

Principalities and Corporations

Dom Helder Camara

When we arrive in a wealthy nation and denounce oppressive structures which exist in poor nations; when we say that some of the rich in poor countries live at the expense of the misery of thousands and even millions of their fellow citizens; when we describe the subhuman situation in which millions of God's children in the underdeveloped world continue to vegetate, it is easy to obtain understanding, sympathy, and generosity on the part of wealthy nations.

But we dare not go further. For if we wish to say that together with wrong structures which should be changed in poor countries there are also wrong structures to be changed in rich nations as well, the first impression is that we are joking: Why change, if everything is going well, the country is rich and grows more prosperous each day?

People in rich countries imagine right away that they are dealing with the frustration of poor countries which, incapable of pulling themselves out of misery, are led to believe that whoever is not miserable, whoever has won and prospered, must have necessarily defrauded along the way. Some become aggressive and retort self-righteously: What blame do rich countries have for being predominately in the hands of whites? Why blame whites for being white and capable of succeeding where others—the black, yellow and brown—have not?

There are those who say, or at least think: Use your head; stop being rabbits and mice living merely to procreate; conquer indolence; work hard; don't let yourselves be exploited by fellow citizens, and you will win out in the end like us.

Instinctively, it is difficult for wealthy nations to recognize that the wealth which they exhibit is nourished at the cost of misery of poor countries, and that their foreign aid is doled out at a price of terrible injustices. Yet, there are hard questions that need to be asked:

Is it true or not that the centers where international commerce is decided and prices fixed are controlled by the wealthy nations?

Is it true or not that the raw materials supplied by poor countries suffer ever-falling prices while manu-

factured products, supplied by the wealthy countries, enjoy steadily rising prices?

Is it true or not that official foreign aid, distributed by the governments of rich nations, is a mere "drop-in-the-bucket" when compared not only to the costs of the armament and space races but also to the setbacks resulting from the international commercial (monetary) policy conducted by the wealthy nations?

Is it true or not, moreover, that the official aid can easily become an instrument of domination, leading to habit-forming dependence on machinery and techniques manufactured by donor-countries? Not uncommonly, with technical and economic aid come, in the form of military aid, obsolete arms which throw the assisted country into a mini-armaments race of its own. It remains within the orbit of the superpower supplier of scrap-iron but, even so, strikes fear in the hearts of still weaker neighbors.

It is not difficult to anticipate the principal contestations: The purchase of raw materials? The wealthy countries can answer that they can do without raw materials, since synthetic substitutes are superior in quality and quantity to those furnished by nature. The fact is that the multinational macro-enterprises and corporations have maximum interest in dominating the sources of production of raw materials, proof that these materials continue to be necessary. There is a natural reaction of the people of rich nations against a rise in prices of raw materials, principally due to the impression that any extra money paid by the poor of wealthy nations goes directly into the hands of the rich in the poor countries. The problem cannot be presented strictly in terms of obtaining higher prices *as aid*. It is more a question of avoiding uncertainty and excessive instability in the flux of prices to the benefit of special interests of the balance of trade of already wealthy countries, rendering any

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serious planning on the part of underdeveloped countries virtually impossible. In addition, there will be no lack of those who will allege that reasonable and firm prices will bring on an inevitable superproduction, synonymous to a fatal collapse of the price-system, mass unemployment and, in short, chaos.

When will there be a proper climate for a profound re-examination of certain false data and economic indexes which create grave ambiguities? When will we stop speaking of overproduction? In considering, at least, vital sectors such as food, clothing, health and housing, we should be ashamed to talk about overproduction. Is it possible that there is an excess of food in a world wretchedly dominated by hunger? By no means. Excess of food is a dubious expression which merely means a lack of consumers who can afford to buy the food. Can there be an excess of clothing in these times of millions and millions dressed in rags? Can there be an excess of hospitals, medicines, physicians and nurses, when man is still far from winning the battle for health? Can there be too many houses—that is, housing in excess—when there are still millions and millions without a roof over their heads and families living in houses which do not even deserve the name “house”? As in the case of food, there is no overproduction of houses, hospital beds or clothing. There is, however, subconsumption on the part of the poor and super-egoism on the part of the rich.

Let us be quick to make very clear that there is by no means any solution in appealing for aid, alms or generosity, although help from concerned individuals or private organizations is welcome, since, while we don't yet succeed in obtaining justice, there are brothers in desperation who cannot wait any longer. The human being hungers and thirsts for justice, and to be treated as a human being; to perform his duties, as long as he sees his own rights respected. To say that there are millions of human beings without this essential hunger, without this thirst of thirsts, is the greatest of humiliations for our supercivilization, which has permitted a relegation of our brothers, children of God like ourselves and men like ourselves, to a subhuman situation.

