

# Promotio Iustitiae

## DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

### **Toward the Church's social mission in Asia**

Denis Kim, SJ

### **Democracy in South Asia – Challenges: democratic promise, a distant dream**

Manu Alphonse, SJ

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### **The rocky road towards democracy in Latin America**

Alejandro Angulo Novoa, SJ



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## Editorial

**Patxi Álvarez, SJ**

The basic phenomena which model people's lives today have acquired planetary reach: global lifestyles, climate change, migration, prevailing forms of development, universal systems of finance etc. At the same time, the concrete forms that these phenomena acquire in each country depend greatly on the way in which states are politically organised. Some states find themselves in a constant dispute with internal and external power groups competing to impose their interests.

Presently, principally since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, most countries in which the Society of Jesus is present live under different forms of democracy. As such, the forms of democracy in these countries exercise considerable influence over the lives of the people we accompany. Specifically, the way in which these democracies develop significantly affects the lives of the poor.



For this reason, we have asked six Jesuits to describe the health of the democracies in each of the six Jesuit Conferences: Latin America, North America, Europe, Africa, South Asia and Asia Pacific. Their efforts have been commendable, as it is not easy to make a brief synopsis of the situation of such a large number of countries, even though if are situated in the same region. Throughout this edition, you will find an overview of the state of democracy in the world. Some of the authors have bravely tried to include a section on how the Society could improve democratic life in the respective regions.

It is worth noting that the authors point to the presence of economic forces as a serious distortionary element in political life. If democracy seeks to promote the equal dignity of people through their political participation, economic power groups are merciless struggling to take control of the political levers, benefiting themselves and generating inequality, injustice and suffering.

This edition 109 of *Promotio Iustitiae* seeks to be a point of departure: an occasion for dialogue in our communities and institutions about the democratic health of our societies and to explore ways in which we can contribute to its betterment. Dedicated religious groups and members of civil society (lay people) can do a lot to improve the lives of the poorest.



## Toward the Church's social mission in Asia

Denis Kim, SJ

*In the midst of the vast differences between Eastern and Southeastern Asia nations, the prevalent democratic model in these countries favours a form of authoritarianism which emphasises economic development and marginalises socio-political development. In the face of Western democracy, this model uses the idea of "Asian values" as a justification to limit the freedom of political expression of its citizens. The Church has been more successful and more inculturated where it has committed itself to the historic task of national development in general.*

### Context: Asia in Development

It is a difficult task to describe the quality of democracy in Asia Pacific. A complexity is that Asia-Pacific has many interesting and diverse cases: communist (North Korea), post-socialist (China and Vietnam), post-civil war society (Cambodia), military dictatorship (Myanmar), liberal democracy (Australia). Many countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan can be either categorized as illiberal or situated somewhere between liberal and illiberal democracy.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the UN Human Development Index 2011, Japan is ranked as the 12th, Hong Kong as the 13th, South Korea as the 15th, and Singapore as the 26th, followed by Malaysia the 62nd, among the all countries in the world.<sup>2</sup> Most other countries, however, are ranked outside the 100th. In terms of corruption and transparency, similarly, only a few countries receive high rank: Singapore as the 5th, Hong Kong as the 12th, Japan as the 14th, Taiwan the 32nd, followed by South Korea as the 43rd.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is well-known that most Asian countries are low in terms of the quality of democracy and its poor governance. Even some countries are notorious for their brutal human rights violations.



Beyond the index, the historical change in the political and economic context of the region is more enlightening. Despite the differences in culture, language, history, and ethnicity, in addition to its geographical arbitrariness, East and Southeast Asia can be understood economically. It has been the fastest growing region in the world since 1965. Its economic growth has commonly been described in terms of a 'flying geese pattern of economic

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997.

<sup>2</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data/trends/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/dec/01/corruption-index-2011-transparency-international>

development'.<sup>4</sup> Japan has taken the lead, followed by the 'four tiger' economies (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan), then the 'little tigers' of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand), and finally by the post-communist economies (China and Vietnam). To a lesser extent, Myanmar and North Korea are now expected to follow this pattern. The recent "liberalization" of Myanmar can be interpreted in this line. North Korea is reported to endeavour to imitate the Thai model in which both political kingship and economic development are simultaneously pursued.

Given the context of political diversity as well as the significance of economic development in the region, this article focuses on democracy issues of the "tiger" countries. The rationale for this focus is that many East and Southeast Asian countries belong to this category. Moreover, their politico-economic pattern is anticipated to be more accepted as an "Asian" model alternative to the Western one, grounded in market economy, liberal democracy, and human rights norms. The rise of China seems not only to confirm this alternative model but also to reinforce its diffusion. Interestingly, however, under the influence of enculturation discourse, the Church's mission has paid attention to the religious-cultural context rather than that of political economy. This article aims to fill the gap by examining the politico-economic context and its implication for the Church's social mission. It begins to examine the political economy of development, followed by the debate of the Asian democracy. Finally, it ends with its implication on the role of the Church in the region.

### **Developmental State or Developmental Authoritarianism**

In the development of East and Southeast Asia, two characteristics deserve attention in relation to the quality of democracy. One is the role of cheap labour; and the other, the role of the state. Economic development has been mainly driven by labour intensive industrialization. Due to the increasing labour costs of the lead goose, older, more labour-intensive technologies were transferred down from the leader countries to follower ones where cheap labour could be found. This began with Japan transferring technologies to Southeast Asian countries, followed by the four tiger countries doing so. The rise of China is also largely indebted to its industrialization based on cheap and flexible labour, about which one might get a glimpse in the recent New York Times' article on the Apple's iPad production.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the role of the state is significant in this labour situation. It differs both from that of the small government in liberalism and from that of the executive committee for the whole bourgeoisie in Marxism. It has played an active role of entrepreneur by planning, moderating the private sectors, and even running the business sectors directly. It also has assisted the TNCs (transnational companies) not only by providing the free-trade zones and tax benefits, but also by controlling labour rights and wage in order for the TNCs to secure cheap labour. Again the New York Times' article illustrates how Apple has benefited through the exploitive use of labourers in China. The role of the state in East and Southeast Asian countries has received ambivalent evaluations. Surely, the state-driven industrialization has contributed to delivering the country out of poverty. However, it was accomplished by authoritarian regimes who disciplined labourers with carrots and sticks. Such regimes include not only post-socialist China but also the four tigers. Those who emphasize the former aspect, entrepreneurship, call

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<sup>4</sup> Kasahara S. (2004) "The Flying Geese Paradigm: A Critical study of Its Application to East Asian Regional Development," United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Discussion Paper # 169, April. Mitchell Bernard and John Ravenhill (1995). "Beyond Product Cycles and Flying Geese: Regionalization, Hierarchy, and the Industrialization of East Asia." *World Politics* 47, pp 171-209.

<sup>5</sup> New York Times "In China, Human Costs Are Built Into an iPad" (Jan. 25, 2010)  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/business/economy-apples-ipad-and-the-human-costs-for-workers-in-china.html?ref=applecomputerinc>

these Asian states a “developmental state”; however, those who stress the latter, authoritarianism, name these states “developmental authoritarianism.”

The ambivalent evaluation sets the background for the well-known controversies on the “Asian values” and the universality of human rights. Before this article shall examine them, it is noteworthy that the following shadows of the rapid economic development are commonly pointed out in the region: the reservation of human and labour rights, the development of efficiency-driven bureaucracy, the superiority of the state over civil society, environmental degradation, etc. Industrialization has also resulted in the increase of inequality between its beneficiaries and those who are excluded from its benefits, for instance, between the emergent middle class and the working class, and between those regularly employed and those irregularly employed. The dynamic relationship between the two unequal sides has influenced the political landscape, and thereby the quality of democracy in the region.

## Western Democracy or Asian Democracy

The East and Southeast Asia region constituted a significant part of the wave of democratization in the 1980s, together with the fall of communist countries. Countries from the Philippines and South Korea to Thailand and Taiwan became democratized by peoples’ power, and optimism prevailed that the authoritarian regimes would fade away in this wave. However, in the early 1990s, the so-called “Asian values,” in particular, vocally raised by then Singaporean and Malaysian Prime Ministers, challenged the Western liberal democracy. They advocated for an authoritarian discipline, presenting the “Asian values” as a cultural backbone in which hard work, frugality, discipline and teamwork can be generated. Soon, however, the 1997 Asian economic crisis blew up the triumphant presentation of the “Asian values”. They, once acclaimed as an engine for the Asian development, are now identified as a source of crony capitalism used to justify the absence of democratic checks and balances. Nevertheless, partly due to the rise of China and partly to the frustration of economic insecurity following upon deregulation policy, people observe recently the resurgence of the “Asian values” and the spread of nostalgia for overthrown dictators, and a softening of the memories of autocratic rule among the middle class. In this context, a few years ago, *Time*, an American magazine, reported “Asia’s Dithering Democracies” in its New Year edition.<sup>6</sup>

Western observers point out several areas in which the Asian countries need to deepen democracy.

- Political culture: Citizens should cultivate their citizenship, differing from subjects or clients who depend on their ruler or patrons.<sup>7</sup>
- Institutions to check and balance power: Society should develop its independent institutions, such as media and court, which can check power.
- Political society: Political parties should represent the diverse interests and are able to mediate people with the state.
- Civil Society: Especially, public sphere should be independent from the state’s control and needs to be strengthened

These observations are based on the Western liberal democracy model. Those who believe that the Western model is not universal argue for Asian democracy. There is no definite consensus on the Asian values or a model of Asian democracy. However, it tends to stress the following aspects:

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1869271,00.html#ixzz1kcaURiND>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1993).

- social harmony and consensus over confrontation and dissent
- socio-economic well-being instead of liberal and political human rights
- welfare and collective well-being of the community over individual rights.

Sometimes it is presented as Asian communitarians over individualism and liberalism, together with the emphasis on nation or state over individuals. Therefore, it is no surprise that authoritarian regimes in Asia have used similar logic in order to justify their authoritarian exercise of power and repress political dissent. Moreover, this logic has been employed in the human rights controversy with regard to China, contending that human rights norms are a Western moral weapon to tame Asia by imposing their standard on Asia.

Despite cultural or political logic, the claim for the Asian mode of democracy can be made on the ground of the Asian state's performance in development. Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father who built the modern affluent Singapore out of the de-colonized small city country with no natural resources, is bold to argue for Asian values. While constructing Singaporean capitalist development, he used to compare socialist with capitalist regimes. However, since the 1990s, he assesses countries by contrasting those possessing Asian values with those that do not. Invited to Manila where democratization took place in 1986 but the economy still suffered, He asserted "Contrary to what American commentators say, I do not believe that democracy necessarily leads to development. I believe that what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy. The exuberance of democracy leads to undisciplined and disorderly conditions which are inimical to development" In his view, the Philippines is handicapped both by its "American-style constitution," which undermines social discipline and stability, and by its "lack" of Asian values. These two factors account for the country being less successful than other developing Asian countries. "The ultimate test of the value of a political system is whether it helps that society to establish conditions which improve the standard of living for the majority of people, plus enabling the maximum of personal freedoms compatible with the freedoms of other in society."<sup>8</sup>

Lee's assertion on Asian values has not only met Western criticism, but also Asian critiques as well. Above all, another Asian leader, Kim Dae Jung, later Nobel Peace prize winner and President of South Korea, refuted these advocates of the "Asian Values." He argues that Asian cultural traditions support not only economic development, widely argued in the Confucian work ethics, but also political democratization, by pointing out in Mencius the people's right to overthrow a tyrant. This reveals the diverse interpretations of the so-called Asian traditions.

The debates on the "Asian values" manifest several layers in the changing landscape of East and Southeast Asia. Above all, Lee and Kim represent top Asian political leaders. Lee has built Singapore, and it makes him credible. In contrast, Kim, as a political dissident, fought against Dictator Park with whom Lee shared similar political philosophy and style. Lee himself explicitly admired Park as the modernizer of Korea in his autobiography. The difference between Lee and Kim, thus, is natural. Successfully presenting himself as a democracy advocate, Kim finally won the Nobel Peace Prize after the summit conference between North and South Korea. In this sense, the debates on the "Asian values" have been rather politically constructed and presented by politicians' raiding the rich storehouse of Asian cultural and religious traditions. The differences internal to Asia and their dialogical and dialectical development within Confucianism, Buddhism, or Islam have been ignored or merely selectively emphasized.

