful for the advocates of the 'Washington Consensus'. It is important to criticize modernity, but with a historical and dialectical approach (actors interacting).

40. This is the reason why it is imperative that we reconstruct a consistent, theoretical framework, benefiting from the contributions of various currents in human thought, including those of a philosophical nature, as well as the physical, biological and social sciences. We are not starting from a vacuum in this field, but nevertheless the new circumstances require fresh viewpoints, and a redefinition of the paradigms of the collective life of humanity on this planet. Likewise, all social and political action should function within this general framework if it is to contribute to the elaboration of alternatives. It is important to define the place of each one of them within the ensemble, so as to give coherence to what could seem a series of separate actions without much connection with each other (empiricism).

The same thing also goes for international politics.

41. As we have already said, the foundations of the collective life of humanity on the planet are fourfold: the relationship with nature; the production of the basics for living (the economy); collective organization, social and political; and interpretation as a symbolic expression of reality. It is the fulfilment of the new paradigms of these four elements, in any given circumstances, that would achieve the Common Good of Humanity, that is, as we have already said, the reproduction of life. It is an objective that has to be continually pursued, but which cannot be defined once and for all because historical circumstances change the context. However, the current crisis requires a radical re-thinking, one that goes to the roots of the situation (István Mészáros, 2008, 86) and this means a complete reorientation, faced as we are with the paradigms of capitalism. The concept of the Common Good of Humanity has been expressed in many different ways, according to the traditions of thinking and the collective experiences of peoples - for example in the philosophies and religions of the East and of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (the *sumak kwasai*, or *buen vivir*), as also in the Marxist tradition of the system of universal needs and capacities (Antonio Salamanca Serrano, 2011, 46 and Solange Mercier-Jesa, 1982).

The new paradigms

42. The construction of new paradigms is a process. It is not just an academic exercise, but something to be worked out in society, where thinking has an essential place, but so also does practical experience, particularly in the social struggles which are each trying to address a deficit in the Common Good and seeking solutions. Since the destructive globalization of capitalism has come to dominate the economies, societies and cultures of the whole world, but has not eliminated them completely, the task has to be undertaken by all of us, according to our own characteristics and historical experiences. No one can be excluded from this common effort to re-elaborate life.

3.1 Redefining the relationship with nature: from exploitation to respect for it as the source of life

43. Modern civilization with its strong control over nature, its high degree of urbanization, has made human beings forget that, at the last resort, they depend totally on nature for their lives. Climate change reminds us of this reality, sometimes in a very brutal way. It therefore means seeing nature, not as a planet to be exploited, nor as natural resources that can be reduced to the status of saleable commodities, but as the source of all life. As such, its capacity to regenerate itself physically and biologically has to be respected. This obviously entails a radical philosophical change. Any relationship with nature that is exclusively utilitarian must be questioned. Capitalism considers ecological damage as 'collateral' and inevitable - though perhaps to be reduced as far as possible; or, even worse, ecological damages are considered as 'externalities', since it is ignored in market calculations and consequently in the accumulation of capital.

44. Some authors go much further, and question the anthropocentric bias of these perspectives, proposing new concepts like 'the right of nature', which the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff has defended in some of his writings. It was on this basis that the president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D'Escoto, proposed, in his farewell speech in 2009, a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth and of Mankind. A Mother Earth Day was unanimously approved by the representatives of the 192 Member States present at the assembly. It was rightly pointed out that the human being is a part of nature and that a dichotomy should not be set up between the two but rather a symbiosis. Different speakers, supporting this position, maintained that only a shallow anthropocentric attitude could consider the human being as the centre of the world, without taking into account other living beings, including the planet itself. This attitude is indeed having effects that are becoming dramatically visible.

45. On the other hand, what we are calling the 'Common Good' of the Earth can only be tackled through the mediation of the human species. It is only human intervention that can allow the Earth to regenerate – or prevent it from doing so through our own predatory and destructive activities. This is why the Common Good of Humanity involves the survival of nature – that is, of biodiversity. If we use the expression 'the rights of nature' (Eduardo Gudynas, 2009), this can be understood only in a secondary sense, since it is only the human species that can infringe or respect those rights. Neither the Earth nor the animals can claim respect for their rights. In any case, what is at issue is the principle that the planet should be sustainable – able, in other words, to conserve its biodiversity – so that it can renew itself in spite of human activity. We can also embellish nature, using its plant wealth to create new landscapes or gardens for more beauty. The Earth is also generous and can contribute, but with non-renewable elements, to the production and reproduction of life. But this is totally different from exploiting it to produce higher rates of profits.

