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**What contribution can Christians
make to globalisation ?**

Introduction

The theme on which I will concentrate will link an essential aspect of the present-day economy, globalisation, with the Christian vision of what constitutes a human society. In basing my discourse on the recent experience of the « Assises chrétiennes de la mondialisation »¹, I would like to take the fruitful path of research opened up by the tradition of Christian social teaching, in presenting a perspective of what the contribution of Christians could be today.

I shall first of all refer back to the innovation which the Encyclical *Rerum novarum*, represented in its time and the

¹ « Dialogues pour une terre habitable », official report of the Assises chrétiennes de la mondialisation, Bayard Press, September 2006.

fecundity which it generated subsequently for economic and social life². I would therefore like to suggest that today's « new things », which have taken practical form through economic globalisation, call for a renewed expression of the Christian vision on the social question.

Then, using the established facts of this Christian vision, assembled in the Compendium but also in more recent texts published by the Bishops' Commissions in Europe, I will endeavour to outline the visions and questions which could be the subject of the discernment and the commitment of Christians.

Finally, I will deal with the difficult question of dialogue on this discernment. This will provide the opportunity to look at the cultural aspect of globalisation and the difficulty of such a dialogue which is sometimes a great source of conflict between Christian anthropology and the utilitarian positions that are expressed on the globalisation platform which has become the platform of Human Rights.

1 Fecundity and topicality of the Christian vision of the economic and social world

When it was published, the Encyclical *Rerum novarum* caused surprise amongst the leaders of European economic and industrial circles, who, at that time, were mainly Catholic. It showed, in fact, an image of industrialisation which revealed its human and social face, the costs which it generated and the sufferings and injustices which it could cause, in the euphoria of an excessive confidence about progress and according to a majority conception of ownership as a right which was not combined with duties. With astonishing audacity, including in

² « *Rerum novarum* », Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, 1891.

the progressive circles of the day and age, the Encyclical called for the forming of intermediary bodies, particularly of workers' trades unions that would be independent of the employers' world. At the same time, it already distanced itself from Marxist economic visions sealing human destiny in production mechanisms alone.

Out of this was born a humanistic and balanced concept of the relationship between freedom, the creativity of the company and the rules which must enshrine it so that man's dignity is accomplished in work. Over the last century, this vision has deepened. Its practical scope was considerable even in the particular context of French society, which was, however, one of the most marked in Europe by the principle of the separation of political and religious powers. Some of us remember, in this respect, the retrospective given by Martine Aubry, former French Minister of Labour, and who could hardly be suspected of kindness towards the Christian faith, on the platform of the *Semaines sociales de France* (French Social Weeks) during the celebration of their hundredth anniversary in September 2004³. I quote Martine Aubry:

« Participating in the drafting of the social doctrine of the Church and involved in political debates, the Social Weeks have led Christians to act and to make things change. As precursors, they proposed, often well before 1914, reforms that sometimes took a long time to be implemented, such as unemployment insurance, universal health insurances, a just living wage, taxes in keeping with income and the reduction of working hours ».

³ « Europe, a society to be invented », 26-27 September 2004, Lille Grand Palais

And Martine Aubry went on to mention, for the North Region of France, « the breakthroughs of which these militants of Christian social doctrine were the inventors or the inspirers, such as the creation of a family supplement in 1919, the first council housing estates on the initiative of Father Lemire at the beginning of the 20th century, and again, the first workers' training school, on the initiative of Father Six in 1919, the mutual benefit societies, production cooperatives and in 1929, the first social insurance systems, precursors of the Social Security System ».

