



GLOBAL WORLD, GLOBAL ETHICS

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1. “ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE”... WITH ANOTHER MENTALITY

“Globalisation” is a fashionable word. We hear it used nearly all the time. Whether it be about the flux of the global economy, international business, multinational companies, or immigration. Many of the social phenomenons that affect us are closely linked to globalisation. We often hear talk of globalisation as if it were a promise of new opportunities. We also hear it mentioned in a critical and even angry tone.

Globalisation, as we know it, has raised much criticism among social movements that go by the name of “anti-globalisation groups”. This classification is, by the way, rejected by many of the protagonists of these groups, who claim to be simply correcting the negative effects of globalisation, although they are not actually against the idea of globalisation itself. In the words of Susan George, a qualified representative of this movement, in a recent article published in the magazine *Dissent* (winter 2001, vol. 48:1): “I reject the word anti-globalisation that the media has attributed to us. In reality, the argument is between those of us who want an inclusive form of globalisation, based on co-operation and security, and those who want all the decisions to be dictated by the global market”.

So we are not talking about the fight against globalisation, but rather against this particular form of globalisation. For this reason, some people talk about the need for a globalisation of social rights, others of the need for planetary ethical values, others speak of a theory of planetary justice which would help to balance out the growing inequality in the world, others speak of the need for non-governmental organisations to control the ebb and flow of finances in the global economy, while others would promote a more participatory democracy. In summary then, all of these groups put forward a type of globalisation brought about through greater planetary solidarity. This appears to be a struggle that will polarise many of the powers that be in the world today.

1. The necessary Utopia

Real changes in the world are always brought about by the fact that someone, or some people, have had dreams. We can only create new types of human relationships in the political, economic and social forum if we recover the capacity to imagine the alternative, to imagine new ways of coexistence and of organising our world. This Utopic imagination which could help us emerge from our pessimistic attitude of “nothing can be done...” is

lacking. Let's recall some of the philosophers' suggestions: the Marxist paradise, the ideal community of communication, the natural state, and the hypothetical state lived out under a veil of ignorance¹. These are Utopias that have served humanity with the aim of improving man's living conditions, so that he can confront today's social problems.

As Christians we should restore the idea of "heaven", not as a form of escapism, but rather as the "eschatological horizon", the horizon of judgement when faced with today's realities. This should also be the horizon of hope that draws us to it. Imagining a new world is the first step towards improving our current world.

In spite of the vital force of Utopia, we should not brush aside the factor of "fear", as an incentive for these changes, or even as a prior warning to these changes. Not a paralysing "fear", but rather a cautious "fear" that compels us to deal with these problems. Whether we like it or not, great ethical Declarations were made after great disasters. The Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 took place after the Second World War; and the ethical Declarations on the medical experimentation carried out on human beings took place after we became aware of the 'medical' barbarities of the Nazis, which were carried out in the concentration camps.

2. Structures of evil

In our world we encounter evil structures that promote injustice. These structures can often overcome us because they appear to be like great "monsters" that we have no idea how to begin to attack. And I use the word "monsters" because these structures appear barely tangible, with no clear, visible head, and yet possessing several "tentacles" that reach out everywhere. These enormous structures perpetuate injustice and seem to hold power over people. They are like new types of "evil gods". This perception, which has become quite generalised, leads to an extreme pessimism, that of: "nothing can be done". The 'idolatry' of these structures means that we do not know how they should be tackled in order to be able to change them. This is the moment when we should remember the fact that these great "monsters" that have escaped our control, are creatures that have been constructed by people made of flesh and bone like ourselves. From this perspective, we should then be able to see that they are not all-powerful beings.

In everything, the little acts of solidarity and justice that one carries out from day to day, one can begin to construct structures of solidarity, that can flourish and grow. These actions that we carry out, however small they may be, do have repercussions, whether they help to construct justice and solidarity or whether they go in the opposite direction. We may ask ourselves: is it important to recycle domestic waste? On this occasion we are talking about a small isolated action that has no great repercussions for the current global ecology of the planet, but it helps us and other people to realise the same thing; that is, it helps the governments to see that the people take these problems seriously... This is why the social movements that pick up on people's dissatisfaction and, at the same time, suggest concrete solutions to address concrete problems, are so important. However, many of these movements lack more globalised suggestions that could change the prevailing conventions in the social, economic and political forum.