46. In the great philosophical traditions of the East, the deep bond between the human being and nature is a central characteristic of their thought. Respect for all life, such as we find in Hinduism and Buddhism, exemplifies this conviction, as does the belief in reincarnation as an expression of the unity of life and its continuance. The belief that man was created from clay (the Earth), which we find in the Judeo-Christian tradition and subsequently taken up by Islam, expresses the same idea. The Bible represents man as the guardian of nature. Even if it affirms that nature is there to serve him, this obviously excludes its destruction. Creation myths in many cultures in Africa and the Americas contain similar beliefs.

47. For the indigenous peoples of the American continent, the concept of Mother Earth (Pacha Mama) is central. As a source of life she is seen as a real person, with anthropomorphic properties. The natural elements are also alive with their own personalities and serve as the objects of Shamanistic rites. At the Climate Summit in Cochabamba in 2010, various texts (the preparatory document and also interventions by different groups and individuals) went beyond the metaphorical nature of the expression 'Mother Earth', attributing to her the characteristics of a living person, capable of listening, reacting and being loved – and for these reasons, with rights of her own. The final document called for a re-evaluation of popular wisdom and ancestral knowledge, inviting us to 'recogniz[e] Mother Earth as a living being, with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship.'

48. Nevertheless it has to be admitted that, when confronted by the logic of capitalism, by development and the advances of urbanization, as well as by the attractions of mindless consumption, the great oriental philosophies and the traditions of the first nations are unable to resist, transforming themselves rapidly or even disappearing from the cultural scene, as has been the case with the 'Asian Tigers', in China and Vietnam, and also among the indigenous peoples of the American continent and the peoples of Africa. Neoliberalism is accentuating this phenomenon all over the world: it has been an individual and collective aspiration for many to participate in the values of the dominant culture. What happened among the subordinate classes of Europe and with Christianity – this being the first religion to be confronted with capitalism – is being repeated elsewhere. Ideological pollution is very real.

49. However, traditional concepts are now once again being invoked, as tools for historical memory, cultural reconstruction and affirmation of identity, all of which can be very useful when questioning capitalist logic. There is a certain pride in being able to refer to historical cultures and in using its concepts to contribute to a process of social reconstruction, although there is always some danger of falling into a paralyzing fundamentalism, more oriented to the past than to the present.

50. The references to Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) and the Sumak Kawsai (*buen vivir*) of the Quechua peoples and to the Suma Gamaña (living well together) of the Aymara peoples (Xavier Albó, 2010, 45-55) belong to these categories. These are two of the founding concepts of indigenous peoples which, in concrete historical conditions, signified a specific cosmovision and practices regarding respect for nature and for shared collective life. As such they can inspire contemporary thinking and social organization and can revitalize the symbol. However, success will depend on making the adjustments that will be necessary in such a way', as Diana Quirola Suarez writes that the transformation provides an opportunity to combine the best of ancestral and modern wisdom, with knowledge and technology working in step with nature's processes' (2009, 107).

51. This does not mean questioning the necessary harmony between nature and the human species, or swallowing the capitalist concept of the exploitation of nature as a necessary by-product of the kind of development conceived as just endless material growth. Nor is it to deny the need to revise the philosophy of the relationship with nature which ignores other living species and the capacity of nature to restore its balance. Nor should we under-value or marginalize the cultures that can offer a healthy critique of humanity, both in its exploitation, brought about by the logic of capitalism, and in the rampant individualism of the consumption model and all the other kinds of behaviour that go with it. Nevertheless it has to be acknowledged that different cultures do exist. If we try to describe the necessary change only in terms of symbolic thinking, representing the symbol as reality, this will come into collision with the cultures that have an analytical approach, and which place the causality of all phenomena into their specific categories, whether physical or social.

52. At the present time the two cultures co-exist. The first comes with a wealth of expression that reflects the strength of the symbol and the importance of idealness, particularly as regards relations with nature. It brings with it truly practical elements, which can easily be translated into knowledge, behaviour and policies. But its cosmovision is difficult for an urban culture in any part of the world to assimilate. The second has clearly reduced itself to a mere practical rationality or even a pure 'superstructure' (the "cherry on the cake", as the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier puts it), thus reinforcing capitalist logic and contributing to extending it further, while also admittedly making possible a great advance in knowledge that is useful for resolving practical and political problems. It would be unwise, in fighting against the globalized capitalism that is leading humanity and the planet into disaster, to state one's case in only one cultural language. On the contrary, this is the moment to apply the principle of interculturalism in all its dimensions.

53. Calling for a new concept of our relationship with nature brings with it many practical consequences. We shall cite some examples, grouping them into 1) necessary prohibitions and constraints, 2) positive initiatives, and then 3) discussing their implications for international policy.