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<sup>8</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 December 1992. Quote from Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University) 1999, 71.



The Asian value debates reveal not only pride in what Asian countries have accomplished, but also a claim to superiority, at least in culture and morality, if not yet in economy, over the West, the former colonizers. Their advocates commonly point to the shadows that reveal the limits of Western modernity, such as racism, excessive individualism, rising crime and divorce rates. However, it is misleading to interpret the debate on the Asian values in the binary frame of “Asian” versus “Western” democracy. Samuel Huntington, a former Harvard political scientist, suffers this pitfall when arguing for the “clash of civilization.” His thesis essentializes the Orient as the symbolic opposite of the West and overlooks the political-economic structure that supports the difference and difficulties. In doing so, both the Asian value advocates and Huntington orientalize Asian traditions as timeless and irrefutably embodied in all Asians.

Rather than the civilizational difference, the Asian value debates can be better understood, as Aihwa Ong, a Berkeley anthropologist, points out, as the “legitimization for state strategies aimed at strengthening controls at home and at stiffening bargaining postures in the global economy.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the difference between East and West can be better understood in the context of neoliberal globalization. Whereas American neoliberalism undermines democratic principles of social equality by excessively privileging individual rights, the dominant Asian strategy in the global market undermines democracy by limiting individual political expression by excessively privileging collectivist security. The recent nostalgia for authoritarian leaders illustrates that the emergent middle class, the main beneficiaries of economic development in these tiger countries, demands better government not so much in terms of democratic representation as in terms of the state's efficiency in ensuring overall social security and prosperity.

### **Nation-State and Migration**

The state-led development and its success have shaped the move of people. After decades of economic development, the leading economic powers in East and Southeast Asia, such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, have become target countries for immigrants, and thus the international migration has rapidly increased within the region. Obviously, the typical causes of international migration between the North and the South, such as the difference in economic structures, life expectancy, demography, social conditions and political stability, can also partly explain this regional migration.

The characteristics of state-led development, however, illustrate a different pattern of social exclusion from Western immigration countries. In terms of ethnicity and race, except Singapore and Malaysia, the receiving countries in the region are highly ethnically homogenous: 98% Koreans in Korea, 98.5% Japanese in Japan, 91.5% of Han Chinese in China, and 98% Han Chinese in Taiwan. It is not surprising that the citizenship law is based on *ius sanguinis* and that foreigners are not treated as equal. In other words, the fault line between ‘us and them’ is easily drawn in blood lines. It partly explains the nationalistic culture in these countries. State is conceived as an extension of family, and nation is a state. Therefore, foreign people easily become subjects the state pays attention to, takes “care” for and controls for the state’s agenda, which is usually interpreted as the national agenda. It is a consequence of a state which not only has orchestrated the economy but also has organized the whole society for economic development. Furthermore, these countries are proud of being a mono-ethnic country, and ethnic minorities have been easily ignored in the name of the national good. Korean descendants in Japan and Chinese descendants in Korea have long been discriminated against and marginalized.

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<sup>9</sup> Ong, op. cit., 11.

In summary, focusing on the tiger economies in the region, this article has addressed economic development, in which the state has played a crucial role, as the main common characteristic of the region. The promotion of authoritarian leadership or Asian democracy manifests not only their pride in their accomplishment, but also their mode of social regulation, which can ensure continuing economic development while minimizing socio-political cost. Obviously, as stated earlier, these characteristics are different from North Korea, Myanmar or some other countries. However, the rise of China is anticipated to affirm and reinforce the diffusion of state-led development, together with its social regulation, in the region.

## **Toward the Church's Social Mission**

The political, economic context of East and Southeast Asia charges the Church to rethink its social mission. The reception and creative appropriation of the CST(Catholic Social Teaching) seem to vary among the local churches. Two factors, one internal and one external, may explain the variance of their reception. Internally, the "inculturation" discourse has led the church to focus on culture or religion. In spite of the importance of sensitivity to local culture, emphasized since Vatican II, however, the efforts toward inculturation have not been free from the danger of essentializing culture in a dualistic way, such as the civilizational discourse does. Some inculturation discourse assumes the so-called modern, Western, capitalistic culture to be bad whereas local culture is romanticized as a source of identity-giving. However, the West "is now everywhere, within the West and outside: in structures and minds."<sup>10</sup> In practice, there is no pure local culture untouched by Western modernity. Inculturation can be void if it lacks analysis of political and economic context and the appropriate response to this context. Externally, the church is a minor religion<sup>11</sup> in a society where the state is a strong regulator. Thus, it has often been considered risky for the church to engage in public issues. This has resulted in the Church's social mission being easily confined within the religious and spiritual realm and within the boundary of the pre-existing nexus between state and society, rather than implementing the CST challenges.

It is ironic, however, that the churches socially engaged for the common good have been more successful at gaining conversions in Asia. The fastest growing churches for the past half century in the region are those in Timor Leste and South Korea. In Timor Leste, the Catholic population has grown from about 25% in 1975 to 98% in 2005, whereas its counterpart in Korea has grown from about 3% in 1960 to 10.1% in 2010, an exceptional phenomenon in Asia. Despite the difference in the historical context and the social location of the churches, the common characteristic of the Catholic Church in both countries lies in its contribution to the historical task in their countries. The task for the former was decolonization from Indonesia; the latter, democratization. The former Bishops Belo in Dili, Timor Leste, and Cardinal Kim in Seoul, South Korea, responded to this historical task with the spirit of the Gospel and Vatican II despite high risk. Due to the leadership in and contribution to these historical tasks each has been counted as one of the most respected persons in their respective countries. As a result, the Catholic Church in both countries has enjoyed moral authority, perhaps a more important quality to any religion than political and economic resources. More importantly, although people know its Western origin, the Church is no longer perceived as a foreign religion. The transformation of its perception has taken place in both countries, because the Church has taken a significant part in their historical change. A true inculturation!

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<sup>10</sup> Quote from A. Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 224.

<sup>11</sup> In East and Southeast Asia, only the Philippines, Timor Leste, South Korea and Vietnam have Catholics more than 5% of its total population.

The Church in the region can learn the lesson from the historical experience of Timor Leste and South Korea. It is the Church's contribution to the historical task of the larger society. Cardinal Kim asserted that the *raison d'être* of Church is not for its own sake, but for the good of the larger society and strove for its implementation in spite of internal and external opposition. Especially in a society where the state tries to domesticate society and present itself as an agent of national good, the role of the Church becomes more significant and has more potential. It should define the common good in its own context, a context where the state usually defines the national good differently from the CST. In a globalized world, the Church as a transnational institution can find favourable space and resources more easily than before to counterbalance the state and build networks for the common good. Jesuits as members of a global religious order can make many paths to serve for the Church in Asia in defining the common good, making strategic plans for it, and mobilizing and connecting the people and resources so that they can be implemented.



## Democracy in South Asia – challenges: democratic promise, a distant dream

Manu Alphonse, SJ

*Political democracy continues to fail to benefit the overwhelming majority of the population in South Asia, due to the absence of a real socioeconomic democracy. This absence generates high levels of inequality on the basis of class, caste, race, gender and membership of a minority group. Signs of hope come from grassroots movements – regrouping women, indigenous peoples and other minorities – which demand respect for their basic needs and defend their rights.*

In 2012 South Asia, democracy is under siege! For the more than 1.5 billion population of the region, the democratic dividend that emerged as a huge post-colonial promise in mid-twentieth century still remains an unfulfilled dream!

True Democracy is the best bet for the week; and hence, over the decades, grassroots democratic aspirations and demands have grown all over the region.



India and Bangladesh with their 'Parliamentary Democracies', Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives with their 'Democratic Republics' and even Pakistan with its 'Islamic Republic' and Bhutan with its 'Constitutional Monarchy' have all, since their independence, attempted varied forms of democratic governance, to cope with the rising expectations of their citizens. And Afghanistan, the latest addition to SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), caught between western imperial games and Taliban terrorism, is struggling for survival as a democracy and as a nation.

The SAARC Charter of Democracy solemnly declares, "Convinced that undemocratic and unrepresentative governments weaken national institutions, undermine the Constitution and the rule of law and threaten social cohesion and stability in the long-run, we hereby commit to strengthen democratic institutions and to reinforce democratic practices."

Yet, the democratic aspirations of the majority of the citizens in the region still seem a distant horizon, continually receding! Most of the Democratic Institutions (Judiciary, executives, Legislatures...) that were brought in soon after independence, but mostly visualized still in the colonial mould, have all been collapsing, due to high levels of corruption and low levels of public morality and accountability, transparency and participation.

## Political democracy minus socio – economic democracy

Speaking in the context of India being declared a Democratic Republic, Dr. Ambedkar, the great Indian Visionary and architect of the country's Constitution, had warned, "On the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality." Ambedkar was deeply convinced that mere political democracy, un-accompanied by socio-economic democracy, would prove to be of no use for the majority of citizens; and he defined socio-economic democracy as a system, where-in every individual, however weak, has the space and capacity to determine his / her life and livelihood. Today as South Asia looks forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ambedkar's prophesy has more than come true, not only with regard India but to the whole of South Asia.

South Asia has always been home to the greatest number of poor and the destitute in the world, in some situations even worse than in Sub-Saharan African countries. A region that houses 23% of the total world population contributes less than 3% to the global GDP and houses 400 million of the world's poor. The UNDP Human Development Reports have consistently placed most of the countries of South Asia very near the bottom in terms of human development measuring educational, health and quality of life standards.

And, in recent decades, as most of the South Asian countries have taken up into neo-liberal, market-driven economic policies, acute inequalities have grown in the region in terms of class, caste, race, gender and minorities.

- All over the region, indigenous people have continued to suffer multiple displacements, due to indiscriminate destruction of land, forests and mountains for mega mining and development projects. In the process, serious degradation of natural resources, water, land and the environment have made the sustainability of the process of development a big question mark. Such displacements have also led to massive movements of migrants within the countries and across the region as well as out of the region, in search of jobs in the middle East and in South east Asia, often under very human conditions and with no guarantee of basic human rights.
- As the 2011 Human Development Report notes, "Women in South Asia lag behind men in each dimension of the Gender Inequality Index (GII), most notably in education, national parliamentary representation and labour force participation." Over the years, the losses due to gender inequality in the world are abysmal in South Asia, next only to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Caste still remains a major discriminatory factor in public life and policies as well as within civil society, especially in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Dalits, lagging behind in terms of all human development indicators, have continued to suffer inhuman violations of their dignity, rights and livelihoods. In recent times, fundamentalisms of all types – religious, racial and regional – have become major challenges in these countries, causing acute violations of the rights of minorities in the area. The Tamils and the Muslims in Sri Lanka, the Hindus and Christians in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and sections of Muslims and Christians (especially dalits and tribals) in India have all been subjected to state-cum-majority terrorism with impunity, with no safeguards of real minority rights. And in countries like Bangladesh and Maldives, greater spread of fundamentalist perspectives among majority communities is driving democracy into great peril.

Unable to meet the legitimate socio-economic demands of their citizens, the States in the region have tended to become more and more repressive, often using the smoke-screen of 'fight

against terrorism'. State terrorism of varied types, backed by mass import of destructive armaments, have tended to suppress the very basic human rights of especially the poor, the dalits and indigenous people in the area, mainly the women and children among them. No wonder, that in 2012, the region has become the biggest importer of arms in the whole world!

The long-standing demand for a Regional Human Rights Mechanism, in conformity with the principles of universally accepted human rights standards to protect and promote human rights and social justice of the people in the region still remains unfulfilled. SAARC, the official states-level body, hampered by the unevenness of its member states and geo-political ambitions and powers, has remained mostly a talking shop.

### **Grassroots civil society springs, signs of hope**

In the midst of near-unsurmountable challenges, the emergence, all over the region, of a wide variety of civil society initiatives such as people's movements and struggles, mobilizing women, indigenous people and minorities in terms of basic needs and human rights provides signs of hope. Strengthening of local governments, even if ridden with political manipulations, has begun to provide space for women and the poor towards sharing of power and governance in the region.

And across the region, forums such as the "People's SAARC", 'South Asian Network for Social and Agricultural Development' (SANSAD), 'South Asian Network for Dalit Human Rights' etc, ensuring people-to-people contacts and interactions beyond official state forums, have, recently, been involved in articulating an alternate vision for the region based on human rights and the demands of the most marginalized sections in the region.