3. A change of mentality

In order to begin building a world in which solidarity is more tangible, and in which exclusion of any kind does not exist, it is first necessary to change one's own mentality. This new way of thinking may only operate in a few people at first, but it will become a seed that will multiply and spread solidarity everywhere, showing that things can change. It is also very important that we realise we are not alone on this journey, and that small changes are possible, in spite of opposing forces, and that we are able to detect when things begin to change.

These transformations begin to appear like small seeds in the middle of a world that has been marked by the reality of widespread injustice and a complete lack of solidarity. The first response to this is that many will begin to form a new mentality in our society. At the same time, forces emerge that oppose this move towards solidarity in our society and that take advantage of every opportunity in order to stir up sentiments that promote the logic in opposing this solidarity. As an example we could look at the events of September 11th in the U.S.A. While they may have initially stirred up feelings and gestures of solidarity towards the victims, they ultimately lead to a more defensive stance in the West. This was seen as the press and governments talked about nothing else but the threat of terrorism and how to combat it, often forgetting that the phenomenon of terrorism is a sign that our world is not functioning properly.

Another example: the arrival of a large number of people from Africa in Western Europe provoked reactions of fear and outbreaks of xenophobia. However, we don't seem to stop to ask ourselves why the African continent has not been included in globalisation, and why its population emigrates in search of the privileged social position which the Northern world already enjoys.

So solidarity appears in the heart of a structure that actually lacks solidarity. It has to make its own way in order to overcome the sluggishness and sense of "inevitability" that the system has created in order to maintain its own survival. It starts to construct a "new mentality".

4. ... and ethics

Nevertheless, when we talk about "globalising solidarity", and changing all those values into social reality, we should think about the need for finding some agreement between all men and women, so that we can put into practise the social and political means by which we can obtain a greater planetary solidarity. The world of values is the world of ethics.

However, we should think about the need for creating a global ethical framework or, in other words, a shared system of basic ethics, which goes beyond the more particularist ethics. How can we possibly understand each other, in a world that makes us feel so small, without some ethical point of reference that would be *common to us all*?

2. NEW ETHICAL PARAMETERS

Just as the world has changed, so have the problems that humanity is faced with, or at least, they seem to present themselves under new forms, or with a degree of interrelation and complexity that demands new reflection. The way we confront many issues points to our need to open up our minds to new parameters: “renew yourself or die”. So, let’s talk about some of the features of this new mentality which is already being formed and which should help us to build a world that can be applied to the lives of everyone today.

1. Renewing coordinates

Shifting from our own space, to a planetary perspective. Our world, the world that belongs to each one of us, has grown. We are no longer talking about our own small world (our family, our locality, our country). Everything that we do in our immediate environment may influence a distant place. Our technological power is such that, when someone undertakes certain actions, they need to realise the repercussions these actions may have in other far off places on the planet. All of humanity shares the biosphere as a common and interconnected place. This applies to our fellow man, though he may find himself far away from us and may seem to be just another anonymous face we can view through modern methods of communication. Solidarity requires each one of us to put on glasses that help us to overcome our short-sightedness.

From short-term to long-term. As time passes, we realise the need to think “long-term” rather than “short term”. For example, the solution to ecological problems and the sustainability of our model of economic growth forces us to think in longer temporal terms. Can we hand over an exhausted and non-recoverable planet to future generations? Planet Earth belonged to our ancestors and we must pass it on to succeeding generations. So our fellow man could be far away from us in time as well as distance.

In politics, one realises that it is necessary to distance oneself from the immediate period of time, in which politicians may only think about current electoral issues, and move into a wider time sphere, where we consider the interests of future citizens. Strict measures to preserve the planet’s ecology may prove unpopular for a government in the short term if they are not properly explained and if the citizens do not participate fully in their creation.

