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PRESENT AND FUTURE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

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Much has been said on the impacts of the crisis on the fundamentals of the economy and its social consequences, because of the artificial and unequal character of growth and its proven vulnerability, affecting both developed and developing countries. However, the present situation, compared with other financial crises, in particular that of the 1930s, is characterized by a convergence of various crises of food, energy, climate with combined social consequences on employment, poverty and migrations.

Such a coincidence is not accidental. There is a basic historical logic linking all of them. The financial crisis, recurrent in the prevailing economic system as a rectifying mechanism, has been aggravated by the uncontrolled global development of financial capital, enabling a high and rapid rate of profit. The food crisis has been accentuated conjuncturally by speculative investments and structurally by the fact that agriculture has become a new frontier for capital accumulation, with the development of monoculture. The energy crisis has been linked with the increase of petroleum prices, partly for speculative reasons, while the necessary investment for a structural solution for a change in the energy cycle (from fossil to other sources) has been seriously hindered by the huge injection of money to save the financial system. Climatic changes have been accelerated by an irrational use of natural resources, in particular fossil energy, due to the model of growth of the post Second World War period. This has been also at the origin of increasing inequalities, combining spectacular growth for about 20 per cent of the world population and inhuman poverty for more than one billion people on the planet.

In the face of such effects, which are related to a common logic of increasing rates of profit and ignorance of ecological and social externalities, two main questions can be raised: to regulate for how long, and to repair the financial and monetary system for what ?

The first question should be seen in light of the great crisis at the end of the 1920s. Then, also, the solution was to draw up a new set of rules to regulate the market, recognizing that its autoregulation was purely illusory. This was the New Deal and its various applications. But when the economic system began to recover (thanks also to the reconstruction after a world war), pressure to deregulate increased to the point of establishing what has been named “the Washington Consensus”, i.e. the neoliberal era of the capitalism. Will the same logic prevail, as seems to be the case in many declarations ? If this is so, in a few years we shall be faced with the same consequences again. A first logic for the short and middle term is thus to propose permanent regulations and not just temporary cures.

The second question is much more serious. Efficient measures are proposed to allow the financial and monetary system to function again on a sound basis, in order to restore growth, development and prosperity. But what does this mean ? To begin again, as before, with the same logic that brought about the present situation ?

Shall humankind continue to exploit natural resources that destroy the ecological system? Will the financial institutions promoting the automobile industry (even a little greener) help to extend monocultures, destroying biodiversity, soils and water, especially for agrofuel? The Copenhagen Climate Conference, an initiative of the United Nations, if it is to be effective, will have to propose very strong measures to save the planet – in direct contradiction with some powerful economic interests, that are already lobbying to mitigate the resolutions.

Will the restoration of the financial system be based once again on a logic of unequal growth, perhaps with large aid programmes for poor sections of the world population, but without challenging the main philosophy of the world economic organization? Will it serve to finance wars for the control of scarce natural resources and energy supplies ? In other words will it mean ‘business as usual’?

It has been repeatedly affirmed that the Objectives of the Millenium will be affected by the crisis, but such Objectives are already in themselves an admission of failure. If they were to be achieved, in spite of the unprecedented riches of the world some half a billion people will still suffer from hunger and poverty in 2015. A telling illustration of this is that Africa is supposed to be receiving international aid for an amount smaller than that of the intervention of the US Government to save General Motors.

Hence the necessity of raising the question of paradigms. We not only need regulations, but alternatives. We need another definition of growth, of development, of prosperity, of civilization. This affects the fundamental aspects of human life in the planet: relationships with nature, the production of goods and services for life, socio-political organization and the meaning of life and ethics.

It is around these four themes that new paradigms could be developed for the Common Good of Humankind. First a renewable and responsible way of using natural resources, respecting nature, not exploiting it as a commodity, because it is the source of life. Second, priority given to use value over exchange value, the economy being the human activity to produce the basis of the physical, cultural and spiritual life of all human beings in the world. Third, generalized democracy in all institutions and human relations, including gender, and finally multiculturalism, to ensure the participation of all cultures, knowledge, philosophies and religions in defining the meaning and ethics of human life in the planet.

It may appear utopian, but all those principles have direct and concrete applications, which already exist in many parts of the world. They are experimented locally by social

movements, translated into political forms by governments, theoretically systematized by intellectuals. One day the United Nations could proclaim a Universal Declaration of Humankind's Common Good, similar to the one on Human Rights.

Such a perspective is the kind of utopia the world now needs to motivate collective action, to encourage social commitments, to realize political projects. There are many signs in the world of a collective vitality, such as the appeal of the social movements to the African Heads of State, the proposed charter of peasants' rights and other such initiatives, fruit sometimes of very tough struggles for justice. They are the sources of hope for the future of humanity.