### **Challenges ahead**

The post-General Congregation, GC South Asia Jesuit Consultation 2010 on "Towards New Frontiers together" identified Displacement/Migration, Fundamentalism and Environmental Concerns as major thrust areas for Jesuits in the region. These are truly great arenas for involvement of Jesuits in the region, individually and collectively.

While it is important to delineate themes of involvement, it is equally important for the Jesuits of the region to identify also the various levels of involvement and major spheres of influence. Public Policy Advocacy for concrete policy changes, focused social research that can expose the hidden contradictions and injustice of the system, accompaniment of the poor in their times of hopelessness... These are all areas and spheres, that Jesuits in South Asia are called to provide intellectual leadership, institutional support and inspiration.

### **Towards a New Way of Being a Minority**

In situation like South Asia, where Christians constitute a minuscule minority, the tendency of the church and religious congregations has been more in safeguarding their institutional (schools and colleges, hospitals...) interest, rather than being a catalytic force in the process of social transformation. In this context, it is important for the Jesuits in the region to show that there is an alternate way of being a minority – by immersing themselves in the struggles for the rights of minorities – irrespective of religion, race or caste and especially of the most disadvantaged among them – the indigenous people, the dalits and racial and linguistic minorities.

Being a minority, it is also important for the church and the Jesuits in the region to merge with alternate secular process for socio-cultural transformation – by playing varied roles of

intellectual leadership, animation and institutional supports. It is important, mainly for the Jesuits, to play key roles in the regional Peoples' Advocacy forums that bring together multiple levels of involvement – grassroots mobilization, social research and peoples' lobbies. The recent initiative of South Asian Peoples' Initiative (SAPI) that was born in the context of the world social forum is indeed an initiative in the right direction, but it needs to shed its tendency to be restricted to 'Jesuit involvement circles' but play catalytic roles in wider secular advocacy forums, such as the Peoples' SAARC and South Asian Network for Social and Agricultural Development (SANSAD).

### **Towards a Secular Democratic Religion**

As the contradictions of unequal economic development sharpen, the ruling elite find in religion a easy tool for manipulation and distraction; and god-men, to exploit the naivety and simple faith of the masses, are aplenty in the region as elsewhere!

Jesuits, as members of a respected religious congregation, have the new Challenge of transforming religion and all religions as instruments of healing and empowering of the powerless – not in a communal manner, but truly in a liberative style. Following the tradition of the great Emperor Ashoka, Hindu-turned Buddhist, who already in the 4th century BC, evolved an Edict on Governance, based on religious values of tolerance, mutual respect and non-violence; the Moghul Emperor Akbar, who dialogued with all (including Jesuits!) to evolve 'Din-Ilahi' (God's religion), synthesizing all religions at their best; the Sufi mystic poets like Kabir who celebrated the God of the poor... Jesuits in South Asia are truly challenged to re-discover the core of their 'religious' identity and to join the effort to turn religion as a powerful tool for democracy and justice!

### **Towards becoming Champions of Human rights of all**

In a situation of increased violation of basic human rights and lives of the socio-economically marginalized sections in the region, the Jesuits need to be seriously involved in the lobbying for a Regional Mechanism for human rights such as a South Asian Human Rights Commission, making all the Governments of the region accountable. Our researchers and social research institutions must synergise their energies and resources on such focused initiatives.

Finally, Democracy is no mere casting of votes; but rather is the open ground and horizon, where the most powerless gain the capacity and space to rediscover themselves as fully human, fully divine! And, in the words of GC 35, Jesuits in South Asia are truly called to transform themselves into 'A Fire that kindles other fires', by re-dedicating themselves to the service of Democracy – Political, Social and Economic – in the region, so that every child, woman and man in the region can truly experience God's own justice and peace!

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# Democracy in Africa: an experiment in progress

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*The expectations of democracy in Africa revolve around three main areas, those of: the distribution of wealth, power, and values or dignity. The democratisation of Africa is underway, even though the experience has frequently been accompanied by the paradoxes of the current form of liberal democracy. After two decades of democratic experiments, political awareness and civic education are booming.*

## Introduction

The recent crises of military coups in Mali and Guinea Bissau, the fraudulent presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the unconstitutional third term candidacy of Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, and the 2007 post-electoral violence in Kenya, are disturbing developments that posit a profound institutional crisis of democracy. Other circumstances that provoke concern are the seeming life terms of heads of states such as Paul Biya in Cameroon, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Eduardo dos Santos in Angola, and Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, as well as Soviet-style landslide re-election victories, as that of Rwanda in 2010. Although up to 27 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa held crucial elections in 2011 alone, it is increasingly acknowledged that elections alone do not make democracy. The current trend of democratic decline suggests the need for an analysis that goes beyond the superficial reading of Africa's political landscape. Is democracy really on decline in Africa and, if so, why? What triggered, in the first place, the democratization process in Africa in the early 1990s? Was the phenomenon a mere post-Cold War fad that is now entering into recession after the keen interest for change has passed? Perhaps, as some have suggested, democracy is failing in Africa because it is essentially a Western project lacking in universal significance. (Held 1987: 12; Monga 1996:68) To understand the African democratic experiment, it is crucial to establish the concept's ontology first and, then, to determine the conditions under which democracy emerges and consolidates.



## Africans' democratic expectations

Until the early 1990s, most African nations were still dominated by dictatorships, one-party and patrimonial states, lack of transparency and accountability of the leaders, social inequalities and



injustices, all of which led to internal instability and civil wars along ethnic lines. The democratization process in Africa coincided with the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. And while the last twenty years of democratic experience have been rather sloppy and haphazard, many observers blame it on Africa's cultural backwardness. They claim the multiplicity of ethnic groups does not make it easy for the continent to adopt principles of democratic governance. Some have measured the experience within the time frame between Benin's first democratic elections in 1991 and Sierra Leone and Liberia end of civil war in 2006. During this period, they claim, only three of the forty-eight states in Sub-Saharan Africa "attempted nominal transitions by holding multiparty elections for the first time in twenty years." (Barkan 2009:4) Other measurements such as the Freedom House distinguish between electoral and liberal democracies only to recognize decline in number of democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa – from 24 in 2005 to 19 in 2012. The Mo Ibrahim Index is even harsher and shows a decline of 5% in political participation since 2007 while only one country – Mauritius – qualifies as a full democracy. (*The Economist*, Issue of March 31, 2012, p.57).

This shows how difficult it is to speak of democracy in Africa. Despite the cunning ways in which post-Cold War African leaders cling to power in a manner reminiscent of post-independence dictators, Africa does not have a monopoly over corruption or resistance to good governance. (Monga 1996, 2009) Yet Africa represents a mosaic of cultures, political systems, historical trajectories, economic networks, and its democratic experience could not be reduced under one such encompassing explanatory variable as cultural backwardness. While I will purposely linger on African democratic paradoxes, I still contend that all of Africa is not made of failed democracies. Much could be learned from many good examples of democratic transition and consolidation, political stability and alternation in power. Ghana, Botswana, Benin, Senegal, or Zambia is such good illustrations that should not be overlooked. Our presumption of democratic failure may come from what Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, once highlighted, namely, the negative image of Africa as a place where nothing has ever worked. But, first, let us look at the African democratic expectation and what might explain the democratic phenomenon of the early 1990s.

The global emergence of liberal democracy after the Cold War had an appeal to all nations, especially in the developing world, since every single citizen could claim equal right or, at least, felt entitled to it. On the political plane, it symbolized the best alternative possible to the totalitarian regimes that characterized most of the twentieth century, be it Nazism, Fascism, and Communism or Africa's postcolonial autocracies. On the socioeconomic plane, it was viewed almost as a panacea to corruption, inequalities, and social injustices that plagued the continent since its accession to independence. Hence, electoral processes came to represent the best way to punish bad political leaders and to replace them by more promising ones. As such, it restored participation of the people to choosing leaders whose decisions affect their everyday lives. A functioning democratic system, however, requires more than just elections. Besides fair and regular elections, it is important to have an empowered and empowering civil society, robust institutions that will help maintain an uncompromising respect of the constitution and the protection for the fundamental human dignity and rights, a multi-party system, the freedom of expression, and a political culture that balances the interests of the state, the majorities and the minorities against different forms of political perversion. For Africans, democratic changes implied a break up with and liberation from military dictatorships, freedom from all kinds of oppression, and the rule by righteous principles that will guarantee a lasting peace and a just distribution of resources.

## Conceptual investigation

Conceptual considerations are necessary not merely for the sake of academic debates but also for practical bearings since no one can long for or embrace what he or she neither knows nor understands. As Horowitz (2006:114) puts it, it was a mistake of the post-Cold War global policy that the world's only superpower (the United States) has committed to, rhetorically and militarily, promote a political system that remained undefined. Before democracy could achieve the kind of universal and ponderable normativity it now enjoys, it had traversed millennia of conceptual refinements and transformations. However, the polarization in the democratic theory debate, as well as the divergence in measurement outcomes, as reflected in the few statistics above, demonstrates a lack of consensus on how democracy should best be conceptualized. As scholars contend, the very definition of democracy as "the rule of the people" is already problematic. David Held claims it comes with many underlying implications and wonders, "rule?" - "rule by?" - "the people?" To begin with the people: "Who are to be considered the people? What kind of participation is envisaged from them? What conditions are assumed to be conducive to participation? Can the disincentives and incentives, or costs and benefits, of participation be equal?" (quoted by Monga 1996:19)

The assumption that democracy is the best of regimes has been unequivocally is not warranted. In fact, the notion of the rule of the people has been disputed from democracy's Greek inception. Plato and Aristotle, for instance, looked at it with contempt while for the sake of political order they favored aristocracy since the "rule of the people" is inherently corrupt and unstable. By purporting to dispense equality to naturally unequal beings, democracy is a perversion of polity and a recipe for the lower strata of society to advance their self-interest, which is, to expropriate the wealth of the better-off and property owner citizens. This disdain for democracy led Guy Donnay (2009) to suggest that Socrates' death sentence was a revenge of Athenians against Socrates who betrayed democracy to support the Spartan aristocracy. It is a legacy of modernity, whence it came to be associated with the notions of justice and equality - although at the outset the conception of justice excluded gender and race. The moderns bestowed on the concept of democracy the notion of equality. However, it should be borne in mind that the liberal perspective of democratic equality originally included in the concept "the people" only property owners who represented approximately ten percent of the population. The difference with the ancient perception is that in modern times, democracy "is no longer foreign, in its historical manifestation, to the ideology of progress" and is based on the universal rights of individuals while it was based on citizen participation in public affairs for the ancients. (Benoist 2011:11) Thus, democracy represented rather a theoretical proposal for balancing the might of sovereign states with the rights of individuals to own property.

Today, democracy may not yet be universally practiced nor uniformly accepted but democratic governance has achieved the status of being taken to be generally right in the general climate of world opinion. Democracy focuses on political arrangements and participation, that is, institutions and processes that guarantee the rights and freedoms to choose and replace leaders through regular and free elections, equality of opportunity and access, and a just distribution of social benefits and burdens are maintained. (Sorensen 1993:10) While contempt for democratic virtues of popular participation was preserved through the Enlightenment framework, as seen in J.S. Mill was concern about the mediocrity of the masses in so far as they no longer needed to take their opinions from the dignitaries of Church or State leaders, the blessing (or curse) of the modern conceptual transformation was its coupling with liberalism as though these terms were natural mates. In fact, liberalism derives its legitimacy from authority of the state to protect individual freedoms - implying the right of private property owners - not the rights of the masses. (Fukuyama 2012:54)

## **The inherent paradoxes of liberal democracy**

There is a persistent confusion about the causal factors of the democratization process in Africa. The historical coincidence with the end of the Cold War has prompted many to interpret the phenomenon as being coterminous with economic liberalism. Indeed, the end of communist meant also the triumph of capitalism. And the fact that requirements to democratize were delivered in the same package with global capitalism makes believe that the democratization process in Africa was only a part of a worldwide movement; that African countries were just following a trend in East Europe; and the Western institutions (World Bank, IMF) were pushing to liberalize the political economic system. (Mohamed and Ndubme 2006) Failure or variation in democratic implementation would, thus, be related to the role of the military that continues to intervene in African politics; incumbent who are not willing to step down or to alternate power, and warlords who create armed conflicts to control natural resources.