From distance to immediacy. Let’s move on, from the knowledge that we are far away from each other in space and temporal terms, to closer proximity and a shortening of time. The reduction in cost and the significant increase in methods of transport and telecommunication available to us today varies our experience of time and space. We have all been brought closer to each other now, and we influence each other much more than we could

ever imagine. The decisions of one multinational company, which has its headquarters in a distant country, can influence our workplace from miles away. For this reason, many of the decisions that are made far away and in which we have no say, may change and alter daily life for a great number of us. Similarly, a local group which, for example, initiates the boycotting of purchasing a particular product from a multinational company for ecological or social reasons (contamination, subcontracting of firms that practice child exploitation, or large-scale dismissal of its workforce, etc.), may produce a chain reaction across the world and cause huge losses for the multinational company, in such a way that it is forced to change its set policy. This is how campaigns of non-governmental organisations are carried out, using established local and global networks of non-governmental organisations, and increasingly thanks to the ease of access to the Internet.

Furthermore, the reduction in cost of methods of transport has led to an increase in journeys (both commercial and vacational), that has brought with it an increase in relationships between people of different cultures. The increase in knowledge of something that was previously considered as foreign has led to a greater proximity. This favours a sentiment of “universal citizenship” and of solidarity. In this sense, in very simple terms, it makes wars more difficult to undertake.

So the increase in travel also allows cultural gaps to be reduced. But, with everything, one must be careful of the form in which information is presented, especially when reference is made to cultures that are far removed from one’s own. We should become suspicious when the mass media presents the news in an “excessively” clear and simplistic way: some countries being evil (those that violate human rights, terrorists) while others are presented as defenders of humanity and humanitarian values. It would be wise to search more carefully for reliable sources that analyse such issues in depth. In this respect, globalisation has two faces: on the one hand, the available methods of communication and the features of the Internet favour truthfulness, but on the other hand, they can also lead to the monopoly of the media by a few people or groups, whose interests lie only in increasing their audience...

From the “tribal us” to the “plural us”. Let’s look at a model of society in which “the others”, those who don’t belong to my community (country, language, ethnic background, religion...), do not become “them”, but instead form part of a greater “us”. A society in which the model of uniformity gives way to a model of diversity. Let’s look closely at the idea of “tolerance” (an important landmark in the history of humanity), by understanding differences, whether cultural or otherwise, as a source of enrichment. This, as we will later see, brings with it the creation of a type of shared coexistence and can lead to the formation of a few basic agreements (these can take many different forms: basic shared ethics, fundamental rights...) Society would then find it hard to admit to violating any of these basic values that serve to bring it closer together.

The presence of these basic values should be represented through the existence of jurisdictional and social bodies at an international level, existing independently from the State. They should be able to transcend the absolute power of the State and guarantee that these basic ethics are adhered to. They should also allow citizens to feel like they belong to different spheres (whether it be a new locality, city, nation, State, a body which is not part of the State, planet Earth...), and yet still remain interconnected.

From “Nature and us” to “us within Nature”. We should, as ecological movements suggest, have a different relationship with our natural environment. We should go from viewing Nature as being renewable and permanent, something existing “independently from

ourselves”, to seeing it as being vulnerable and exhaustible, and forming part of our reality. In other words, let’s shift from having an exploitative relationship (“Nature is at our service and we can use it as we wish”), to a more protective and caring relationship for this vulnerable entity.

As humans we constitute a species that exists within the biosphere, and we should maintain a balance with the other species in our world. A greater solidarity between species of our world should therefore exist. Our wellbeing is linked to Nature. An impoverished natural environment brings with it an impoverished humanity. In the West, we can learn a lot about other perspectives of the world which are a lot more respectful towards Nature, and which do not view their relationship with Nature according to the category of subject and object. Some Oriental traditions possess this belief system (Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus), and Native American traditions too.