The most serious, the saddest and most shameful thing of all is that our supercivilization very often does not understand. It fears, and even combats and not uncommonly crushes, profoundly human efforts *to help* in the most fundamental and sacred of promotions—the human promotion of men now reduced to the condition of sub-men; to help men who are reduced through our own fault to a situation of slavery (without officially being called such, but still slavery) in the attempt to guarantee them access to the most fundamental and sublime of educations; a liberating education. Our supercivilization does not find it shameful in numerous countries to leave behind, in a state of fatalism or mere vegetation, human beings who have lost the spirit of initiative, creative imagina-

tion, hope, and even their own voice.

We have alluded to only one economic factor, the object of much misunderstanding: over-production. There are, in economics, countless other data and indexes crying out for a human interpretation. In juxtaposing two more sources of equivocal data, how many half truths, how many falsehoods, are implicit in the terms of “gross national product” and “development,” understood as the simple economic growth of privileged groups?

When listening to such affirmations, the so-called pure economists will surely laugh in disdain at that which must seem to them an unsupportable confusion between ethics and economics. But ask: What horror has the world come to when it uses profit as the prime force in human progress and competition as the supreme law of economics?

And what leaves many without hope is the verification that, alongside the capitalist superpowers, perfectly consistent within their suicidal and brutal economics, socialism, in theory more human, has generated in half a century two superpowers who have become in their own right empires, much like their capitalist sisters. And now, almost upon us, is another meeting of the greats—as usual, a potluck of the powerful at the expense of the powerless. The third attempt of poor countries to dialogue with countries of abundance in terms of justice—an attempt that is being prepared, as we know, for the beginning of the current year in Santiago, Chile—runs the same risk of failure experienced in the two previous assemblies of UNCTAD held in Geneva and New Delhi.

What valid hope can there be that the world may one day be a more just and human world? The appeal to armed violence does not seem to be a solution; not only is it known that hate does not construct, that hate generates more hate, but, also, that the manufacturers of weapons and wars are on the side of the powerful. Isn't it naive for this world dominated by forces ever more destructive and by structures ever more restrictive to appeal to non-violence? Isn't the World Congress of Non-Violent Movements, programmed for this coming April in Driebergen, Holland, already condemned to failure?

There are actually profound reasons for hope. Everything that is anti-human ends up by destroying and devouring itself. Unless I'm mistaken, one can already glimpse the Sphinx that will carry to the extreme of self-destruction the inhuman economic systems which dominate the world of our time: the multinational macro-corporations will have control of all the earth's resources. Their extreme force will be their weakness. Non-violence will have *natural* allies: How long will technicians be forced to place their intelligence and specialized preparation at the service of those who sustain them, be willing to work for monsters bereft of substance or soul, monsters who will

reduce practically an entire humanity to a state of slavery? How long until governments will no longer let themselves be manipulated by forces stronger than the strongest federal states? How long?

And when will the military finally perceive that, not infrequently, they are set up as uniformed puppets at the service of always more restricted groups, resulting in the enslavement of the ever increasing masses?

It is evident that it would not be reasonable to destroy progress but rather to change, in rich countries as well, the unhuman structures in order to place technological advancement, which is a human glory, at the service of the whole man and all men.

You, in this country, have honored me by attending to some of my ideas, knowing that I am merely a pastor who seeks to lend his voice to the world of those without voice. But permit me to make a concrete appeal of greater scope for our attempt to change peacefully, yet effectively, the structures of oppression.

It would be helpful to prepare—if possible in time for the World Congress of Movements of Non-Violence—a study on the possibilities of the survival of liberty, individual human freedom, in the United

States, as a test case for those possibilities in the rest of the world.

This country, as you know better than I, came into being as a result of the need felt by the Pilgrims to accept any sacrifice, to begin life again from "zero," as the price to be paid to save their freedom. And this has been a constant in your life as a people, as it seems to be an essential principle of human life. The study I mention would consist in verifying objectively whether technological advances make these principles completely out-of-date. Are we only talking about Puritan moralism that has no meaning today and even less for tomorrow?

The multinational macro-corporation, logically, is inevitable: but is it possible to humanize it, or has this very preoccupation lost its meaning and its reason for being? Have parliaments and political parties lost out? Are labor unions and cooperatives only museum pieces? Shall the press-written and spoken—forget its pretension about freedom of ideas and the free debate of opinions? Should the university be a servant of the "robotization" of the world? Should the religious seek the courage to march tranquilly into the archives of history?

Or is the last word still—and always—with the human person and with the divine privileges of intelligence and freedom?