While liberal capitalism was introduced as an alternative to development quandary, democracy sought to control the squandering of public resources by African dictators. Nonetheless, many have underscored the logic of capitalism that produces inequalities in social and economic resources "so great as to bring about severe violations of political equalities and hence, of democratic process." (Dahl 1985:60; Monga 1996; Sorensen 2008: 10) That is why the globalization process has also epitomized the "third wave of democratization. However, in most developing countries, economic globalization is one factor that undermines the people's political control and sovereignty. It not only pits domestic claims against multinational interests but also reduces the state's capacity to protect local interests against corporation-dominant form of economic production. (Denault 2008; 2010) This contradiction between undemocratic market forces and democratic participation lies at the heart of the current form of liberal democracy that seeks to reduce the government to its bare minimum, making it incapable of mitigating socioeconomic inequalities while protecting the interests of a new global aristocracy. As the multinational corporations shape the available knowledge and categories with which we think of ourselves, they have come to monopolize the power of representation and have succeeded in concealing the unprecedented forms of social and environmental injustices they engender. (Landefeld and Whichard 2006; Munck 2007; Mahler 2004; Rodrik 1997) Because, in many cases, the globalization has undermined democracy in poor nations, let us hope that the current ongoing "Occupy" movement will provoke further reflection about the worldwide indignation against a prevailing capitalist financial dictatorship that has yet to welcome democratic rules and principles.

A second paradox concerns the distribution of power and the very nature of African state. While the modern state has undergone profound changes in the recent globalization times, the fragility of the typical African polity exposes a contradiction of principles entailed both in the nature of the state and the notion of "liberal democracy." Sociologist Weber has argued that it is to misread history as to interpret "the welfare state as the teleological completion of liberalism... [It is the] state's absolute end to safeguard (or to change) the external and internal distribution of power." (Weber 1946:334, quoted by Wolin 1989:151) Equally, let us not lose sight of the history of the state formation in Africa of which the goal was not the welfare of the people but the opposite, to constrain them toward colonial production interests. Throughout the decades that followed independence, the struggle of Africans consisted of converting the existing structures to accommodate local and domestic interests. However, the post-Cold War blurring of domestic demands for democracy and international trends toward globalization obfuscates this structural tension in African states. There is confusion between the necessity of development and the people's welfare expectations to which the state has abdicated in favor of non-governmental organizations.

This suggests a third paradox, which I call the distribution of worth or dignity. While it is now clear that democracy and capitalism are not natural mates, and that the current crisis of democracy is global and not peculiar to Africa, it should be acknowledged that Africa's rush toward democracy was a statement against abuse of power and wealth by dictators, but even more, the claim for human rights and dignity. The sluggishness of Africa's democratic progress could possibly find an alternative explanation in the very nature of liberalism. This is not to insinuate that democracy and economic liberalization are incompatible. It is however true that the terms "liberal" and "democracy" are in contradiction, not in complementarity, with each other instead. While democracy seeks to maintain people's sovereignty as a people, liberalism undermines such democratic claims for the simple reason that it invests a minority of property owners with extravagant powers that hamper the people's demands for social justice. In other words, liberalism is in contradiction of principles with democracy when selfishness overtakes the common good; and individuals overlook the community for the sake of material wealth creation. Hence, liberalism constitutes the very source of the democratic crisis both in Africa and elsewhere. (Benoist 2011:10) Besides, although some have extolled globalization's potential to boost economic growth in Africa, it is obvious that countries with weaker institutions have rather suffered more marginalization, the unfairness of labor practices, environmental depletion, and further erosion of the state's capacity to provide welfare programs. By the same token, if the middle-class that composes the basis for effective civil society is neglected and sacrificed for the sake of corporations and the handful of people who control them, the risk is greater to confuse democracy with populism. In Africa, people's protests are usually met with police brutality whereas the civil society participation in policymaking process is swept over by lobbyists with more power to bribe politicians. (Landefeld and Whichard 2006:128)

### **Prospects of Democracy in Africa**

The current model of political organization, however, has only succeeded in skewing individual successes against collective projects. That is, there is a paradox inherent to the very democratization process. The reality of democracy in Africa may look bleak; democracy is nonetheless becoming the rule of the game. Nigerians descended into the streets to protests the government's cutting of social funds from oil revenues. Meanwhile, after going through a hysterical moment of ethnic violence, Kenyans agreed to a power sharing between their two contending leaders. The legitimacy of Mali's government may require it to negotiate with the Touareg people, overcome the terrorist presence of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, and protecting the rights of the internally displaced people. The Senegalese people refused to have their democracy stolen by anti-constitutional fraud; instead, its civil society mobilized to organize parallel monitoring and computing centers of electoral votes. Ivory Coast has yet a long way to go before democracy is engraved in its institutional processes, while Gabon, Togo, and the D.R. of Congo all need to prove they effect regime change without violence. Hence, any measuring activity begs for nuances and historical contextualization. It is not only difficult to speak of Africa's complexities as though the continent were a monolithic political unit.

These few examples lead us to return briefly to the crucial problem of competing priorities of economic fulfillment and civil and political freedoms. A focus on external causal mechanisms alone has obscured the more profound yearning and demand for democracy as the best political expression of the quest for self-fulfillment. In the developing countries, however, leaders have contested priority of democratization, instead maintaining that the poor need to fulfill their economic needs first before they can claim political rights. In other words, given that political freedoms and rights can hamper economic growth and development, democracy should not be the priority of governments in poor developing countries. Why, indeed, bother about the luxury of political freedoms in the face of the overpowering grossness of poverty? Known as the Lee

thesis – according to Singapore former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew – this view is often complemented by the cultural relativism that posits democracy as an exception of the West. Thus, the democratization process in Africa seems but another form of Western imperialism, one that fails to respect the reality of diversity by promoting the rights of individuals over those of communities. (Sen 1999:147ff; Sorensen 2008: 100)

The importance of democracy is not well served when the urgency of economic needs is pitted against the guaranteeing of civil and political liberties. It is now high time to measure the democratization process outcomes in Africa and, by the same token, to revisit the meaning, the principles, and the exceptionalism of African democracy. This apparent paradox is the heart of the current global crisis of democracy in general. Since democracy is about protecting the basic rights and freedoms of the citizens, the consensus that liberal democracy makes the best form of government could be misleading. The liberal tradition has established that political legitimacy is founded on representative and procedural decision-making processes that include competing interests of citizens regarded as equal bearers of rights and duties. Since all political institutions are about justice, “laws and institutions must be reformed or abolished no matter how efficient and well-arranged if they are unjust.” (Rawls 1971:3) Disagreements over causal mechanisms may prevail but there is a tacit acknowledgement that nations should embrace liberal democracy in response to the widespread demand for justice, equality and peace.

A question worthy asking at this point is to learn what makes Africa exceptional and resistant to good governance. In other words, what is the democratic future of Africa? Do cultural reasons explain Africa’s regression into authoritarianism and the failure of democratic consolidation? By valuing community rights over individual rights and by showing unlimited respect to authority are African cultures maintaining a hierarchical order over against the idea of equality and accountability, thus showing cultural incompatibility with the very idea of democracy? What should be the proper role of the state when liberal individualism remains unchecked and a matter of undemocratic decisions? How can globalization be used to the welfare of Africans? What kind of democracy does Africa need?

## Conclusion

In sum, democratic expectations in Africa revolved around three major areas: the distribution of wealth, power, and worth or dignity. Have these expectations been met? It is hard to tell. However, as a form of participation, African democracy is *en route* even though the experience is often met with the paradoxes inherent to the current form of liberal democracy. It is thus important, by way of conclusion, to be reminded that democracy is a dynamic and ongoing activity, not a stasis. That is, although some aspects of it seem on decline in Africa, the political awareness and civic education after two decades of democratic experiments are on the rise. One of democracy’s important features, indeed, is political participation of the citizens in voting for the leaders and in controlling the decision-making process. The ballot participation will obviously make no sense if elections are not a channel for the people to create a community of meaning and a shared destiny. Democracy is about political meaning, not atomized individuals with separate goals and selfish achievements. Elections can make a difference only if they come to restore the political sovereignty of the people against new forms of dictatorship.

Unless Africa learns to listen to her people’s needs, experiences, values and interests, that is, to understand her historical trajectories, the wounds of her memories, the hunger for justice, the imperative for structures that protect basic rights, the need to overcome past humiliations and to empower local communities for self-determination and meaning provision, she will miss every historical momentum to properly use either the vibrant and youthful talent of her people or her natural resources that make an good asset for international clout, political leverage, and

economic liberation. Also, to say for instance that natural resources can constitute a curse is an aberration. Instead, it is better to ask the question who is profiting from those resources, and from crises resulting from resources' misappropriation.

The non-governmental and international organizations and the multinational corporations may continue obfuscating rejection of the current liberal order, and the mimetic form of African postcolonial institutions, but since the democratization process has been set in motion, it will continue to grow at its own pace. Today, democratic aspirations are not a luxury that countries mired in historical contradictions should not demand. The process of democratization will be bolstered only where states can ensure the basic human rights, because democracy is about the very fundamental quest of self-fulfillment and happiness, which in African contexts has been identified by theologians as the longing for "abundant life." (Mulago 1972; Nyamiti 1993; Bujo 2003, 2008) That is, in Africa, the distance that still separates theory from practice.

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## Democracy in the United States and Canada

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*The authors examine the state of democracy in the United States and Canada, countries with extremely distinct democratic origins. In the first place, they outline the main features of their historical evolutions. Subsequently, they sustain that competition between groups holding irreconcilable positions – such as the influence of powerful interest groups and large multinationals – is destroying democracy. Presenting some of the values of these democracies, they conclude by suggesting that the establishment of a government of nations throughout the world is needed.*

Democracy in North America is highly admired around the world. It has been described as a beacon on a hilltop to the world of a better way of living. Over several centuries it has drawn people from every country of the world. At least if you look at the number of immigrants both documented and undocumented who seek to enter as permanent residents and eventually citizens, this is and has been very true. Freedom and democracy have a drawing power. They speak to the human heart. They bind up the wounds of hardship. And this attraction has been there for several centuries. Of course immigrants are not just seeking democracy as a form of government, though this is certainly desirable after suffering through exploitative, military and authoritarian regimes. They are also seeking the values that come with it: peace, freedom, respect for law, expression of religion, freedom of the press, opportunity for employment and business, etc. Democratic societies are rooted in the practice of these social values, in a word, justice for all.



This article will attempt to address the state of democracy in the United States and Canada. From the outset this is difficult task because each country has had a different history, and different traditions of democracy and different practices through to this day. These two countries look similar as they share the same continent and their version of an English accent is more or less the same<sup>12</sup>. They also have a fairly integrated economy and are each others largest

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<sup>12</sup> I don't have space to develop this as part of this article, but it should be mentioned that a large difference between the U.S. and Canada is the fact that Canada is an officially bilingual country. English and French are recognized as official languages in Canada - more than 20% of the population are Francophones across the country. And Quebec, the French-speaking province of Canada and home of French culture in North America, is recognized as a nation within the Canadian confederation.

trading partner. But as political societies they are very different. In this short article we will touch on some of the things shared in common and point out some of the major differences when it is important to do so.

There are very high ideals built into the traditions of democracy from its origins in colonial North America. North America of the seventeenth century was a mixture of the aboriginal peoples, and colonies from France, Spain and England. Self rule and responsible government in the colonies were begun before the American Revolution (1776). Nova Scotia grew beyond Letters of Trade to a civil government in the 1730's and in Virginia for example, forms of local government and strong participation were well developed. But these democracies were in the towns where the local population was relatively small. People gathered together to at first survive and then prosper. The colonial structure did involve an overarching yet distant authority, exercised by the Governor; but that authority was far-off. The generation of the Revolution and the subsequent constitution affirmed that the foundation of political authority was "We the People." The constitution articulated the high ideas of the Enlightenment era.

After 150 years of growth and prosperity under a colonial rule, one of the principal motives of the revolution was participational democracy, a more complete involvement in governance, a rule by and for the people, and of course, controllable taxation. These ideals of the Enlightenment for rationality, respect for the moral character of the human person were articulated as the foundations of a new society, a new country. But one of the other conditions that contributed to the beginning of a new, young and healthy democracy was the availability of good farm land for a quickly growing population. But this land was taken from the aboriginal people who did not share in the new society. Farm production increase and the new industries of the cities added to the new prosperity. The resources were there; the land was there, waiting for the arrival of the immigrants.