2. Renewing politics

From competition to co-operation. In the relationships between countries, we should move away from the competitive model to the more co-operative one. This step is not an easy one, whether it concerns States or companies. States can become more co-operative, if they form part of international structures that encourage participation between countries. Being able to transcend one’s nationality should be considered as being positive for citizens, in such a way that we can begin to respond to problems whose resolution often transcends the level of the State, (let’s think about ecological problems, defence against other economic models, and international politics). Also, through these structures, cultural minorities belonging to these States may see a form of protection against other States that tend towards cultural uniformity.

From the free market to democratic control. The economic forum is fast changing from local markets to one single global market, and this easily escapes the control of the traditional State. The local market is limited and its main players would be made up of that country’s companies. The global market, on the other hand, follows a different system of logic, in which the main players are multinational companies that can easily escape State control. These multinationals can then set up or destroy systems in certain countries, motivated by the labour cost or the facilities offered in that country, in terms of its financial policy, its labour policy and its environmental policy.

By escaping State control, these players in the global market also avoid any form of democratic control. One could argue about whether the control of traditional States over the local markets was actually democratic, but without a doubt, in the present day, the global market makes any kind of democratic control more difficult. This should make people aware of the wisdom in creating global democratic political institutions that can respond to logic similar to that seen in the global market. It is only in this way, that is, by creating globalised regulations, that we will be able to control the negative aspects of the globalisation of the markets.

One way of monitoring and controlling the activities of the multinationals has been through social movements. These are basically democratic groups accustomed to being able to transcend the level of the State, or function as a network of local movements.

Technical and scientific progress: from cost-effectiveness to public service. The current advances in science in the field of research are often motivated by their profitability in the free global market. Maybe we should begin to think of research more as a service to the public, in which different human communities can participate. Research should then be understood in terms of a global public service, for the whole of humanity, and from the point of view of inter-generational solidarity. These research projects could produce innumerable benefits for large sectors of the population. Under these conditions, it would therefore be incomprehensible that such projects would not be carried out just because the sector they would be helping is in countries that do not have the economic resources available to obtain their resulting benefits.

For example, in terms of solidarity, it is scandalous that certain vaccines against illnesses that affect large sectors of the population are not financed, while the markets of northern countries are inundated with medication for migraines or arthritis. It is equally scandalous that multinational pharmaceutical companies² patent certain products obtained from plants and found in the traditional medicine of many countries in the South, as if they had “discovered” them. There are many examples like this, and some have been brought before the courts, such as was the case with the oil of the Indian Nim tree whose effects are testified to in Hindu literature from more than two thousand years ago.

In such issues, the free market needs to be corrected, and this could only be carried out by organisations that transcend the level of the State. Solidarity should also be thought of in inter-generational terms, in such a way that we take care of our elderly people. This should be in such a way that we start to find suitable jobs or voluntary services that allow the elderly to contribute to the common good and feel useful. Solidarity should also be seen in the other sense: from the elderly towards young people. By taking care of the scarce resources available to us and the power of medicine to lengthen people’s lives –even to the point of not respecting human dignity-, we should be able to accept human mortality, through solidarity, and give up certain aggressive and costly medical practices.

From security to risk. We should also become more aware of the fact that our society faces many risks that are not monitored closely enough. Any technological progress brings with it risks that need to be evaluated according to the most objective criteria possible.

Technological progress should not become a captainless ship, but instead should be governed by the interests of the community, which should carefully evaluate its risks and benefits. We should ask ourselves: What risks can we allow? Which groups would be most affected by these risks?

There are dangers at every level: social, economic, ecological... Let’s remember, for example, the famous Belmont Report on human experimentation, prepared by the Congress of the U.S.A. This was motivated by the fact that the majority of people who were subjected to biomedical research programmes belonged to certain ethnic minorities (blacks, Mexicans...) , and that these did not benefit from the results of the research. This signalled a serious problem in regards to justice, (apart from the possibility that a statistical bias could affect the scientific accuracy of the results).