When we place ourselves in the circumstances which led to the visionary Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, we are tempted to think that our economic situation today is profoundly different and calls for an updating which, without a doubt, transcends the anniversary celebrated by *Centesimus Annus*. The need for this updating is justified in two ways:

- First of all, there has been an upheaval in the economic world, not only over the past 100 years, but even over the last fifteen years. A hundred years ago, the new economic event was the progress of industrialisation and mechanisation bringing with them an upheaval of rural societies. Today, and particularly over the past fifteen years with the end of ideological and political rivalry between East and West, the new event is composed by the universalisation of economic globalisation, given the voluntary enrolment in its wake of the very large emerging nations, China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa, which were first of all recruited by colonisation, then escaped from this in the second part of the 20th century. To these emerging nations, we can today add Russia which is currently negotiating its entry into the World Trade Organisation: who would have thought this possible, only 15 years

ago? The *Compendium*, amongst the « Res novae in economics », clearly mentions « the opportunities and the risks of globalisation », « the international financial system », and the « role of the international community in the age of the global economy », without, however - if I can be allowed to make a personal observation - attaching fundamental importance to them. Published in 1991, the Encyclical *Centesimus annus* could not have been fully aware of the developments still to come from globalisation.

- The other justification for an updating of Christian social teaching on economic globalisation comes from the feeling of powerlessness which accompanies its developments. Whereas each and every one, particularly in our country, agrees to recognise the decisive character of economic globalisation by sometimes denouncing its gravely perverse effects and sometimes urging the authorities to adapt our economic and social structures, very few see it as a humanisation and cooperation project. Here, we are in the field of litanies. Whoever ventures to express a qualified opinion on globalisation, relocations, immigration and its management is very rapidly suspected of betraying his camp or of attacking another camp. The result, it should be said, is a rather generalised avowal of incompetence or indifference. In the circles of business executives, it takes the form of an often unqualified assent to the free play of the market forces which would seem to be supported by the apparent success of the American economy. Amongst a large number of « alter globalists », it is expressed, and this, in my opinion, is the same thing, by a condemnation without appeal and without a well-thought-out and well-founded alternative, of the few international institutions

responsible for overseeing, in other words, for humanising, globalisation.

It is not a question of contrasting indifferent pragmatism and litanies of accusations. They find their source in a real difficulty where I see the need for a renewed Christian contribution. It concerns these *nubs of political and social contradiction* which objectively block the progress of the humanisation of globalisation and which, in a certain way, justify the popular feeling that « politics surrender to economic forces ». I have borrowed this analysis from the economist Jean-Noël Giraud, to my knowledge a non-Christian and a specialist on Energy, when he addressed the National Congress of the Christian Movement of Business Executives in March 2001. According to Jean-Noël Giraud:

- a) First of all, the mechanisms of the globalised financial markets penalise those practitioners who are business executives or governmental leaders when they recommend regulatory reforms.
- b) The division between winners and losers of the liberalisation of trade within « rich » or « poor », countries numbs the capacities of proposal or initiative, particularly in a democracy.
- c) Finally globalisation itself, in testing national identities as a source of cohesion and integration, stimulates a nationalistic sense of belonging and mobilises the reflexes of sovereignty as obstacles to the development of joint international rules.

Hence the surprising conclusion of Jean-Noël Giraud: « I can only see the Churches, with their international stature, as being able to raise their voices loud enough and in a sufficiently

relevant way, to show the path to a better collective regulation to humanise globalisation »⁴.

2 A Christian inspiration to humanise globalisation

Can we meet this challenge? Can we, to make things simple, establish on the basis of the principles and wisdom accumulated by Christian social doctrine a « vision » that is both useful and the inspirer of a reform of globalisation which can be proposed not only to Christians, but to all the practitioners that make up the embryo of an international community.

I feel that this can be done. The foundation remains the one laid by *Rerum Novarum* and confirmed by the major declarations of Vatican II, which already stated the essentials but probably in a far too general way: the creativity of the company, free initiative and free exchanges are irreplaceable sources for human development. But they must be ordered by rules, in respecting values or fundamental criteria and showing subjectivity, that is, the quality and personal dignity of every worker, whether he or she is salaried or not and involved by his or her activity in this situation of economic interdependence. Such rules call for the setting up of a « Universal World Authority »⁵.

Yet, even if we have an embryo of international principles or rules, subject to the vagaries of national ratification, in the field

⁴ « A human economy is possible », National Congress of the MCC, January 2001.