Let us fast forward over the last 250 years to consider the state of democracy today. When we turn to today and look at the functioning of the democracies we find a very different story from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century ideals. So many of the foundational conditions have changed. The main concerns of politics are more or less the same since Aristotle: the selection and replacement of the leaders, the role of private property, the active involvement of the citizens, the definition and protection of rights and the rule of law over arbitrary authority. But how these things are done and more to the point, how an individual citizen can take part is radically changed. Part of today's story is simply the size of the populations (USA: 330 million, Canada: 34 million.) What was possible for a few thousand people is not possible for a few million. The capacity and determination of local people in a local riding has given way to the power of political parties and the influence of and growing demand for money to wage campaigns and develop policy and finally legislation. The media is playing a larger role. Then it was the newspaper and now it is television, radio and Internet. This is where the money is used. It certainly no longer functions or feels like rule by and for the people. Government is still based on the consent of the governed but the tools of determination are very changed. In brief, the increased number of participants and the money generated by these larger groupings has changed the measure of involvement. Put another way, wealthy people and corporations determine government.

The level of dissension among the party options has also increased to an almost dysfunctional level. Part of this is the very nature of majority rule in a democracy. One of the fundamental principles of democracy, and perhaps a weak spot, is rule by the majority. That is if 51% of the people (or even less) or the house of the legislature vote for something it is passed, (with a few constitutional exceptions which require a higher percentage.) This means that often 49% of the people do not get their way. The result has been that the respect for the system of government, in which many people have to live with laws they do not agree with, has deteriorated. In short,



democracy is weakened in its practice. In the days of George Washington there were no political parties. Factions cooperated for the good of the country. In Canada at the beginning of the Confederation, 1867, there were party elegancies, but parliamentary process was respected. In the case of both Canada and the United States, but mainly in the United States the party system has developed into bitter partisan divisions based on social and ideological differences. These disagreements are so harsh that the respect for the procedures and institutions of parliament (Congress) are diluted and government itself regularly comes to a stand-still. Certainly this principle has eroded to the state of a dysfunction. The United States has budget procurement crisis several times a year, based mainly on ideological differences. The consent of the governed has been strained to the point where the common good of the nation or its peoples is no long foremost. And sad and sometimes unhealthy compromises are struck to get beyond the impasse. And incredibly, it is not so much the rich against the poor or racial divides, which are deplorable as policies, but many people vote against their own interests. For example, people vote to lower taxes no matter what, even though this will weaken education, transportation and health care in their communities. Democracy works when people pursue their best interests. But an anti-big government theme has emerged that resents the role of government in anyone's life. This is, I think, some kind of leave-me-alone conviction that is very anti democratic.

Part of this partisan divide is the role of large corporations in government through lobbies and the interests of national and international corporations who seek to influence government to ease the way for them to maximize their profits. In fact many international corporations are well beyond the control of any national government since they have structured their legal existence to be outside the domain of any one national group of citizens. And even the companies which are national in character, the banks and the auto industry, have an excessive hold on the governments interest. It is the "Wall Street" versus "Main Street" divide that was dramatized during the economic crisis of 2008 and the Occupy Movement of 2011 and 2012.

One of the contentions of politics in these two democracies is the definition and expectation regarding the nature of the State itself. This is one of the principle that divides between the strong centralized state and the de-centralized state. Put another way it is the conflict between the views that sees all power given, inalienably to individual persons and only those powers which are conceded to the State, does the State legitimately have. In the USA, for example, if I have a right to self protection, God given, then the State cannot inhibit me from bearing arms. The other view is more constitutional. In Canada these tension have worked themselves out through a slight different history. In Quebec, for example, the legal traditions are based in Napoleonic Codal law. In fact the Supreme Court of Canada hears cases from both Codal and Common law traditions. In this view, the State has the duty to determination of all areas of life for the common good and limit the rights of individuals accordingly. It comes down in practice to questions of what services the government will offer its citizens: health care or not, education or not, roads and transportation or not. It separates those who want a fully private and free market approach to these social needs and those who want those services to be provided equally among groups and regions and paid for through taxation. The mantra of "never raising taxes" and the "curse of socialized medicine" are the battle cries for this debate.

But what of the poor who often tend to be the new immigrant and the refugee? What of the native peoples whose lands were taken for the creation of these democracies? Well, frankly in the opinion of these writers, they are not that well cared for through these democratic structures. Perhaps it takes three generations for the immigrant to find their place and their voice in the political and economic society. The native people have been afflicted with treaties and self rule policies (which are very communal and democratic) but which have excluded them from the benefits of mainstream life.

Another great struggle that is going on but is not debated very publically is that between concerns of the common good in a broad sense and concerns for the well being of the economy. The most critical example of this is the policy concerning the development of the Alberta tar sands. Enormous and fairly immediate economic reward is pitted against and ecological implications for the country and the whole planet. Usually corporations with lots of money for lobbying and right wing governments cooperating swing the policy decision in favour of economic development. Does the voice of the people really even get expressed in these contests? I do not think so.

But it does but does bring out a fundamental point about democracy. Decisions are not made by popular referendum for the most part, but by the majority of the elected delegates in the parliament. The parliamentarians are really just keeping the 37% of people who voted for them happy; and those people are keeping the parliamentarians in office. There have been attempts to find a more direct democracy, the referendum in California, for example, verses representational democracy, where individuals who are elected by the people are then in principle free to determine which way they will vote on the proposed bills. But what is at stake here is the citizens' role to participate in public life. Lobby and interest groups are created to try to influence the legislators. Committees offer open hearings where citizens or groups can go to promote their point of view. The public press plays a big role in this, taking up causes or exposing weaknesses in the proposed legislation. But recent history suggests that it is the large forces and the corporate players who get the benefits. Look at the bailout of the banks during the 2008 financial crisis. It was not the mortgage holders and house owners who gain much benefit. Many of those citizens lost their homes. And they have had little recourse since.

Now, I do not want to dwell on all the discontents of contemporary democracy. Some of the basic functions are fulfilled. When people run for the presidential office it is not some kind of automatic result, as perhaps in Russia. It is a genuine contest in which most of the time the people do decide. (We must overlook the year 2000.) The rights of people to be informed about public issues are fairly strong. The role of the press is very active in seeking information and providing it to the public in a timely way. The press is endangered by the entertainment industry which would turn political information and commentary into a one liner show for laughs before an audience. Unfortunately more and more young people get their daily dose of political news from a comedian, all be it a skilled one, than from a competent journalist. The deeper analysis and time-consuming research of journalism gives way to the thin banter of a script writer. At the same time the practice of religion can flourish as does pluralism and the tolerance necessary to live together peacefully. Although there is violence in most places, peace and security are the more prominent. These democracies have improved the lives of generations of peoples including their economic well-being. They have been a success.

But have our democracy help solve the truly human issues of our times? Issues like the on-going international wars, issues like the movement of increasing millions of people as refugees, issues like the deterioration of the planetary atmosphere: these are the global issues. In fact, there is evidence that each of these situations has been worsened under democratic governments, and under non-democratic governments, alike. Although there is some consensus around the nature of the issues, the people do not seem to be able to effect through their governments the improvement the world needs. The next step is the creation of a democratic structure among nations around the world, something beyond the present powers of the United Nations.



## Democracy in Europe

Frank Turner, SJ

*The author focuses on the state of democracy in Europe as a whole, avoiding a detailed analysis of particular countries. Following a brief introduction on the various ways of understanding democracy, he analyses some anomalies in democracy today. In addition, he underlines the threat that the current model of economics and finance mean for democracy within the context of a today's globalised economy. Finally, he argues that a variety of instruments are needed in order to ensure that political responsibility can be exercised transnationally.*

### Introduction and Typologies

This essay is a reflection, not a survey, covering a theme broad enough to sustain an encyclopaedia. I shall not examine the democratic credentials of member states of the European Union (EU) or of other European states, but focus on the European level. Examples from the affairs of single states either illustrate broader trends, or identify what I believe is the mistake of contrasting some 'democratic deficit' of the EU with the fully achieved democracy of nation-states.



A helpful typology was offered to the *Eurojess* Congress of August, 2005 by Norbert Brieskorn SJ:

1. 'Direct' democracy: where the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule.
2. 'Indirect' or 'representative' democracy: where citizens exercise this right through representatives chosen by and responsible to them. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address famously referred to 'Government of the people, by the people and for the people'. The elected authorities remain 'of the people' and are not above the law.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The philosopher Eric Voegelin points out fascinatingly that this famous expression, commonly attributed to Lincoln himself, is borrowed from the Prologue to Wyclif's translation of the Bible (1384), where it reads, "This Bible is for the Government of the People, by the People and for the People". One of the key pronouncements of Western institutional democracy firmly rooted in a Judaeo-Christian 'religious' insight. (Voegelin, *Demokratie im neuen Europa*, 1959).

3. 'Liberal' or 'constitutional' democracy: where representative government is exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee certain individual or collective rights to minorities, such as freedom of speech and religion.
4. 'Social' or 'economic' democracy: where, government (whether or not democratic in any of the first three senses) tends to minimise social and economic differences.

Models never appear in pure form. Direct democracy may find a place within 'representative' or 'constitutional' democracies, as in the case of referenda over European belonging, although those who lobby for referenda tend to claim they are somehow *especially* democratic. 'Democracy' can acquire a still fuller sense, perhaps by analogy, as when we refer to the 'democratisation' of the workplace or of the school-system, when the decision-making of directors or managers is the fruit of genuine consultation.

The term 'democracy' (state or non-state) therefore comprises three levels of discourse: the institutional arrangements that govern the community concerned (voting structures, electoral codes and procedures); the ethos of political representation (in what way do the formal structures of government truly *represent* the society that generates them?); an accord governing the relationship between political authority and broader social and economic life (the guarantee of certain freedoms, of the rights of minorities).

As Brieskorn remarks wryly, 'disagreements grow as these terms are specified further'. Few US citizens would call their country undemocratic because work-place democracy is rare. (They may, of course, be too complacent.) Second, a critical sense is necessary. Democracy has a certain prestige, and laying claim to it attempts to legitimate a political system, perhaps tendentiously. Third, there is a serious question, to be discussed below, as to whether the 'free market' is inherently anti-democratic by relegating politics to a secondary sphere of social life.

Models and typologies are naturally plural. Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, recently used the term 'deep democracy' to describe her hopes for Egypt. In effect, she reframed some elements listed by Brieskorn in terms of 'surface' (perhaps too dismissive a term for the institutional structure of a political society) and of 'depth':

'Democracy is about votes and elections – but it is also about far more than that. What we in Europe have learned the hard way is that we need deep democracy: respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, an independent judiciary and impartial administration. It requires enforceable property rights and free trade unions. It is... about building the right institutions and attitudes. In the long run, 'surface democracy' – people casting their votes freely on election day and choosing their government – will not survive if deep democracy fails to take root.'<sup>14</sup>

Ms Ashton says that Europe has learned that we *need* this. She does not claim that Europe has everywhere *achieved* deep democracy, even though only one fully European nation, Belarus, is positively excluded from the Council of Europe as being insufficiently democratic and respectful of human rights. Indeed several member states of the European Union are currently embroiled in public controversy about their democratic credentials, and awkward questions could be asked about others.

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/04/egypt-tunisia-eu-deep-democracy>. 4th February 2012.

## Some National Anomalies

‘Such is the reverence for Mario Monti that some compare him to Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, the patrician recalled from retirement to save ancient Rome. . Having defeated the foes, Cincinnatus surrendered his absolute powers and returned to the plough, refusing all spoils and gifts. So when Italy faced disaster last year, with bond markets about to push it into insolvency, Mr Monti was summoned from his tranquil existence as president of Milan’s Bocconi university and sage on matters European. Appointed senator for life, he took power from the dissolute Silvio Berlusconi on November 16th. He appointed a small cabinet of technocrats and, naming himself finance minister, refused a salary for his cabinet jobs.’<sup>15</sup>

This testimony to the esteem in which Mario Monti is held in European circles portray him as delivering Italy from the whims, frivolity, incapacity of Mr Berlusconi and restoring its international respect. He was invited by the President (himself elected by the Parliament) to form a government. He is both Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance, and the government ministers he has named were also unelected.