From the traditional business to the responsible business. Businesses, which are something that generates wealth in the heart of society, should be aware of –and even include in their objectives- not only their generating of wealth, understanding this as economic

benefits, but also their role as a cultural power within society. These objectives should include policies to preserve the environment, and to encourage good working conditions. This is how the “nation’s wealth” can be achieved. The manager, as part of his role as a citizen, should also take on some of the responsibility for the problems in society, which go beyond mere economic production.

3. Renewing beliefs

From the fragmentary perspective to the unity of life and heart. As time passes, men and women live in different spheres, with each one bringing something different to our lives. For example, the family gives us warmth and affection; the business gives us work and a salary; clubs give us free time and sport; belonging to a church enhances our faith that gives meaning to life, etc. Each sphere has its own system of logic and its own specific values. We therefore behave in a different way in each sphere, according to what is expected of us. In business, we function according to the logic of co-operation and agreement; in the family, on the other hand, we expect unconditional love...

These different types of logic, which are perhaps necessary to each environment, can bring with them dangers to the individual. The first of these is that of living in a fragmentary way, as if each different sphere represented a different box with its own specific attire. For example, we can’t show our emotions in work, unless we are trying to get something; we can’t strike up great friendships...

A second danger is that of the behaviour of one sphere influencing the other, so that one uses a form of behaviour that is not suitable and not well received. For example, acting in a compassionate or excessively emotional way in business.

Another aspect we should be aware of is the fact that these spheres change very often in today’s world. A sense of belonging is not something that can be taken for granted for long in today’s world, due to our increased geographical mobility (changes occur when people move house), and our increased career changes. This new mobility also affects a reality that enjoyed much greater stability in the past: that of the family. This is one reason why more separations and changes in partners are taking place. This mobility can often represent an uprooting of one’s emotions.

Since humans possess a more unitary type of psychology, we normally tend to create one basic area or sphere in our lives from which all the other spheres proceed. In the past, this happened in a more spontaneous way, maybe because people had more time on their hands then. Now, the nature of the modern world means that we become dispersed around the place and so have less time in which to create this original sphere in our lives. If this same area in our lives was in the past the family, today we are finding that many parents realise their children are complete strangers to them, even after living under the same roof for many years. Our emotions and affection will only remain in places that we can dedicate our time and ourselves to. In a new society, it will be necessary to create this primary sphere, in order to move between the other spheres and live them as an enriching experience.

On the other hand, in order to create greater solidarity, warmth and compassion should be cultivated in areas that would normally be ruled by another type of logic. In this way, as well as giving greater unity to our behaviour, we would also be introducing the frame of mind

much needed in other areas, such as work relationships. The current phenomenon which has seen an increase in social volunteers may be illustrative of the fact that many people are fed up of the over-competitiveness found in some businesses, and are seeking time to take refuge in areas which concentrate more on emotions and compassion. This phenomenon has increased our solidarity with those who are excluded from society, (so they no longer remain statistics or images, but become the faces of real people). Yet this may still be in response to an occasion when a person was not able –or it wasn't possible for them– to introduce more compassion and solidarity into the other areas of their life. Without trying to make any ethical evaluation of this, we can see that some people dedicate their time to voluntary work and, at the same time, move between very different spheres in their work or even within their family.

From anger to compromise. We often become angry about small details that affect us or that happen around us; but we live through them as if they were inevitable, being the result of a bigger situation over which we have no control. We become angry about robberies, about the violence happening all around us, and sometimes we protest about the government. Nevertheless, we should pause here for a moment, without taking one step further. It is necessary to move from these feelings of anger about the events happening around us, to reflect upon its causes, on the type of society we are living in, and on the idea of responsibility. This is why, continuing with the same example, we become angry about the violent wars we see on the television, without realising that we are accomplices of the government that invests in, produces and sells weapons. Our government sells weapons to countries that may be lacking in morals, and favour violence, (however unlike us they may seem).

Obviously some people protest against the government, but many more don't worry about them at all. But it is by behaving like this that we are allowing a democracy, which is supposedly built on the common wishes of the people, to be lead by the interests of a minority. We should learn to think that the reason for everything we see around us is based on causes that could often be avoided or lessened. We cannot condemn something without first realising that, in an indirect way, we are basically giving it our approval. For example, we complain about certain types of behaviour among young people; nevertheless, on an educational level, we are constantly reducing our investment in marginalised and impoverished areas.