54. 1) First, we must outlaw the private ownership of what are called 'natural resources': i.e. minerals, fossil energies and forests. These are the common heritage of humanity, and cannot be appropriated by individuals and corporations, as happens now in the capitalist market economy – in other words, by private interests that ignore externalities and aim at maximizing profits. A first step in a transition, then, is for countries to recover sovereignty over their resources. Of course this does not necessarily ensure the desired result of a healthy relationship with nature: national enterprises often operate with the same capitalist logic, so that State sovereignty would not necessarily imply a philosophy of respect for nature rather than its exploitation. The internationalization of this sector would be the next step, but only on condition that the relevant institutions (like the United Nations and its agencies) are made really democratic: in many cases they are still under the influence of the dominant political and economic powers. The introduction of ecological costs of all human activities into economic calculations is also a necessity, making it possible to reduce these and to counter the utilitarian rationale that excludes "externalities": one of the reasons for the

destructive nature of capitalism.

55. Another aspect is the need to forbid the commercialisation of those elements necessary for reproducing life, such as water and seeds. These are common goods that must not be governed by commercial logic but should be handled in different ways - which does not necessarily mean by the State, but under collective control. In more concrete terms, this principle involves putting an end to the monocultures that are preparing 'the deserts of tomorrow', particularly those producing livestock feed and agrofuels. A tax on the kilometres covered during the exportation of industrial or agricultural products would make it possible to reduce both energy use and the contamination of the seas. Other such measures could be proposed.

56. 2) On the positive side, reserves that protect biodiversity should be extended over more territory. The promotion of organic agriculture would be part of this initiative, as would the improvement of peasant agriculture, which is in fact more efficient in the long run than capitalist productivist agriculture (Olivier de Schutter, 2011). Legislation requiring the extension of 'life expectancy' for all industrial products would make it possible to save primary materials and energy and reduce the production of greenhouse gases (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011).

57. 3) Finally, in the field of international politics, the struggle against the basic orientations of the financial institutions, which contradict the principle of respect for nature, has to be fought on a number of fronts. There is the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the regional banks; and there is also the regulation of the private banks, that are so powerful at this time, when the world economy is being financialized. The policies of the WTO promoting the liberalization of the world economy also have ecological implications, since most of them are implemented without taking externalities into account. Member states of this international organization have a huge responsibility in this field; alliances between ecologically conscious nations could influence decision-making.

58. The promotion of international conventions is another very important aspect. For example, there are the conventions on the climate (Cancún), biodiversity (Bonn and Nagoya), those on the protection of water (rivers and seas) and of fish, on waste (especially nuclear) among others. The extent of awareness of this dimension of the new paradigms will depend on the international effectiveness of progressive states, and this could form part of their foreign policy.

59. The redefinition of the 'Common Good of Humanity' in terms of our relationship with nature is an essential task, considering the ecological damage already inflicted, with its harmful effects on the regenerating capacity of the planet and on climate stability. This is a new factor in the collective conscience, but it is far from being shared among all human groups. The socialist societies did not really incorporate this dimension in their planning, as is illustrated in the spectacular economic development of a country like China, which is being achieved without giving much attention, at least for the time being, to externalities. A socialism of the 21st century would tend to incorporate this as a central plank of its policies.

3.2 Redirecting production for life's necessities, prioritizing use value over exchange value

60. The transformation of the economy's basic paradigm lies in giving priority to use value, instead of exchange value as is the rule under capitalism. We talk of use value when a commodity or a service is useful for the life of someone, rather than being simply the object of a transaction. The characteristic of a market economy is to give priority to exchange value: for capitalism, the most developed form of market production is its only 'value'. A good or a

service that cannot be converted into merchandise has no value because it does not contribute to the accumulation of capital, which is the aim and engine of the economy (M. Godelier, 1982). According to this view, use value is secondary and, as István Mészáros says, 'it can acquire the right to exist if it adjusts to the requirements of exchange value' (2008, 49). Any goods, which are not at all useful (the explosion in military expenditure, for example, or the white elephant projects of international development assistance), can be produced as long as they are paid for or, if artificial needs are created through publicity (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011), or if financial services are expanded through speculative bubbles. In contrast, putting the emphasis on use value makes the market serve human needs.

61. It is not possible to achieve this without challenging the private ownership of the principal means of production, which is what places decision-making power in the hands of the holders of capital goods and subordinates labour to capital, both directly, through wages and indirectly, through other mechanisms like monetary policies, national debts and budget deficits, speculation on the price of food and energy, the privatization of public services etc. It is the exclusive control of capital over the production process that also lies behind the degradation of working conditions (Jorge Beinstein, 2009, 21) and of the devaluation of women's work, which is so essential for the reproduction of life in all its dimensions. However, total State control as a counterweight to the total market is not a satisfactory solution, as past socialist experiences prove. There are many different forms of collective control.