Despite the pious tribute, there is reason for democrats to pause here. Mr Monti seems to owe his appointment, which occurs only indirectly through the electoral system, to the hope that it would reassure to the financial markets.<sup>16</sup> Although he faces elections in 2013, his unelected government will exercise power for more than a year, a period which could significantly shape Italy’s future.

The questions posed in relation to Italy applies with still more force about Greece. The Prime Minister since November 2011 is Lucas Papademos, a Vice-President of the European Central Bank from 2002 to 2010, previously Governor of the Bank of Greece at the time when Greece entered the Euro on the basis of economic data now known to be misleading (but which the EU itself failed to challenge). He has no previous political experience. He was named to his post a few days after EU Commissioner Olli Rehn declared that ‘finance ministers from the seventeen countries in the union that use the euro were expecting the announcement of a unity government before their meeting in Brussels’ (next day), to discuss the terms of a bail-out.<sup>17</sup> Elections were expected quickly, in February 2012, although these were then postponed till April or May. Meanwhile, the ‘technocratic’ government has agreed cuts to the minimum wage, pensions and benefits severe enough to entail drastic humanitarian consequences. Many families, for example, will now be unable to pay for the professional care of their elderly and sick relatives. It is not obvious that such calculations weighed with the EU.

The ‘troika’ of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission and the European Central Bank has become the de facto arbiter of the economic fate of Greece.<sup>18</sup> When on November 1st, the then Prime minister George Papandreou proposed a referendum to judge

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Mario, put on your toga’, Charlemagne, writing in *The Economist*, March 10, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> The new Italian government “is certainly an improvement on the previous one . . . and I think people can have confidence in Mario Monti,” said Paul De Grauwe, an economist at the University of Leuven. . . . “The problem is that this may not satisfy markets.” However, some in the party of Berlusconi accused Mr. Monti of pulling off ‘a market-driven coup d’état’ and are looking for any chance to force early elections and a return to democratic processes. (*International Herald Tribune*, November 16th 2011).

<sup>17</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, November 6th, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Democracy at a discount, *EU Observer*, November 18th, 2011).

whether such cuts were tolerable, there was an immediate outcry from the EU.<sup>19</sup> The citizens of Greece could not be allowed a say because there was no time: Greece could be bankrupt before the referendum could be carried out. Meanwhile, uncertainty – and the decisions of ratings agencies to downgrade Greek debt – would push interest rates upwards, rendering the debt ever more onerous. (These rates, incidentally, were effectively set by financial institutions that had previously bet against Greece, also contributing to the crisis.)<sup>20</sup> Greece bears considerable responsibility for its own plight: but its fate is largely determined by financiers. The desires of the Greek people find no political expression (except riots) at a critical juncture.

Yet matters are less simple. Even one of the fiercest of critics recognised the untenable nature of the Greek *status quo ante*: early and extravagant retirement benefits, unsustainably bloated public services, widespread tax evasion.<sup>21</sup>

*'What hope is there for a nation that has proved fundamentally incapable of forming a political community? 'We are responsible for our own history'. Even if it wanted to return to the pre-crisis days, 'when we were living a lie', Greece would be unable to do so. Polls . . . point to the belief among some Greeks that a technocratic administration might be preferable to the disgraced political class.'*<sup>22</sup>

What prospect lies beyond the 2012 elections if, by common consent, the Greek political class is 'disgraced' and the broader Greek political community significantly deluded or dishonest? What political party will command sufficient public confidence to implement the programme imposed from outside, when the country faces measures that could hardly be imagined in many other European countries except for wartime?

A third, quite different example, of democratic 'crisis' is that of Hungary. Its government, elected in 2010, has for the past year been at odds with the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe across a broad range of issues: alleged threats to the independence of the judiciary, the media, the data protection authority and the Central Bank.<sup>23</sup> The Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán has in turn accused the European institutions of 'treating Hungary as a colony', as if they were replicating former Soviet domination. ('We are more than familiar with the character of unsolicited assistance, even if it comes wearing a finely tailored suit and not a uniform with shoulder patches.')<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, his defiance coincides with Hungary's serious need for both EU and IMF money. In the present discussion, the issue at stake is not how far Hungary's controversial constitutional reforms may or may not be justified: but the existence of a profound dispute between the EU's institutions and a member state on the democratic character of that state.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, head of the group of eurozone finance ministers said, 'The Greek prime minister has taken this decision without talking it through with his European colleagues'. □ CBC News, November 1st, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/25/business/global/25swaps.html?\\_r=1&em](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/25/business/global/25swaps.html?_r=1&em), New York Times, 24th February 2010.

<sup>21</sup> The Greek government's tax investigation agency was established in December 2009. Its head reported in August 2010 that his staff had used a helicopter to fly over the more expensive suburbs of Athens. Using satellite imagery they found 16,974 private swimming pools, as against 324 officially declared. In the first six months of 2010, €1.8 billion tax was recovered by this single agency. (Der Spiegel, 4th August, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Serge Halimi, 'Greece in Chaos', Le Monde Diplomatique, December 2011, citing the French-Greek philosopher and economist, Cornelius Castoriadis.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, the formal 'opinion' of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission 19th March, 2012: [http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2012/CDL-AD\(2012\)001-e.pdf](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2012/CDL-AD(2012)001-e.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Simon Taylor, European Voice, 16 March, 2012.

Beyond these three examples, democratic anomalies exist across a broad spectrum of European states: in Russia, living under what has been called the 'managed democracy' in which Mr Putin and Mr Medvedev smoothly alternate supreme office, whilst exercising tight control over any effective opposition and the media; in the Czech Republic, embroiled in the allegation that a wealthy business executive semi-controls the city government of Prague;<sup>25</sup> even in Belgium, where the force of regional consciousness is so strong that separate communal voting systems struggle to deliver an integrated national parliament.<sup>26</sup>

At national level, therefore, three principal challenges may be identified: to transform the politics of certain states emerging with difficulties from a recent past that was far from 'deep democracy', (Hungary, Russia, and elsewhere); to negotiate a nation-state's difficulties in reconciling divergent regional traditions and aspirations (Belgium, but also Spain, the UK, etc); and to sustain the democratic politics of a state in the midst of economic crisis, where transnational realities and forces (including the EU itself) exert massive pressure, especially given an economic paradigm that is largely internalised alike by the political class and the general public. Given the limited space available I now concentrate on this third challenge.

### **Economic globalisation, and the struggle between finance and politics**

According to Aristotle and Plato (whose tradition extends to and beyond Thomas Aquinas), the political function entails responsibility 'for the sake of the good life and not for the sake of life only'. 'Virtue (i.e., in Aristotle, 'excellence') must be the care of a state which is truly so called, and not merely enjoys the name' (Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, 9). From that perspective, Plato already identified the threat to politics from money.<sup>27</sup>

In his book *Spheres of Justice*, Michael Walzer argues that justice requires a political society to make distinctions about what money may and may not buy. Employers may buy the time and skills of a person, but not the persons themselves, for that would be slavery. Those who go to court may legitimately (though perhaps sadly) secure a decisive advantage by employing 'the best lawyer': but they may not employ the judge. Political office may not be bought, nor may citizens legally sell their votes, nor officials their decisions. Money has a rightful function, but that rightful function is restricted.<sup>28</sup>

With globalisation, the power of money acquires a new force, sometimes threatening the distinctions made by Walzer. To say this is not to say that globalisation is intrinsically evil (although that argument has of course been made, as for example in *Promotio Iustitiae* by Ambrose Pinto SJ).<sup>29</sup> It is merely to say that the power of globalised finance poses serious challenges to democracy. François Hollande, socialist candidate for the French presidential election recently claimed this, though over-rhetorically: 'Mon véritable adversaire n'a pas de

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<sup>25</sup> Roman Janousek, accused of being the 'shadow mayor' of Prague", selling off city property, rigging public tenders and overseeing huge development projects. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17521319>)

<sup>26</sup> Belgium achieved an unwanted world record between 2010 and 2011 for surviving 510 days under a caretaker government (whilst basic public services, administered by competent regional governments, continued to run efficiently).

<sup>27</sup> In the Republic, Plato attributes a strictly subordinate role within the state to merchants (their dominance would be 'oligarchy', and would corrupt the state). "The more the people value money, the less they value virtue . . . when wealth and the wealthy are valued in a city, virtue and good people are valued less (Republic II, 371 & VIII 550-51).

<sup>28</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, Blackwell's Oxford, 1983, pp. 103-08.

<sup>29</sup> See 'Globalisation and Faith-Justice: a debate', in *Promotio Iustitiae*, 2003/5 (81).



nom, pas de visage, pas de parti. Il ne sera donc pas élu. Et pourtant, il gouverne. Cet adversaire, c'est le monde de la finance'.<sup>30</sup>

At the heart of globalisation lies the power of corporations, which can grow further only by reinforcing their transnational presence and influence. By elaborate systems of subsidiaries and transfer payments they relocate profit, so reducing overall tax payments. They minimise political accountability and demanding deregulation whilst maximising political influence: through lobbies such as 'BusinessEurope',<sup>31</sup> or through practices such as the 'revolving doors' through which politicians or senior officials may move between supervisory roles and jobs within the industries they have just supervised.<sup>32</sup> Given sufficient resources, political decisions can, up to a point, be bought. A European Union 'transparency register' begins to respond to the perceived problem, though so far tentatively.

The finance sector – by far the fastest growing sector of the global economy – is opaque to outsiders, is almost impossible to monitor for taxation purposes, seeks growth and profit in isolation from any social function beyond itself, is controlled by and profitable to the wealthy alone, yet is able (as the 2008 economic crisis showed) to project its losses onto the political community. States were virtually forced to rescue banks, to their grievous economic detriment.<sup>33</sup>

The political power of money imposes itself in other ways. The US electoral system is virtually closed to anyone who cannot mobilise campaign finance: now Mitt Romney is not only the richest presidential candidate ever, but is claimed to be richer than all previous candidates put together. By a decision of the Supreme Court in 2010, billionaire supporters are allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money through nominally independent 'Political Action Committees' or 'SuperPACS', to support a candidate of their choice. Since such support does not come free, are such candidacies a threat to democracy? In case one thinks that Mr Romney has no precise European equivalent, (and therefore that Europe is 'more democratic' than the USA) one may recall how Silvio Berlusconi's overwhelming financial power, coupled with his media ownership, prevented due scrutiny of his government: was his government more democratic than that of the unelected Mario Monti?

Fortunately, however, forces generate counter-forces, and the power of globalised finance is now generating both national and supranational opposition. In the UK, the government-sponsored Vickers Commission has proposed the separation of 'high-street' banking (that directly serves personal and commercial customers), from investment banking which need not be rescued by the community when failure occurs. It thereby threatens the existing transnational banks. At EU level the European Commission in March, 2012 issued a Green Paper (a consultative draft) proposing measures to control the 'shadow banking' sector (entities such as hedge funds which have up to now escaped effective political oversight) that was worth

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<sup>30</sup> 'My true opponent has no name, no face, no party. It will therefore not be elected. Yet it governs. This enemy is the world of finance.' (Courrier International, No 1116, 22-28 March, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.buinesseurope.eu/Content/Default.asp?PageID=587>

<sup>32</sup> A report of the IMF in November, 2011 discusses the astonishing success of such tactics in moulding political decisions in the USA: there is little reason to think the efficacy is less in the EU. 'Three's Company: Wall Street, Capitol Hill, and K Street', Deniz Igan and Prachi Mishra' ([http://www.prachimishra.net/IM\\_lobbying%20and%20financial%20regulation\\_MAIN%20TEXT.pdf](http://www.prachimishra.net/IM_lobbying%20and%20financial%20regulation_MAIN%20TEXT.pdf)). For Europe, see the reports of the Corporate Europe Observatory (<http://www.corporateeurope.org/>).

<sup>33</sup> As a key element of the EU's strenuous and desperate attempts to rescue the Euro, the European Central Bank has lent some €280 bn to banks at a rate of 1%, whereas the lending to a country such as Italy may be at 5% or 6% (rates forced up not least by the decisions of corporate ratings agencies themselves immune to any effective political control).



€46 trillion in 2010: 25-30% of the total financial system and half the size of overall bank assets.<sup>34</sup> Other regulations are being developed to improve the transparency and oversight of 'less regulated markets' such as those in derivatives, and of such new practices as 'high-frequency trading'.<sup>35</sup> The European Commission proposes a Financial Transactions Tax (opposed by governments such as the UK protecting its powerful finance industry): both to discourage irresponsible speculation, and to ensure that the finance sector is not uniquely exempt from contributing to the broader economy.

