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Part I – The Need for a New Start

Introduction – Under a spell

In 1975 E F Schumacher was commenting on the naive optimism of those who believed that Britain would emerge from the economic crisis it had been experiencing and return to normal, by means of wage restraints and cuts in government spending. He was pointing out that the economic thinking behind that idea of *normal* would only worsen the already emerging “crisis of resources, the ecological crisis and the social crisis”. Assumptions about what constitutes *normal* were the problem, and they were not being addressed. This is how he put it:

...it is the end of an era. A year ago, Barbara Ward put it into very simple words: “The party is over”.

What sort of a party was it? We allowed ourselves to be entertained by three illusions:

- First, there was the illusion of an inexhaustible supply of cheap fuels and raw materials.
- Second, there was the illusion of an almost equally inexhaustible supply of workers willing to do boring repetitive, soul-destroying work for very modest rewards.
- Third, there was the illusion that science and technology would soon make everybody so rich that no problems remained except what on earth to do with all our leisure and wealth.

I think you will agree with me when I say: these illusionary entertainers, which made the party what it was, all three of them, have left, have completely vanished: they had cast a spell over us, had taken us on a trip. Every day now it seems more incredible that we were taken in by them and believed what they told us. We are waking up and see a great deal of debris around us – but the spell is still there, in a subtle kind of way: most of what we say and do is still based on the implicit assumption that the three entertainers will soon return and the party will be resumed.

In fact, we all know that the three great entertainers will not return; that the party is over. Whose party was it anyhow? That of a small minority of countries and, inside those countries, that of a minority of people. (Address given at the AGM of the Catholic Institution for International Relations, 13 June 1975).

Not much has changed over 30 years. It seems we just do not learn. The banking crisis of more recent times is evidence of that. Attempts were made to repair the existing systems in order to return to business as usual. But, “business as usual” was the problem.

In our own country the spell of the entertainers still lingers. Some economic planners tend to think of social impacts and ecological impacts as a kind of collateral damage, to be redressed afterwards – from the proceeds of an economy based on purely economic principles and

efficiency. Which begs the question: is it good economics if it doesn't try to *prevent* negative social and ecological impacts? This paper is largely about the need for *integrated* social, economic and ecological planning.

A moral/spiritual crisis

I am under no illusion about the difficulties, the main one being that what has not gone away is the underlying spiritual/moral crisis, at the root of which is greed. It is compounded by self-deception and the deception of others. Have you heard people in the oil industry talking about reasons for price-hikes, or people in the liquor and tobacco industries talking about "self-regulation"? In biblical categories what we are dealing with is "self-indulgence" and "hardness of heart". That is why Pope Paul VI, also in 1975, emphasised that "there can be no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons" (Letter on Evangelisation, n.18). That is where a new start begins.

But it doesn't finish there: he went on to say that evangelisation involves every aspect of our lives, both personal and social (cf n.29) with a view to transforming and making humanity itself into something new (cf n.28).

The biblical term for "new persons" is conversion. It involves a *turning from* current self-centred attitudes and lifestyles. But more importantly, it involves a *turning to*; and for Christians this means deepening our relationship with Christ. In the language of Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch of Constantinople

The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change of lifestyle and sustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act (Common Declaration, June 2002).

Connections

John Paul II and the Patriarch were acknowledging the connectedness of the economic, the social and the ecological, and of all these with the moral and spiritual. The connections go deep and have to do with how much we respect human dignity – our own and that of others. In his 2009 Encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI claimed that "the way humanity treats the environment influences the way humanity treats itself, and vice versa" (*Caritas in Veritate*, n.51). Human life itself is part of the life of the planet. And so, it would be inconsistent, not to say shallow and cynical, to speak of respecting the planet while not deeply respecting human life itself, at every moment from conception till natural death:

How can we separate, or even set at odds, the protection of the environment and the protection of human life... since the book of nature is one and indivisible? (Pope Benedict XVI, Annual Address to Ambassadors, 2010).

A green brand of politics has not yet understood this.

The crisis affecting the environment did not start with the environment. Not all "natural" disasters are natural. The crisis starts in human hearts. It results from the kind of economies we build. The environment cannot be isolated from our human activities.

A new era and new opportunities

John Paul II and the Patriarch also implied that there is a way out of our crises, but it calls for "a change in the way we think and act". I stand with those who believe – even against the odds – that we live on the threshold of new opportunities for genuinely ethical approaches. If we are at the end of one era, we are also at the beginning of another. I find reason for hope

in the intuitions of younger generations, and in John Paul II's and the Patriarch's reminder that "it is not too late; God's world has incredible healing powers..."