62. Thus what we need is a totally different definition of the economy. It would no longer be a matter of producing aggregate value for the benefit of the owners of the means of production or of finance capital, but rather a collective activity aimed at ensuring basic needs for the physical, cultural and spiritual lives of all human beings on the planet. A national and world economy that is based on the exploitation of work to maximize profits is unacceptable, as is the production of goods and services destined for 20 per cent of the world population who have relatively high purchasing power, leaving all the rest excluded because they do not produce any added value and have insufficient income. Redefining the economy thus means a fundamental change. Privileging use value - which still involves the development of productive forces - must clearly be implemented in harmony with the first paradigm of respect for nature, as well as with the other two paradigms to which we shall be coming shortly: generalized democracy, and interculturalism. This does not exclude exchanges necessary also to the new use values, but on the condition that they do not create imbalances in local access to use value and that they include externalities in the process.

63. 'Growth' and 'development' are not the same thing: this is what neo-classical and neo-Keynesian economists seem to forget. As Jean-Philippe Peemans, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, has said, 'the logic of accumulation as the only development logic' is well entrenched. But a new approach is evolving, which takes various forms. One of them is to take up the concept of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, 'el buen vivir' or 'living well' (sumak kawsai). This is a much broader notion, which not only implies the complete opposite of growth as an end in itself, but also harmonizes with nature (Diana Quiroga, 2009, 105). Already in the 1960s the Club of Rome had proposed zero growth as a solution for what, even then, was felt to be a non-sustainable way of life. In the Soviet Union of the 1950s, Wolfgang Harsch wrote a highly original book entitled *Communism without Growth*. The idea was taken up again, although this time much more radically, by Serge Latouche in France, who in the 1990s launched the concept of 'de-growth', inspiring a series of movements, mainly among the middle classes of Europe, to reduce consumption and to respect the natural environment. While the content is positive, the expression is rather Eurocentric and limited to the consuming classes. It would seem somewhat indecent to preach 'de-growth' to African peoples or even to the impoverished classes of industrialized societies. A concept like 'living well' or 'buen vivir' has a broader and more positive connotation. In Bhutan, under the influence of Buddhism, they

have the notion of happiness, which has been officially adopted as a political and social objective. These are perhaps small islands in the ocean of the world market, but they herald the development of a critical vision of the contemporary model, with a clearly holistic perspective.

64. Prioritizing use value over exchange value also means rediscovering the territorial aspect. Globalization has made people forget the virtues of local proximity in favour of global interchanges, ignoring externalities and giving primacy to finance capital - the most globalized element of the economy because of its virtual character. Territorial space, as the site of economic activities but also of political responsibility and cultural exchanges, is the place to introduce another kind of rationale. It is not a matter of reducing the question to a microcosm, but rather to think in terms of multidimensionality, in which each dimension, from the local unit to the global sphere, has its function, without destroying the others. Hence the concepts of food sovereignty and energy sovereignty, by which trade is subordinated to a higher principle: the satisfaction of the requirements of the territory's dimensions (Jean-Philippe Peemans, 2010). In the capitalist perspective, the law of value imposes priority for commercialization, and hence it gives precedence to the export of crops over the production of food for local consumption. The concept of 'food security' is not adequate, because it can be ensured by trade that is based on the destruction of local economies, on the over-specialization of certain areas of the world, and on transportation that is a voracious consumer of energy and polluter of the environment.

65. In the same line of thinking, the move towards regionalization of economies on a world scale is a positive step towards delinking from the capitalist centre that transforms the rest of the world into peripheries (even if emerging ones). It is also valid for exchanges, as in the monetary system, which would thus redistribute a globalizing model.

66. This brings us to practical measures. They are numerous, and we can give only a few examples here. On the negative side, the predominance of finance capital cannot be accepted, and for this reason tax havens of all kinds must be abolished, as well as bank secrecy, two powerful instruments in the class struggle. It is also necessary to establish a tax on international financial flows (the 'Tobin tax') to reduce the power of finance capital. 'Odious debts' must be denounced, after due audits, as has been done in Ecuador. Speculation on food and energy cannot be permitted. A tax on the kilometres consumed by industrial or agricultural goods would make it possible to reduce the ecological costs of transport and the abuse of 'comparative advantage'. Prolonging the 'life expectancy' of industrial products would effect great economies in raw materials and energy, and would diminish the artificial profits of capital resulting purely from the circulation of trade (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011).

67. From a positive viewpoint there are also many examples to be cited. The social economy is built on a logic quite different from that of capitalism. It is true that it is a marginal activity at present, compared with the immense concentration of oligopolistic capital, but it is possible to encourage it in various ways. The same goes for cooperatives and popular credit. They must be protected from being destroyed or absorbed by the dominant system.