As to the corporate sector generally, in October 2011 the European Commission published a new policy to promote 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) – to ensure that enterprises 'should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical and human rights concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their shareholders'.<sup>36</sup>

Up to the 1980s some decades of consistent economic growth and full employment had allowed people in Western Europe and the USA (the situation was radically different elsewhere) to assume that economic progress is a 'right' attached to democratic citizenship. The tension between markets and democracy was conveniently obscured. As growth fell and unemployment rose, governments borrowed heavily in order to support public services and benefits, accommodating national expectations but accruing a huge public debt. The economic crisis then drove governments to rescue, in the name of the common good, strategic financial institutions, which had before insisted on their autonomy. So we live now amidst a triangular struggle between the financial markets, sovereign states, and the transnational regulatory regimes that are slowly emerging to respond to the new global situation.<sup>37</sup> It is impossible to forecast confidently the result of this struggle.

This argument about the rule of finance, finally, exemplifies a far broader question of the relationship between democracy and *equality*. Experience shows that the concentration of economic power undermines the democratic requisite of dispersed political power. This insight lies at the heart of a crucial polarity proposed by Pope John Paul II. In *Centesimus Annus* (1991) he contrasts a 'free-market economy' with a 'free economy'. Governments have the task of determining the juridical framework within which economic affairs are to be conducted, and thus of safeguarding the prerequisites of a free economy, which presumes a certain equality between the parties, such that one party would not be so powerful as to reduce the other to subservience (§.15).

Where an economic system is made absolute at the expense of other dimensions of human life, 'economic freedom' actually alienates and oppresses the human person (*Ibid*, §. 39).

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<sup>34</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/bank/docs/shadow/green-paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/bank/docs/shadow/green-paper_en.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> High-frequency traders . . . favour tactics such as inputting many quickly cancelled orders, a technique nicknamed "quote stuffing". . . . Under the proposal, orders should also stay in the market for at least 500 milliseconds before they can be cancelled (!) and traders who constantly cancel their orders should be penalised. (<http://www.euractiv.com/euro-finance/eu-lawmaker-turns-screw-ultra-fast-trading-news-511783>)

<sup>36</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/index_en.htm). To many civil society organisations, the CSR model seems necessary but insufficient, since the voluntary framework, lacking any legislative force, leaves companies finally unaccountable. Nevertheless, the business environment is changing. 'Stakeholders' include far more than 'shareholders'. No one can nowadays say, as a century ago, 'What's good for General Motors is good for America'.

<sup>37</sup> 'Markets now rule the world', Wolfgang Streeck, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January, 2012).

## Can democracy evolve to survive?

The second part of my argument has tried to show that in the face of economic globalisation, the scope of the correlative political responsibility needs to be expanded beyond the still predominant paradigm of the nation state. The growing pains are already acute, as is shown by intergovernmental struggles within the EU, and states' protests against 'Brussels'. However political consciousness has already evolved profoundly. Aristotle's *polis* was a small city-state (by definition governed by its citizens, though these citizens were a small and privileged minority of the inhabitants). The Peace of Westphalia, 1648, enshrined the right of the nation-state to be sole sovereign over a geographically limited territory. This dominance helped overcome the evil of vicious conflict between feudal lords, but opened the way to no less destructive conflicts between competing nations, as in the 'total wars' of the twentieth century. If it is true that people's attachment to nations depends on their belief that the nation is the relevant arbiter of their fate or prosperity, the economic and environmental crises show that belief to be less and less true.

Certain federated structures – the UN, the World Trade Organisation, and so on – already seem indispensable to transnational governance, whatever their failings. However these remain principally intergovernmental, as every UN Security Council veto demonstrates. The WTO may pass judgements against the immediate interests of even the most powerful nations: those nations nevertheless use the WTO primarily to pursue their national interests. Thus Pope Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) goes so far as to propose a 'true world political authority' met in part by the necessary reform of the UN (§.67) so that – to quote the unconsciously amusing English translation – 'the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth'.

The EU is a more radical project than the UN. It is unprecedented and unique. In principle, and at its best, the EU enables states to transcend their national identity and interests by exercising political authority together with other states; and by establishing economic arrangements that embody a transnational care for the weaker. Although the EU constantly falls short of its aspirations the aspiration itself, to construct by consent a new kind of political body adequate to the transnational realities of the modern world, neither simply economic nor simply hierarchical, is remarkable.

It thus misses the fundamental point to call the EU 'anti-democratic'. Such a charge derives from two sources: its remoteness from the daily lives of its people and its inherent complexity. Neither suggestion is false, but neither is fully persuasive. It would be odd to say that the EU is more remote from the 500 million Europeans than the 1.2 billion Indians are from the democratic government of their single state. Second, though the complexity is undeniable, for example in its interplay of 'community' and intergovernmental principles,<sup>38</sup> it is not necessarily more impenetrable than the multilevel governance of Belgium (a state of fewer than 11 million) to which I have already referred. The EU's own consciousness of these difficulties underlie such elaborate mechanisms of active participation as the proposed 'Citizens' Initiative'.

The real democratic deficit, I suggest, stems from pragmatic measures pursued under pressure, for example, of the financial crisis, as in case of the demands made on Greece by the 'troika' discussed above. Even this case, however is scarcely new. Famously, in the 1980s and 1990s, the 'Structural Adjustment Funds' provided by the IMF and the World Bank to developing countries came with demands that the recipient countries implement policies of privatisation

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<sup>38</sup> For further details, see Frank Turner, *Thinking Faith: 'Does the European Union need a Constitutional Treaty?'* (January, 2008: [http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20080118\\_6.htm](http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20080118_6.htm)).

and deregulation, without democratic mandate. We notice it and resent this process more when Europeans are victims as well as judges.

The democratic deficit charge is sometimes a mere caricature, however, levelled by national governments clinging to the absolute status they enjoy on the Westphalia model. If we assert the primacy of politics over economics; and if we recognise that economic globalisation escapes the political control of nation-states, then we evidently need a plurality of instruments to embody the transnational exercise of political responsibility.

## Conclusions

We face not only an economic crisis but a crisis of the environment and of climate change. Both these crises require states to share their sovereign powers, and renounce unilateral authority over their populations. That step will rarely command popular assent, since the necessary measures are *ex hypothesi* unpleasant. So one may say that the economic and environmental crisis taken together generate a democratic crisis.

Pierre Rosanvallon has considered this question in his book *La Contre-démocratie : La Politique à L'âge De La Défiance* (2006). We find ourselves in a 'risk society' far less stable than previously, so it is not surprising that there is less confidence than before in the 'classic democratic modalities' of universal suffrage. Rosanvallon speaks of counter-currents in a society that express a kind of generalised distrust in politics.<sup>39</sup> If we say, however, that democracy is not essentially about 'the vote' but about the accountability of political leaders to those they represent, then alternative forms of critique and surveillance are not 'contrary to democracy' but are a 'contra-democracy': a form of necessary vigilance. Strikes and demonstrations (such as the 'riots' in Greece mentioned above) can certainly degenerate into destructive populism with no positive vision. But it is false to suggest that people in general have been anaesthetised into depoliticised passivity by TV and advertising.

Democracy makes demands on everyone, demands not limited to those with a defined institutional role.<sup>40</sup> In the Europe of today this spirit needs to find expression at multiple levels, local, national and supranational: not only on behalf of citizens (since Michael Walzer suggested that the tyranny of citizens over non-citizens is probably the most common form of tyranny in human history)<sup>41</sup> nor only on behalf of Europe, but for the common good, the good without limits of nation or continent.

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<sup>39</sup> The British political journalist Jeremy Paxman, well-known for his confrontational TV interviewing of politicians, said (only half-jokingly) that always had an unspoken question at the back of his mind, that structured the interview: 'Why is this bastard lying to me?' He speaks for the times.

<sup>40</sup> The New Science of Politics (Chicago, 1952).

<sup>41</sup> Spheres of Justice, p.62.



## The rocky road towards democracy in Latin America

Alejandro Angulo Novoa, SJ

*The author considers inequality – rooted in culture and often going beyond that of political organisation – to be the principal source of the problems of governance in Latin America. The article focuses on an analysis of ethics. The author examines ‘de facto’ power groups which dominate the society and lead to social, economic and political inequality. Finally, he suggests that spiritual renewal and the defence of the weakest are ways in which the Society can respond to these challenges.*

Democracy in Latin America – or *Our Democracy in Latin America*, as the title of the report by the Organisation of American States (OAS), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2011<sup>42</sup> reads – faces three major challenges: (1) political participation to resolve the crisis of representation, (2) the organisation of the state as a republic with independent branches of government with mutual oversight and mechanisms for accountability, and (3) the weakness of the state<sup>43</sup>. This is a technical view of the problem. In reality the roots of our ‘ungovernability’ can be found in the cultural inequality, inherited from European colonisation, and is about much more than political organisation. This inequality not only undermines the republican organisation of the 18 Latin American states, it ensures that poverty affects the majority of all their populations, making a mockery of the very term democracy. Hungry peoples do not have political power. The report recognises inequality, based on past injustice, but focuses more on studying the political consequences than discovering the cultural, therefore ethical, causes of the phenomenon<sup>44</sup>. Consequently its recommendations focus on the formal mechanisms necessary to resolve the inherent problems to these three great challenges. These mechanisms are necessary and, for the most part have been implemented in the sub-continent. But they work poorly or simply do not work.



On the contrary, our objective prioritises the analysis of the ethical crisis through reflection on some pedagogical approaches to deal with this crisis. This approach is based on the guiding

<sup>42</sup>Our Democracy / United Nations Development Programme, Secretary General of the Organisation of American States. — Mexico : Fondo de Cultura Económica, UNDP, OAS 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p. 5

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p.15

principles established by the Society of Jesus for its apostolate: (1) the promotion of justice in the service of faith and (2) the preferential option for the poorest of the poor.

To reach our objective, first of all, we will examine the analysis undertaken by these international entities in order to subsequently draw conclusions regarding our apostolate.

### **Truncated citizenship**

In the technical vision put forward by the OAS, the “difficulties in expanding the rights of citizenship and obstacles created by concentrations of political power” are presented as challenges, after having “left military authoritarianism behind”<sup>45</sup>. This vision seems somewhat blurred as it ignores the omnipresent power of the military that is but one of the “*de facto* powers” alluded to throughout the document. The fact of having overcome the crudest forms of military dictatorships does not mean militarism has been defeated. In Latin America, and maybe one could say throughout the Americas, militaries continue being states within states. Many of the electoral promises of President Obama have not been respected because the Pentagon would not allow them, as you well know with regard to Guantanamo.

This simple recourse to violence, either through military intervention in the maintenance of public order, or the more ordinary “police brutality”, is an essential part of the nature of the capitalist world. However, it is particularly powerful in the Americas, from Bering Strait to the Patagonia, where it assumes dimensions out of all proportions: to the extent that the report cynically asks the question “...how much insecurity, how much lawlessness, how much poverty, and how much inequality can a democracy withstand?”<sup>46</sup> But it does not ask how many soldiers a democracy with *carte blanche* to accumulate financial capital requires.

Considering human rights violations and their causes as an evitable part of reality, described as a “truncated democracy”, is what has allowed the moral conscience of Latin American peoples’ to deteriorate and reach the alarming state of indifference, for example, towards the victims of the so-called “armed social conflict” in Colombia. This is also insinuated by the real tragedies of indigenous peoples and blacks, in other countries where these groups form ethnic minorities. One could generally consider this social callousness as the indifference of the privileged towards the poor majority. Although the roots of this can be found in the period of colonisation, today this classism, with strong tints of racism, is alive and well.

Nevertheless, focusing on citizenship and the concentration of power, the OAE report touches the nerve of the issue. Citizenship in much of Latin America only exists on paper. The concept of citizenship is a juridical fiction which depends entirely on the rule of law. But the rule of law is the Achilles Heel of Latin American democracies. The rule of law cannot be considered a social reality in countries plagued by *de facto* powers; this is a contradiction in terms. In these circumstances, the construction of the kingdom of God takes on a very precise meaning of urgent importance.