⁵ The reference to a world authority with a universal sphere of competence appears for the first time under the pen of John XXIII in the Encyclical « *Pacem in terris* », 1963. The *Compendium* alludes to this in paragraph 371.i

of the environment and development, thanks to the loose conglomeration of the United Nations, and in the field of work, through the ILO Decent Work Agenda, we are still a very long way from a world Authority, even a partial one, to ensure its general adoption and, what is even more important, its effective implementation. Here, we are clearly at the heart of the problem.

The right diagnosis was made, in my opinion, in a recent text, which almost passed unnoticed, of the Bishops' Commission for Justice and Peace France in 2004. What did the Commission say? Taking into consideration this historically new situation which would like the vast majority of sovereign States to wish to be incorporated into the system of international exchanges, there are quite clearly *two ways* of envisaging the international order.

The vision which prevails today is the one which is based on multi-polarity. A certain number of great political and economic powers that are called poles consider that they can do without world rules recognised by all and that they could make their interests prevail through the system of influence which surrounds them and on the basis of a world or regional power struggle. It is, in fact, the « Babel-based » version of the international order⁶.

In a certain way, the recent failure of the Doha negotiations clearly illustrates the predominance of multipolarity. This failure really shows a disregard for « the preferential option for the poor », a concept which does not only apply to the field of

⁶ In French terminology, we speak of *international regulation*. I prefer the idea of multilateralism which does not simply cover rules, but also legitimate institutions which are able not only to draft and promote common rules, but also to see that they are implemented.

the development, but also to that of exchanges and trade: compared to the preceding negotiations of the GATT Rounds, the Doha Development Round, launched in the year 2000, was the one which, since the origin of the GATT negotiations, went further in tariff concessions and effective import tax reductions agreed by industrialised countries in favour of exports from poor countries. This failure invites us to work with all our might for another perspective, that of multi-laterality which ensures that the world order is based on supranational rules compelling recognition by all and whose legitimacy does not stem from force but from the principle of proportionality which respects national specificities. Multilateralism is the « Pentecost » version of the world order.

The fact that the multilateral alternative is only faltering at world level and is only really embodied in the European institutions - and I clearly say so this evening - should suffice to alert the Christian conscience. It also opens up a vast project for the development of Christian social thought, in conjunction, in the very spirit of Vatican II, with all the research carried out by international civil society, with which, of course, Christian inspiration must not be confused. Here are some examples of these projects which have, as yet, been scarcely explored. I have selected them because they illustrate those nubs of economic and social contradictions indicated by Jean Noël Giraud and which would make a summary application of major moral principles unwise. For example:

- What right do we have to stop emerging countries from consuming just as much energy as industrialised countries have had the possibility to consume?
- How can we prevent certain social categories in industrialised countries (farmers, employees from sectors which, for the most part, have an under-

- qualified labour force) from having to pay the price for the opening up of international trade to developing countries, even if this is indispensable?
- Who will guarantee a just payment of investments in the field of research and development when the countries that will benefit the most, particularly in terms of healthcare, are not solvent?
 - How can standards of quality and respect for workers' rights be promoted in countries which do not know the rule of law nor social partners and where, by its nature, a large part of the work is informal?
 - What limitations do the dynamism and social cohesion of the company impose on the rights of its shareholders? What separation of powers is necessary to prevent abuse?

In these fields, the research of universities, National Bishops' Conferences and the Christian lay world is not inactive. I will quote, for example, the reflections published in 2005 by the Belgian Commission for Justice and Peace which is revitalising the applications of solidarity in the completely renewed context of North-South and South-South relationships as well as the highly pioneering work of the Social Committee of the Bishops of France, devoted last year to « *Benchmarks for a globalised economy* », undoubtedly one of the most well-informed reflections today on the financierised economy and the opportunities and failures which it holds. It is not a case of under-estimating the wealth of this research but to recognise that it lacks visibility and appears fragmented with regard to the expectations caused by globalisation.

3 Globalisation and pluralism

Perhaps this splitting up and this fragmentation of the contribution of Christians to the humanisation of globalisation stem from the dichotomy that we have allowed to be established between the religious or theological point of view and the economic and social point of view. I must therefore now approach the specifically cultural or anthropological dimension of a Christian contribution. This cannot, in fact, be reduced to a contribution of principles and wisdom aimed at the establishment of economic structures which generate justice, even if justice and social cohesion are the necessary conditions of humanisation in the Christian sense of the word. The Christian contribution also aims at revealing the meaning which is the foundation of such an aspiration and which cements the individual moral guidelines and the right structures. How can what gives a meaning to life, taken in such a global vision of persons and their communities, be shared?