As for regional economic initiatives, they can be the means of a transformation out of economic logic, on the condition that they do not represent simply an adaptation of the system to new production techniques, thus serving as means to integrate national economies into a capitalist framework at a higher level. Restoring the common goods that have been privatized by neoliberalism is a fundamental step to be taken in public services like water, energy, transport, communications, health, education and culture. This does not necessarily mean the State taking them over but rather the setting up of many different forms of public and citizen control over their production and distribution.

68. Redefining the 'Common Good of Humanity' in terms of a new definition of the economy is thus a

necessary task to be undertaken, confronted as we are by the destruction of our common heritage as a result of forgetting the collective dimension of production for life-needs, and by the promotion of exclusive individualism.

3.3 Reorganizing collective life through the generalization of democracy in social relations and institutions

69. Our third central theme, in revising the paradigms of collective life and the Common Good of Humanity, is the generalizing of democracy, not only in the political field but also in the economic system, in relationships between men and women and in all institutions. In other words, the mere forms of democracy, which are often used to establish a fake equality and to perpetuate unacknowledged social inequalities, must be left behind. This involves a revision of the concept of the State and the reclamation of human rights in all their dimensions, individual and collective. It is a matter of treating every human being, with no distinction of race, sex, or class, as partners in the building of society, thus confirming their self-worth and participation (Franz Hinckelammert, 2005).

70. The concept of the State is absolutely central in this field. The model of the Jacobin centralized state of the French Revolution, erasing all differences in order to construct citizens who were in principle equal, is not enough to build a real democracy. Such a state was without doubt a step forward when compared to the political structures of the European ancien régime. But it is now necessary not only to take into account the existence of opposing classes, and to realize that any one class, or a coalition of them, can take possession of the State to ensure that their own interests dominate; but also to acknowledge the existence of all the various nationalities that live in a territory and who have the right to affirm their cultures, their territorial reference points and their social institutions. This is not a matter of falling into the kind of communitarianism that weakens the State, as has happened in certain European countries in the neoliberal era. Neither is it a matter of retreating into nostalgia for a romantic past, like certain politico-religious movements, nor of falling into the clutches of powerful economic interests (transnational enterprises or international financial institutions) that prefer to negotiate with small-scale local bodies. The aim is to reach an equilibrium between these different dimensions of collective life, recognizing their existence and setting up mechanisms for participation.

71. The role of the State cannot be formulated without taking into account the situation of the most marginalized social groups: landless peasants, lower castes and the dalits (the former untouchables), who have been ignored for thousands of years, as well as the indigenous peoples of America and those of African descent who have been excluded for over 500 years. Juridical processes, even constitutional ones, are not enough to change the situation, necessary though these are. Racism and prejudice will not rapidly disappear in any society. In this field the cultural factor is decisive and can be the subject of specific policies to protect people against aggression by the 'all market' and which provide the basic necessities constitute an important step in the transition process, as long as they are not just 'band-aids', detached from structural reform.

72. It is also important to look out for the use of vocabulary twisted from its original meaning. The Right is outstanding for making pronouncements in this vein. They talk now about 'green capitalism'. But even in countries that want change, traditional concepts are used and we must pay attention to their real meaning which could serve as elements of the transition to another way of collective life, or simply be an adaptation of the existing system. The general political context makes it possible to understand the difference and evaluate it.

73. The generalization of democracy also applies to the dialogue between political entities and social movements. The organization of bodies for consultation and dialogue must be part of the same

approach, respecting mutual autonomy. The project for a Council of Social Movements in the general structures of ALBA is an original attempt in this direction. The concept of civil society, often used in this proposal, must not be ambiguous, because this is also where class struggle takes place: there really is a lower and an upper civil society.

Forms of participatory democracy, as can be seen in various Latin American countries, also follow the same logic. Real independence of the various executive, legislative and juridical powers is a guarantee that democracy is functioning normally. A democratic State must also be secular: that is to say, free from the intervention of religious institutions, whether they are majority religions or not. This does not mean a State is so secular as not to acknowledge the public aspect of the religious factor (the social-ethical dimension of Liberation Theology, for example) or worse still, as was the case in the countries of 'actually existing socialism', a State that establishes atheism almost as a quasi-religion.

74. Other institutions should be guided by the same principles. Nothing is less democratic than the capitalist economic system, with the concentration of decision-making power in just a few hands. The same thing goes for the social communications media and is also applicable to all social, trade union, cultural, sport and religious institutions.

75. This paradigm can result in both negative as well as positive concrete policies. Organizing the means to fight against racism and gender discrimination in various fields comes under this heading. So does action to democratize the mass communication media, for example, through prohibiting its ownership by finance capital. Rules ensuring democratic functioning (equality between men and women, alternating responsibilities, etc.) can be the conditions for public recognition (and, possibly, for subsidies) of non-State institutions, such as political parties, social organizations, NGOs and cultural and religious institutions.