From the small story to the bigger picture. Let's move from our faith in bigger projects, to believing in the smallest ones, and in more particular actions. Let's stop believing in the great promoters of Utopia who would claim to have found the cornerstone for changing things and saving humanity. An example of these would be in the great ideologies promoted in the XIXth and XXth centuries. Today, we prefer to believe in what is small and mundane, even though our view may be biased, only worrying about a certain aspect of this complex reality.

We no longer claim to have found that which should solve everything. With this mentality, there has been a rise in social movements (ecologists, feminism, pacifism, non-governmental organisations...), that, even though they promise a brighter future, do not reduce the complexity of reality and do not claim to have found the solution to everything. They respond to concrete needs, without using a great ideology as the motive for global change.

We are talking about a new type of realism that limits itself to concrete reality, perhaps without even realising that it is from these simple projects that more global ones are created. In fact, working in the domain of concrete reality brings with it values that transcend this reality, opening itself up to a type of universality. For example, a demonstration against the channelling of mercury into a river in your town is more than a simple concrete preoccupation, and instead represents a basic cultural attitude that demonstrates a respect for nature. A social worker, does not just resolve the working problems of a single mother who arranges to see her, but also communicates a social expression of a universal value: that those who are excluded from the system can still retain their dignity as human beings.

Therefore, a more global reality opens up before us from the smallest things, when we realise that we are closely linked, (in sharing the same biosphere), and that, in order to solve our problems, we need to cooperate with each other.

3- THE NEED FOR SHARED “BASIC” OR “GLOBAL” ETHICS

Our world today is very diverse. We live alongside people who think very differently to ourselves, coming from different cultural traditions, religions, and ideologies... We only have to walk through the streets of our cities to see this. This diversity does not necessarily mean there is peace, since it often makes solving common problems more difficult. That said, we can still, in the heart of this diversity, seek for that which can bring us together as regards values or the fundamental rights of people. This is how we can create a society in which there is co-operation, and not just coexistence.

1. The search for “basic ethics”

Many have attempted to undertake this search. Some have tried to create Worldwide Ethics, or Fundamental Rights that would be common to all human beings. Others prefer to talk about the creation of a theory of justice for the whole of society, which promotes solidarity and the greatest equality as regards the distribution of world resources between men and women. This “world ethics” –or however it should be named- does not claim to recreate a new type of ethics promising “salvation”. Instead it offers itself as a guide, in the form of concrete ethics or basic principles needed to survive and to humanise this world which is becoming more globalised every day.

The new problems of our society, (ecological problems, questions on the sharing out of resources, the issue of technology that is now able to affect the time when life is at its most fragile...), have made us become acutely aware of the fact that we belong to the same species and share the same biosphere. Many of these issues affect us as a common humanity, and for this reason, we should look for global solutions that are not limited to certain areas. It is necessary then, for us to agree on the basics, and at the same time to leave a wide margin of liberty for the remaining questions. This is how these new ethical projects claim to be respectful towards different religious and cultural traditions.

This approach offers an alternative to the maxim “let everyone do what they want, as long as they are not interfering with the legitimate liberty of others”. This would lead to the exploitation of the weakest, and towards an uncontrolled economic neoliberalism, which would ignore cultural minorities.

This is why the acceptance of this necessary ethical diversity should not mean that everything can be permitted. Instead, in respect to people’s plans for happiness, everyone should be allowed to pursue their own goals while inviting others to do the same, but at the same time respecting some basic values that should be common to the whole of humanity.

Today, the discourse of the first author to speak of the need for certain “basic ethics”, W. Adorno, gains strength. After the impact of the Second World War, he offered it as an essential requirement in order to be able to judge and avoid the incredible acts of inhumanity

carried out by the Nazis. It was from this mentality that the movement in favour of Human Rights arose.