The ethical approaches I am suggesting presuppose five things:

- (i) Personal conversion, (whatever our religious affiliations);
- (ii) The connectedness of economic, social and ecological issues;
- (iii) The need for strategies if we expect to be effective;
- (iv) Strategies that involve public discussion and include all who are likely to be affected by any decisions;
- (v) The need to build consensus within communities of interest, i.e. having regard to different levels of understanding and different motivations.

Part II – Consensus-building

1. Consensus among those who recognise economic good sense and a sense of responsibility

The most basic level of consensus could be among those who can see the economic good sense of working for sustainable development. People in this group accept the economic fact that increasing production and consumption are not indefinitely sustainable, and that whether we like it or not we need to move from high energy consumption to much lower levels of energy consumption. They accept that "the party is over".

This approach involves self-interest, but there is also a sense of social responsibility involved when it is accepted that "humanity is consuming the resources of the earth and of life in an excessive and disordered way... (and that this) provokes a level of rebellion on the part of nature" (cf John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n.37).

Galvanising the consensus and the potential consensus within this group would be part of a wider strategy.

2. Consensus among those wanting authentic human development

There is also potential for building consensus among those who realise that authentic human development cannot be one-dimensional – it involves the proper integration of many facets of human wellbeing: cultural, spiritual, social, environmental and economic. Increasingly, people see through the reductionist policies and slogans that speak of a "better future" based narrowly on economic planning and business as usual.

As Pope John Paul II put it:

... There are collective and qualitative needs which cannot be satisfied by market mechanisms. There are important human needs which escape its logic. There are goods which by their very nature cannot and must not be bought or sold (*Centesimus Annus*, n.40).

And Pope Paul VI:

Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, i.e. it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person...

If further development calls for the work of more and more technicians, even more necessary is the deep thought and reflection of wise persons in search of a new humanism which will

enable modern people to find themselves anew by embracing the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation. This is what will permit the fullness of authentic development.... (Pope Paul VI, *On the Progress of Peoples*, 1967, nn.14, 20).

That has implications also for how we understand the purpose of education.

Moreover, holistic human development, though personal, is not individualistic. It involves relationality. We can only be fully alive in relationship with others. Every one of us is somehow *less* so long as we benefit by arrangements that deprive others.

The fields of trade, commerce and industry are meant to put us into relationships of respect for, and collaboration with, other people – building them up, not taking them down.

Right Priorities

An important feature of right relationships is respecting the priority of people over things, and of needs over mere wants. The use of finance or of technology in ways that marginalise some, e.g. by creating unemployment, is an ethical issue; it is not just part of an economic equation.

Right relationships require

....economic policies which realise that the needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich; that the rights of workers are more important than the maximisation of profits; that participation of marginalised groups has precedence over the preservation of a system which excludes them (*Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983).

The common denominator between how we can harm one another socially and economically and how we harm the planet is plain, old-fashioned greed. Rents in Christchurch went up 15% after the earthquake. The accommodation was the same, or worse. But as the need for accommodation became greater, the cost of it was put up, somewhat like a surcharge added to the cost of the commodity or service being exchanged. Can we charge people for something that is already theirs, namely their need? In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas said no. Today we get around it by deeming the value of goods and services to be measured partly by “supply and demand”. We even manipulate the supply to increase the demand, and the price. I’m not sure how that is different from greed. I *am* sure that it widens the social and economic gaps between those who can better afford and those who cannot.

Similarly, it is greed that exploits the planet’s resources beyond the minimum necessary for meeting human needs, and to the maximum possible for maximising profits. And this is regarded as normal and acceptable!

The planet is not a mere quarry for one-dimensional economic purposes. It is also our human habitat, intended to meet other, no less important needs, especially the need for self-transcendence through the experience of beauty, wonder, stillness and silence, the presence of God, and communion with one another (cf CA, n.36). The ability for self-transcendence in these ways is precisely what has been damaged and diminished by sin. Losing sight of the basic fact that creation is a gift from God, we no longer give thanks, nor see the beauty through which God attracts us. Through Christ, our relationships with God and one another are restored, and this is what changes our relationship with the planet. Ultimately, the whole issue is theological. This leads us to consider the potential for creating a further level of consensus.

3. Consensus based on the Judeo-Christian tradition

The potential for consensus at this level will be taken seriously by those of us formed by the Word of God, especially but not exclusively, in the Judeo-Christian tradition. And yet it gives us common ground with people of all faiths and none who feel called to make "human life more genuinely human" (John XXIII).

The Judeo-Christian revelation gives us insights into what it means to be authentically human based on what it means for God to be God! Let me explain: In the Judeo-Christian tradition God is "Lord" and God's freedom is sovereign. God is not dependent on, nor answerable to, any other being. Nor did God need to create. All created existence, including human existence, comes out of a choice God did not have to make. It was not owed to us. It is therefore pure gift.

Since we are, therefore, to the core of our being, gifted existence – gifts – we can only be true to ourselves by *being gifts*, i.e. being there