76. As for international politics, there are many possibilities of application. An obvious one is the United Nations, whose various organs, starting with the Security Council, are hardly democratic. The same goes for the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Supporting efforts in this direction can be a priority for governments of the periphery. The meetings of the G8 or G20, although informal, carry real weight and should be challenged. Courts of justice to respect human rights, institutions which are desirable in themselves, should still be subjected to the same norms of democracy, as well as given new fields to deal with, such as economic crimes, 'odious debt' and ecological damage. All the new Latin American regional institutions, like the Banco del Sur, regional currency and ALBA, should be given special attention in this regard, as well as regional institutions on other continents.

77. The destruction of democracy by capitalism, especially in its neoliberal phase, has been so great that societies, at all levels, are now organized to serve the advantages of a minority, provoking a degree of inequality in the world that is without precedent in history. To reestablish democratic functioning as a universal paradigm thus constitutes a central pillar in the concept of the Common Good of Humanity.

3.4 Instituting interculturalism while building the universal Common Good of Humanity

78. The objective in reformulating this cultural paradigm is to give to all knowledge, cultures, philosophies and religions an equal chance of contributing to the Common Good of Humanity. This cannot be the exclusive role of Western culture, which in reality is totally identified with the concept of 'development', eliminating or marginalizing all other perspectives. Undertaking this involves, not only an understanding of reality or its anticipation, but also the necessary ethic for elaborating the Common Good, the affective ethic necessary for the self-motivation of the actors and aesthetic and

practical expressions. Multiculturalism also obviously entails the adoption of the other three paradigms: the relationship with nature, the production of life's basic needs and the organization of democracy on a broad scale. It is also important for the transmission of ideas and values among all peoples. To speak in everyone's language and to express oneself in culturally comprehensible terms is an essential requirement of democracy.

79. However, multiculturalism is not enough. Open inter-cultural activity should also be promoted, with dialoguing between cultures, and the opportunity for exchanges. Cultures are not objects in a museum, but the living elements of a society. Internal and external migrations, linked to the development of the means of communication, have created many cultural changes, clearly not all of them desirable. In order to exist, cultures must have material bases and means, like territorial reference points (in various forms) and educational and communications media, as well as various opportunities to express culture like fetes, pilgrimages, rituals, religious agents, buildings, etc.

80. This brings us to the practical aspects of designing a multicultural State. In countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept has been translated into constitutions specifically by multinational States, although not without difficulties when it comes to putting them into practice. The central idea is the obligation for the State to guarantee the basics of cultural activity for different peoples and, in particular, to defend them from the assaults of economic modernity and the dominant culture. For this purpose, bilingual education should be promoted. However the notion of interculturalism must also have an influence on general education, like the teaching of history and the reshaping of an education philosophy at present guided by the logic of the market. The publication of inexpensive books, the organization of book fairs, artisanal centres, interactive museums, etc. are useful tools. Communications media are important as they transmit not only information but values. Without denying pluralism or democracy, this problem must be tackled as a whole: promoting local cultures, counterbalancing monopolies and destroying the dominance of a handful of international agencies. Ethical bodies must also have the opportunity to express themselves, such as associations for the defence of human rights, watchdog groups of various kinds, religious institutions.

81. Culture includes the spiritual dimension, which is a characteristic of human beings, raising them above the concerns of everyday life. This is a central theme in a period when civilization is in crisis. All over the world there is a search after meaning, for the need to redefine the very aims of life. Spirituality is the force that transcends the material world and gives it a meaning. The sources of spirituality are many and are always to be found within a social context: they cannot exist without a physical and biological base. The human being is indivisible: spirituality presupposes matter which, on the other hand, has no sense without the spirit. A cultural view of spirituality, ignoring the material aspects of a human being - which for an individual is their body and for society is the economic and political reality - is a conceptual aberration, leading to reductionism (culture as the single factor in change) or alienation (ignorance of social structures). Spirituality, with or without reference to a supernatural, gives sense to human life on the planet. How it may be expressed is conditioned by the social relations in each society, but it can give a direction to these relations. A change of paradigms cannot be carried out without spirituality, which has many paths and multiple expressions.

82. The vision of the world, the understanding and analysis of reality, the ethics of social and political construction and the aesthetic expression and self-motivation of the actors are essential elements when designing alternatives to the model of capitalist development and the civilization that it transmits. They form part of all the new paradigms: our relationship with nature; the production of life's basic needs; the redefinition of the economy; and finally the way in which we conceive the collective and political organization of societies. In all their diversity, these paradigms can contribute to the change that is necessary for the survival of humanity and the

planet.