The first *de facto* power is that of presidents who ‘legislate’. The report shows how, among the countries for which data is available on the use of extraordinary legislative powers by the respective presidents between 1980 and 2007, Ecuador and Venezuela resorted to the use of extraordinary legislative powers the most, on eight occasions, followed by Argentina and Brazil on seven occasions and Colombia on five occasions. This illustrates the degree to which power is concentrated in the region, and the inadequacy in these countries of the systems of checks and balances of this power, which should constitute basis of democracy.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.35

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.35

Likewise, a glimpse at the reforms of the respective constitutions confirms that this process is not a caricature, since every reform, in the current circumstances characterised by injustice and inequality, brings a cloud of uncertainty over charter of citizens' rights. The OAS report, using an index of 0 to 3 as indicators of basic civil rights in the below table, exemplifies the significant difference between Latin America and Western Europe:

Year 2000	Freedom of expression	Freedom of association	Workers' rights	Women's Economic Rights	Women's Social Rights
Latin America	1.39	1.67	0.72	1.33	1,39
Western Europe.	1.71	1.81	1.77	2.15	2,62

This first de facto power creates disorder within the legal system. In contrast, the remaining de facto powers operate on the margins, or outside, the law. From an ethical perspective, there is no doubt that the abuses of the powerful are not only immoral, but also illicit. Yet, the powerful consider their actions legal, since in violating the principles of justice and equity, they come close to their own self-constructed vaguely defined limit of legality, supported by their ill-gotten privileges.

The second de facto power – not put in first position so as not alter the source of the information – are the powerful economic groups, businessmen and the financial sector. A survey, undertaken in 2004 by the United Nations Development Programme, reported that 79% of those interviewed agreed that these groups were the ones which held the most power. The third de facto power is the media, indicated by 65% of those interviewed. If one takes into account that most interviewees are taken from the higher strata of society and senior managers, one understands that the distinction made between businessmen and the media in reality is fictitious. But it forms part of the democratic myth of plutocracies. The media in Latin America, as in the rest of the world, are tools of the owners of capital. The church was indicated in third place in the survey, by 48% of those interviewed. If one considers the enormous power held by Christian churches and the general prevalence of the Catholic Church, one could interrogate oneself as to the practical meaning of the “preferential option for the poor” littered throughout the recent documents of the Church. In sixth place, 26% of respondents of the survey identified illegal groups in the list of the most powerful: mafias, drug-traffickers, guerrillas, paramilitary groups. And in last position came civil society organisations identified by 12.8% of respondents. It is worth noting the position of civil society groups in order to understand democracy in Latin American. But it is more revealing that the perception of the power of illegal groups was shared by more than a quarter of interviewees, given that as a de facto power it holds huge sway, above all, if one takes into account that the power of drug traffickers is clandestinely connected to the power of capital, with which it configures an obscure, but terribly real and efficient, alliance.

This contradictory concentration of power in officialdom and its corresponding dispersion among de facto power groups have generated endemic legal, economic and social poverty in Latin American democracies. The OAS report, after a controversial debate, concludes that Latin American states have been taking back responsibility and power and building their institutional capacities, but have also taken on “inappropriate roles (for example, producing goods and services) <sup>47</sup>.” Here, their liberal faith is professed and the debate on more or less state – as the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid p. 138

report seeks to depict the way forward as a smaller, but more efficient, state – is presented with the aim of not betraying faith in capitalism. Moreover, this is combined with its faith in the so-called free market's ability to resolve the problems of meeting basic needs, in which the report professes erroneously that all goods and services can be distributed efficiently by the market. However, immediately afterwards, it rightly admits that failures in the privatised markets for social services end up causing a lot more segmentation of systems, and that the agents of these systems tend to specialise in the most affluent segments of the society, as has happened with health, education provision etc.

This contradiction is an essential element of the conception of liberal capitalists, forming part of the privileged classes in our countries, who believe that the accumulation of wealth requires the existence of a poor, exploitable, population. The following data is proof of this. The cosmetic distortion of the reality of poverty is an indicator that humanising values are short supply and that the few who possess them capitulate in the face of the greed and arrogance of power.

### **Truncated society**

A significant indicator of inequality, at the basis of social organisation, is the increasingly informal nature of employment, or more precisely, the precariousness of the same. It is a central issue of concern, as dignified employment is one of the sources of security of the population and, therefore, of the humanisation of society. In many places, state policies have been adapted so as to facilitate recruitment without having to pay social contributions or offer employment protection. We refer to this as the growing precariousness of the labour market; the emblematic actors of which are workers cooperatives. This is the new name for the management of slavery: the creation of legal agencies, hostile to all forms of decent employment, whose activities frequently include anti-trade union persecution. Those responsible for this persecution do not hesitate in resorting to the murder of trade unionists.

To get an idea of the situation from the perspective of the United Nations, one may also use the human development index based on a combination of indicators including life expectancy at birth as a measure of good health, years of schooling as a measure of education, and income per capita as a measure of spending capacity. In these indicators, which we could loosely refer to as 'standard of living', we see that Argentina and Chile have a "very high" level of human development; Uruguay, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia have a "high" level; the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Paraguay, Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala have a "medium" level; and Haiti has a "low" level of human development. But one must look to see what these levels mean in reality.

Of the 187 countries examined in the report, Latin American countries as a whole can be found between the 44<sup>th</sup> position, occupied by Chile, and 158<sup>th</sup> occupied by Haiti; in other words there are 43 countries with a higher level of human development than Chile and 29 countries positioned after Haiti.

In terms of education, a very high level of human development refers to between 12.6 and 7.3 years of schooling, a high level refers to between 12.1 and 5.5 years of schooling, a medium level to between 10.7 and 2.3, and a low level refers to between 7.2 and 1.5 years of schooling. The Latin American average is 6.23 years of schooling, not ideal if one thinks that some societies, such as in the United States, achieve twice this average rate with 12.4 years of schooling.

In terms of means of subsistence, in Latin America there are approximately 134 million people who live with less than four dollars a day and 77 million surviving on less than two dollars a day. One indication of this deprivation is the rate of child mortality, 19 deaths per 1,000 live



births in the continent, 32 in the Caribbean, 18 in South America, 17 in Central America. Life expectancy at birth oscillates between 76 years of age in Central America, 74 in South America and 72 in the Caribbean. It is 67 years of age in Bolivia and 62 in Haiti. The percentage of the population with access to drinking water is 97% in cities and 80 in rural areas.

According to the United Nations, the index, with all its limitations, demonstrates that Latin America is in an intermediary stage of human development. The same can be said of democracy as conventionally measured. This has led to a shift in the focus of international aid back towards Africa where the indices of human development are much lower. However, as the situation of human rights demonstrates, this intermediate level has a very high social cost.

International aid is another one of the eloquent expressions with much ado about nothing. The reality is international aid includes all sorts of interventions from humanitarian aid to the contradictory strengthening of the armies of various nations. There is no talk of international arms trafficking in these high level arenas.

These societies, like those we have seen, are politically weak due to inequality, and vulnerable due to poverty, making them instable at all levels of existence; "tied foreign aid" has produced regrettable effects not only in the political and economic arenas, but above all in the field of ethics which has undermined the autonomy of the organisations which could have developed their creativity if they had not subjected to the cronyism of the short-term and capricious financiers.

At this point, our reflection needs to scrupulously examine the way both governmental and private aid agreements have been established, monitored and terminated. We have to be lucid in distinguishing between the benefits and losses to our social apostolate of accepting aid when this assistance comes with conditions.

In short, human dignity – as understood within the order of the constitutional state – is not compatible with social, economic and political inequality. Therefore, we examine, albeit summarily, the state of human rights among us.

### **Truncated rights**

The 2011 report by Amnesty International is eloquent. The defence of human rights continues to be a dangerous task in a large part of the region. For example, activists in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Venezuela are targets of murders, threats, kidnappings, arbitrary judicial actions. There are some protection mechanisms in Colombia and Brazil, but their effectiveness, like in Mexico, are far less than satisfactory.

Although native Indians throughout the Americas have vigorously organised themselves, human rights violations continue and impunity is much higher in these cases as opposed to those of the non-indigenous population. The proliferation of the agro-industry, the booming mining industry, mega-projects, such as dams and motorways, put the livelihoods of small campesinos at risk, but above all the indigenous and afro populations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru. Entire populations are subjected to threats, harassment, forced evictions, displacement and murders.

In recent years, there have been numerous demonstrations against government policies in relation to all the social and environmental needs of the population: access to land, education, and all other public services. In 2011, protests in Ecuador resumed with threatening vigour.



In Mexico, Central America, Brazil and the Caribbean human rights violations take place in the poor areas of cities, committed by criminals and the police forces. In Colombia the inhabitants of a large number of rural areas suffer the worst abuses at the hands of guerrillas, drug traffickers and the military, aggravated by the fact that the security forces systematically support paramilitary groups. This strategy highlights the level of corruption which not only plagues the security forces, but extends throughout the social and political panorama.

According to Amnesty International researchers, governments refuse to take measures to control this corruption and are bent on using arms against this evil. From our point of view, this evil cannot be cured by the use of more violence. The concrete outcome of this strategy has been the proliferation of human rights violations, among which extrajudicial executions disguised as "deaths in combat" stand out as being doubly perverse. In the case of Colombia, those responsible for these actions have frequently been rewarded with promotions and compensation within the ranks. Neither Mexico, nor Brazil, nor Colombia has managed to control their security forces, despite efforts in this direction. Impunity in general, even more so in the case of the military, has ensured that the defence of human rights – in addition to the aforementioned risks – has become a suspicious activity in the eyes of societies deceived by the mass media and that human rights defenders are considered public enemies and in the worst cases white-collar terrorists.

Into this bleak picture of ignorance and contempt for human rights, women and children bear the brunt. Yet there is no clear understanding either of the dimension or the effect of the violence against babies, small children, or women.

This violence goes from sexual and gender-based violence to anti-female violence as a tool of war.

### **The Social Apostolate**

The response of the Society of Jesus to these challenges facing our peoples has been multiple and in many cases heroic, befitting the complexity of the problems identified. The difficulties have been analysed from all angles and the corresponding action taken, based on the particularities of each country, has often caused serious repercussions for those involved, including on many occasions their martyrdom.

This brings us to an initial conclusion: the blanket defence of human dignity is a priority, as well as being the original hallmark of the Jesuits. We are the heirs of the period known as humanism. In contrast, our societies find it difficult to escape from materialism which objectifies human beings; the economic and political hegemonies in the world today tend towards this soulless mechanisation that robotizes men and women and makes them slaves to their own machines. The response, without a doubt, is spiritualisation. A few years ago Ricardo Antoncich SJ exhorted us to cultivate liberation spirituality. Our original charism is ideal in this area; it is necessary to drag the world towards contemplation to attain love. This, of course, means the personal and social purification that Fr Ignatius described in his masterpiece.

The second conclusion is that this defence of humanism, understood as loving care of human dignity, has a priority: the defence of the weakest. We have already seen how Latin America is plagued by huge inequality, the scandalous violations of the human rights of so many groups, and the almost total impunity from prosecution for those responsible. Parodying a former president of Colombia, who referring to corruption said "we have to reduce inequality to its just proportions". It seems this is the real meaning of the preference for the poor. It is not enough to satisfy a basic need in a particular moment. This is humanitarianism, which is insufficient. We

need to begin by building a system which provides for the basic needs of the poor. Without this form of comprehensive humanism, there can be no such thing as a dignified life.

Both these challenges require solutions that run contrary to the dominate culture of the media and homogenising nature of consumerism. Both these factors combined obscure and impoverish the conscience of individuals with false illusions of grandeur. This makes internalisation – the basis of profound spirituality – more difficult to achieve, which in turn is the only way to prevent or cure this superficial extroversion. We have to connect with the Spirit, not with the Internet.

Moreover, without a moral awaking, it is useless to hope that we will feel any responsibility towards others, particularly towards the neediest. The alienation that keeps us connected to the world makes us ignore and neglect those close by, when we deny them a voice and a vote in our society. Or worse still, when we consider that they are superfluous populations and therefore disposable, like a significant part of the privileged have unconsciously thought since the time of Malthus. We cannot consider ourselves oblivious to this egoistic temptation that ignores solidarity and imprisons us inside our own small world. The clamour of the poor in Latin America is the revelation of Christ for us. And awaiting this clamour and responding with loving care is the path that brings us towards God.

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