It is here that economic globalisation, because of the outstanding assent that it encounters, confronts us with two concepts of the approach to truth: the Babelian-based concept adapts to the supremacy of one ideology over the others; it is not far from requesting a single language, a single moral and religious corpus and a one-to-one a relationship between the religious and the political aspect, whilst the Pentecost vision will relinquish such a supremacy to allow an area of dialogue and debate to be opened, through a pluralistic definition, whose main issue will be the pragmatic construction of a universal, but not absolute, base of common rights and principles. Transcending religious and philosophical specificities, this base is essential for founding a free acceptance of multilateralism.

This direct relationship between the development of a democratic international order and the emergence of a base of common values emerged recently once again, with the attempt, aborted for the time being, to establish a European Constitutional Treaty. This same relationship caused Pascal Lamy, Director General of the World Trade Organisation, to say recently that the main contribution of the Churches, as « experts in humanity », was to help with the establishment of this common base. This also invites the Church to show great reserve, as if there must be a common base, it can neither reflect a dominant influence, nor express the theological depth of the specific identity of each Church.

How can this dilemma between pluralism and specificity be overcome; how is it possible to give it a meaning, without affirming a superiority of some kind? I will say, first of all, how, as a Christian Conference on Globalisation, we have tried to overcome this dilemma. We have chosen a synodal approach, essentially founded on a mutual receptiveness to the perceptions and the experiences that each and every one carries within him or herself, even if it means abandoning a single discourse. Above all, we have admitted that the meaning to which we wished to testify could already be seen outside the Churches, that is, everywhere where men and women, companies and trades unionists, NGOs and persons responsible for public life, or ordinary citizens, anticipate through innovating behaviours these rules still in the making. In other words, we have tried to show the fruits of freedom when it is animated by the meaning that we are calling for.

Have we, by doing this, underestimated the dangers of a dilution of the Christian identity and its theological roots? A few moments ago, I mentioned the perspective of a world multilateral order, attached to the image of Pentecost, this task

of forming a common conscience towards which civil society, governments, representatives of companies and professionals are working. The construction of this is being carried out too slowly in the melting-pots of the international institutions, at the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank, of course, but also within the United Nations, as at the Council of Europe or the European Parliament.

The Catholic hierarchy is showing concern, and I share this concern, at seeing the extent to which the debates in these institutions sometimes give rise to an antireligious and particularly anti-Christian combat, whose challenge consists in the meaning to be given to human rights. In a more acute way than on a strictly national level, these bodies are seeing the development of a humanistic argumentation, which, in the name of freedom, calls for a multiplication of rights based on the sole criterion of utility, with the danger of undermining the sense of responsibility. In the name of democracy, this argumentation asserts equality in all fields, even if this means denying the essential qualities of otherness and opening the way to abandoning the weakest. In the face of such attacks which often stem from a militant atheism, relativistic by construction, the Christian conscience cannot just pride itself on its religious basis. It must indicate with confidence the practical fruits of the principles of responsibility and solidarity with which it is nourished, principles which, I would once more like to stress, make it possible to understand the longevity and the effectiveness of the European institutions.

We are living in a world of a pluralistic nature, a pluralism which is good news in itself as a condition for the development of international institutions founded on right and not on constraint. In this new context, the testimony of values and principles progress through the argument of authority, but through the attachment to the practical transformations which

are indispensable for justice. It results from this that if we fully desire to contribute, like Christians, to a really human globalisation, we must not consider as secondary the unfailing and unfaltering construction of a more just multilateral economic, environmental and social order. We must show, on the contrary, the coherence between this target and the application of the principles of responsibility, solidarity and dignity of the poor which, for us, give a meaning to freedom.

This is no doubt a subject which would merit an Encyclical, devoted to the humanisation of globalisation.