4 The Common Good of Humanity as a global objective

83. The Common Good of Humanity will result from successfully achieving all these four goals, which are each fundamental to the collective life of human beings on the planet. Those goals that are defined by capitalism, guaranteed by political forces and transmitted by the dominant culture, are not sustainable, and so cannot ensure the Common Good. On the contrary, they work against the continuance of life (François Houtart, 2009). There has to be a change of paradigms, to permit a symbiosis between human beings and nature, access of all to goods and services, and the participation of every individual and every collective group in the social and political organizing processes, each having their own cultural and ethical expression: in other words to realize the Common Good of Humanity. This will be a generally long-term process, dialectic and not linear, and the result of many social struggles. The concept of Common Good as used in this work goes well beyond the classical Greek conception, taken up by the Renaissance (José Sanchez Parga, 2005, 378-386), and beyond the social doctrine of the Catholic church, based on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. It is for this reason that a complete theoretical rethinking is necessary, on the one hand dealing with all the elements that have led the world into a systemic crisis situation and with the wearing out of a historical model; and on the other hand, redefining the objectives of a new social construct that is respectful of nature and capable of ensuring human life as a shared endeavour. As Enrique Dussel (2006) has said, what must be ensured is the production, reproduction and development of the human life of each ethical subject (each human being). This is what the Good of Humanity means. The ultimate reference of all paradigms is life in its concrete reality, including relations with nature which is, in fact, negated by capitalism.

84. There may be objections that this is a fanciful utopia. The fact is that human beings need utopias, and capitalism has destroyed utopian thinking, announcing the end of history ('there are no alternatives'), so that the search for the Common Good of Humanity is indeed a utopia, in the sense of a goal that does not exist today, but that could exist tomorrow. It is not simply a 'harmless utopia' (Evelyn Pieiller, 2011, 27). The need for it is felt by hundreds of thousands of social movements, citizen organizations, political groups, all in their own way struggling for better relations with nature and for its protection, for peasant and organic agriculture, for a social economy, for the abolition of illicit debts, for the collective taking over of the means of production and for the primacy of work over capital, for the defence of human rights, for a participatory democracy and for the recognition of the value of different cultures. The World Social Forums have made it possible to visualize this reality, which is gradually creating a new global social consciousness.

85. However, it is a dynamic process that requires a coherent total vision as the basis for coming together in action, with the aim of building a force powerful enough to reverse the dominant contemporary system in all its dimensions, economic, social, cultural and political. It is precisely this that the 'Common Good of Humanity' seeks to express: a coherent theoretical basis, enabling each movement and each social and political initiative to find its place in the edifice as a whole. The achieving of it cannot be the work of just a few intellectuals who think on behalf of others, but a collective work, using the thinking of the past, especially the socialist tradition, directly confronting capitalism, and integrating new elements. Nor can its dissemination be the exclusive responsibility of one social organization or one avant garde party monopolizing the truth, but rather of many anti-systemic forces, fighting for the Common Good of Humanity. Of course, many theoretical and strategic issues remain to be studied, discussed and tried out.

Transition

86. We cannot go into detail in this text, but it is worthwhile introducing, in this moment of reflection, another notion, which is the concept of 'transition'. Karl Marx developed it apropos the shift from the feudal mode of production to capitalism in Europe. It is 'the particular stage of a society that is having increasing difficulty in reproducing the economic and social system on which it was founded, and seeks to reorganize itself on the basis of another system, which becomes the general form of the new conditions of existence' (Maurice Godelier, 1982, 1, 165). Evidently it is a question of long, but not linear processes, more or less violent according to the resistance of the social groups involved. Many analysts believe that capitalism has reached the end of its historical role because, as Karl Marx already observed, it has become a system that destroys its own bases of existence: nature and work. And this is why Samir Amin talks of 'senile capitalism', why Immanuel Wallerstein published an article in the midst of the financial crisis, saying that we were seeing 'the end of capitalism' and why István Mészáros refers to its incapacity to ensure the maintenance of the 'social metabolism of humanity' (2008, 84).

87. While one can accept the idea that we are living in a transition from the capitalist mode of production to another, and that the process can be precipitated by the climate crisis, we must not forget that such a change will be the result of a social process, and this cannot be achieved without struggles and a transformation in power relationships. In other words, capitalism will not fall by itself and the convergence of all social and political struggles will have to achieve it. History teaches us that capitalism is capable of transforming its own contradictions into support for the accumulation process. Already people are talking about 'green capitalism'. Developing the theory of the concept, within the historical context of the current system's crisis, will enable us to work out the tools for evaluating the social and political experiences now under way. This is particularly the case for Latin America where regimes have embarked on a process of change, heralding the socialism of the twenty-first century.

