
IGNACIO ELLACURÍA AND A CULTURE OF SHARED FRUGALITY

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We are living not only in an epoch of change but in a change of epoch. Forty years ago Ignacio Ellacuría, who was assassinated on the 16th of November 1989 for his commitment for justice and peace in El Salvador, had a prophetic presentiment of this change. He analysed with clarity the crisis in the present global system, which he characterised as a civilization of capital wealth. With great creativity he put forward another model, which he called a civilization of poverty. Pope Francis, from the very beginning of his pontificate, has shown his deep concern for the future of our planet and for a more just global order. In his encyclical *Laudato Sí* (2015) he insists on the intrinsic connection between the social and ecological challenges that face the world: he invites us to listen both to the cry of the poor and to the cry of the earth. He calls for “a real cultural revolution” directed towards “an integral ecology”. Ellacuría developed the concept of a civilization of poverty in various articles. By “civilization” he meant a global order of human cohabitation. He gives various meanings to the term “poverty”, as did the Latin American bishops at their meeting in Medellín (1968) and the theology of liberation. Fundamentally, it has three meanings. The first takes poverty in a negative sense as the absence or privation of what

is needed to live with dignity: this misery-poverty has to be eradicated. In a second sense, poverty is something positive: the spiritual openness to God and an evangelical counsel of perfection. The third meaning is also positive: it is poverty that gives solidarity with the poor and is a share in the struggle for justice.

Ellacuría describes the civilization of poverty as follows: “At a deeper level it is not simply the creation of a new world economic order, in which the relations of interchange are more just, but a new civilization, built no longer upon pillars of hegemony and domination, on accumulation and difference, on consumerism and a falsified well-being, but rather upon pillars that are more human and more Christian.” (Ellacuría, 2000, p. 300) He goes on to explain more fully what is this civilization of poverty, “in which poverty will no longer be the privation of what is necessary and fundamental, owing to the historic action of certain groups or social classes, of certain nations or groups of nations, but rather a universal state of affairs in which are guaranteed the satisfaction of fundamental necessities, the freedom of personal choices, and a context of personal and communitarian creativity which would allow the apparition of new forms of life and culture, new relationships with nature, with others, with oneself and with God.” (Ellacuría, 2000, p. 303).

It is obvious that the poor are much closer to this concept of life than those who live in abundance. That is why Ellacuría insists that the poor are the primary subjects of the changes that are needed. That is also why Pope Francis keeps on repeating that changes come from the periphery and that the future of humanity lies in the hands of the people. In this search for a new model of civilization, the Church and – from an ecumenical point of view – all the Churches and non-Christian religious communities, have a very important role to play. A Church that is poor and for the poor, such as Pope Francis wants, can be, and has the duty to be, the promoter of a civilization of poverty.

The Covid-19 pandemic makes it still more urgent to rethink and to reshape our present model of globalisation taking into account the poor, the natural environment and the future generations. It makes evident that the global natural commons like the atmosphere are overused and the global social commons like health care are underprovided. It makes us aware that health is the most precious universal common good and that it is globally vulnerable. It makes us also aware that we are all in the same boat and one human family. The virus doesn't know or respect any frontiers. To stop the pandemic the countries must look and cooperate beyond their borders. We feel more and more interdependent from each other, we are all vulnerable, we are connected globally for the best and the worst. We should give up our collective short-termism and understand solidarity as an intragenerational and intergenerational challenge.

Pope Francis with his Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) offers a compass and a roadmap for building up a new model of globalization. Its central message is that dangerous climate change and the unscrupulous exploitation of natural resources continue to threaten the future of our planet. The issue of ecology is an issue of justice. The Pope also questions our present economic system, which he associates with a throwaway culture that is incompatible with the stewardship of creation. *Laudato Si'* is a dramatic and a joyful document. Dramatic because it faces the global crisis of today's world which is both ecological and social. Joyful because it offers ways and hope to tackle this crisis.

Another innovation of *Laudato Si'* is to consider the atmosphere, the oceans and the tropical forests as natural global common goods. In the present crisis, we can add health as the principal social common good. The global common goods cannot be solely under the rule only of nation-states but they belong to all humanity. So the principle of the universal destination of goods (Pontifical Council for

Justice and Peace, 2004, nos. 171-184) must be applied. We have a common but differentiated responsibility for these common goods and to discharge that responsibility we need democratic governance of them.

Inspired by Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis, I plead for a "civilization of shared frugality" (Maier, 2014). That means on the one hand that resources and wealth must be divided more equitably and on the other hand that this will inevitably require restrictions in the lifestyle of the people in rich countries. Its decisive criteria have to be universality, justice, and sustainability. The economies of the rich nations of the North are not universalizable because of reasons having to do with the environment and because of limits of natural resources. Whatever is not universalizable cannot be defended ethically either, according to Kant's categorical imperative. On a global scale, justice means that all human beings have the same right to natural resources and to energy and that ecological consequences are distributed equitably or at least in a more or less similar way. Sustainability means administering resources in such a way that the foundations of action are not destroyed and that the rights and interests of future generations are borne in mind.

The implementation of such a civilization of shared frugality is a gigantic challenge. For it a new social contract between business, science and politics is needed. The interlocking of the problems requires interdisciplinary efforts. Here also the religious communities with their motivation and action potential are in great demand. Justice and the preservation of creation are also questions of faith.



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