88. The concept can also be applied to particular processes within a general evolution. Without losing the radicalism of the objectives, it is a matter of identifying actions that can lead to the desired result (i.e. another mode of human development), bearing in mind both the concrete circumstances of material development and the existing power relations in the socio-economic and political fields. A typical example is that of the extraction-based economies which, in spite of the ecological and social destruction that they cause and although very much dominated by the interests of capital, cannot be brought to a sudden halt in the progressive countries. This is because, among other things, they provide the financial backing for new policies, as is the case of Venezuela and Bolivia. The transition phase would consist of 1) introducing a long- and medium-term economic policy based on the needs of the internal market; 2) promulgating stricter ecological and social laws controlling ecological and social exploitation; 3) making users pay the costs; and 4) promoting international legislation to avoid the phenomenon of 'comparative advantage' that favours those whose legislation is less restrictive. In other countries that are less involved in these activities, like Ecuador, a moratorium of some months or years could be proposed, in order to negotiate a transition process with the various social movements.

89. Using this conceptual instrument cannot serve as a pretext for making political and ideological concessions of the social-democrat variety - in other words accepting that the development of the forces of production cannot happen without the adoption of the principles, tools and formulas of capitalism. That would mean reinforcing the power of those social classes most opposed to a change in the model, as has been the case in Brazil - in spite of advances in other fields; or, as in the socialist countries, establishing new social differences that will inevitably lengthen the transition process, as in China and in Vietnam. All this does indeed pose a more fundamental problem: how do we develop our productive forces with a socialist perspective, that is to say, in terms of the Common Good of Humanity? And what forces should be

developed first? It is a problem that the countries and progressive regimes that came into power after the Second World War, were unable to resolve; and it was the origin of their failures, as well as of the present neoliberal orientation of most of them. As Maurice Godelier said, in his courses at the Catholic University of Louvain: 'The drama of socialism is that it had to learn to walk with the feet of capitalism'. The idea of developing organic peasant agriculture, as was proposed in an Asian seminar at the University of Renmin in Beijing in 2010, instead of promoting the monocultures of an agro-exporting agriculture; the idea of reorganizing the local railway network in Latin America, instead of adopting ILSA (Instituto Latinoamericano para una Sociedad y un Derecho Alternativos) projects: these are examples that could be proposed. Many others could also be worked out in order to promote a genuine transition and not just an adaptation to the prevailing system.

5 Towards a Universal Declaration on the Common Good of Humanity

90. Another function of the concept of the Common Good of Humanity would be to prepare a Universal Declaration, within the framework of the United Nations. Obviously a simple declaration is not going to change the world, but it could serve to organize the forces for change around a project that would continue to be fleshed out. It could also serve as a useful pedagogical tool for promoting the theoretical work necessary to mobilize social movements. It would be at the same level as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was the result of a long cultural and political process that started in the Enlightenment and at the beginning of 'modernity', and signified the emancipation of individuals and the recognition of their rights. It was developed by the French and US Declarations at the end of the 18th century. We know that it is not perfect. It was drawn up in a context that was heavily influenced by the social vision of the Western bourgeoisie, and it has provoked responses like the African Charter of Human Rights of the OAU and a similar initiative in the Arab world. It is used by the Western powers to establish their hegemony over the world. However, it exists: it has saved the freedom, even the lives, of lots of people, and has guided many useful decisions for the well-being of humankind. It has been improved over time, adding second and third generation rights. Nonetheless, to deal with the dangers that the planet and the human species are facing, a new equilibrium is necessary, demanding not only a broadening of human rights, but also a redefinition of the Common Good of Humanity on the basis of new paradigms.

91. The preparation of a new Universal Declaration can thus be an instrument for social and political mobilization, creating a new consciousness and serving as a basis for the convergence of social and political movements at the international level. Clearly it is a longterm task, but it needs to be started. Not only can the coming together of social movements like the World Social Forum and political parties like the Forum of São Paulo contribute by promoting such a Declaration, but so can individual countries through their representatives in international organizations like Unesco and the United Nations itself. There will be a political struggle, but it is worth doing and can be seen as one of the elements of the necessary revolution of the paradigms of the collective life of humanity on the planet.

92. It is very important to make the links between the defence of 'common goods' like water and this vision for the new construction of the 'Common Good of Humanity'; partly because the holistic vision embodied in the latter concept requires practical implementation - as in common goods for example - if it is to emerge from the abstract and be translated into action. Partly, too, because specific struggles must also take their place in the overall plan. In this way the role they are playing can be identified not simply as mitigating the deficiencies of a system (thus prolonging its existence), but rather as contributing to a profound transformation - one that requires the coming together of the forces for change in order to establish the bases for the survival of humanity and the planet.

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