The proposals, which could be called basic ethics, put forward a system of ethics through a dialogue process that is subject to a series of conditions. Let's call it an "ethic of maxims" that proposes a hierarchical system of values offering models of behaviour for living a full and happy life.

The problem which these basic ethics present is deciding the way in which we come to define these basic values so that they can be accepted by every culture and system of values. Let's recall the criticism that the UN Declaration of Human Rights was subject to, (whose contents could be considered as a possible nucleus for these Basic Ethics). This was on account of them having been created with little participation from the different cultures that populate the planet, and because they only reflect a predominantly Western culture. Let's ask ourselves how far these human rights, which were agreed through a dialogue process, can be imposed onto cultures which did not participate in their creation. What could be seen as the "minimum" for westerners, might very well be considered as the "maximum" for other cultures.

Nevertheless, let's remember that much of the criticism of the Declaration may also be in response to particular interests. For example, criticism that came from persons or groups that had acquired a position of privilege in their cultures, through the oppression of other human beings. There may also be the case of those who suffer the violation of their fundamental rights (according to western mentality), and who may accept it in good faith, whether through ignorance or because they have been educated in a specific tradition which has not yet established concrete rights.

These basic ethics become necessary when we want to create laws on how to resolve the problems that humanity is suffering worldwide. It would be naïve to think that laws can remain ethically neutral, because behind every law, we find a preference for certain values. Finally, this proposition of some common eternal ethics brings us to the question about a need for a "worldwide authority" that monitors the adherence to these basic principles.

2. What are Basic or Civil Ethics? Human Rights, the Civil Ethics of today

Civil Ethics is a good example of a possible system of basic values because it offers a way of establishing the content of these values, as well as suggesting what their content could be³. Civil Ethics is a new attempt at building a system of universal ethics that claims to have found some basic values that are shared by men and women throughout the world. It presupposes:

- a) the non-denominational nature of society,
- b) the possibility of a purely rational system of ethics,
- c) that humans are already living according to their own values of happiness, and we cannot hope that these values could be shared.

Civil ethics claims to identify some basic ethics, shared by all, which can become the basis for legislation. It does not claim to be a system that is independent of other systems of ethics, but instead can be attributed to them all, since men and women are already living according to their own particular “ethics of happiness” or set of maxims.

This system offers a method of obtaining the basic shared contents of these values and goes on to amplify them. This same method is taken from the Discursive Ethic suggested by J. Habermas and K.O. Apel. The contents are formulated through a dialogue that is subject to a series of conditions. For example⁴:

- 1) Everyone who is affected by the issue raised must be present.
- 2) All human beings should be considered as valuable contributors.
- 3) Any conclusions reached can always be revised until a point of “rational communication” is reached.
- 4) Everyone can put forward their position.

This proposed dialogue can reach a consensus on certain questions, but it should not be a “strategical” agreement, or an agreement belonging to the “majority”, but instead should represent a real ethical convergence of opinion for all participants.

In regards to the Discursive Ethic, this should take place in such a way that the basis for any moral norm lies in its legitimisation through consensus. The agreed contents should be accepted by all parties, and the ethical content of values already lived out by different communities or individuals should be tolerated, since these have not been agreed upon.

It is sometimes difficult to reach a consensus due to the disparity of people’s convictions, the tendency towards dogmatism, the emotional and unconscious implications involved, and the prejudices held by some on certain issues before a dialogue is even established, just as it is difficult to establish some form of equality, when people of different hierarchies or those with authority and power are present in the dialogue.

At the present time, the basic contents of civil ethics, could be understood in terms of the Human Rights of the first, second and third generations. Those rights belonging to the first generation are usually to do with individual liberty and spring from the oral tradition, (the right to life, to freedom of expression, to free movement and meetings, to intervene in politics...). Those of the second generation, on the other hand, are called social, economic and cultural rights. They refer to living conditions, the distribution of food, culture, health, retirement, protection against unemployment, etc. They were conquests of the socialist movements. These two generations were recognised by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

The rights of the third generation, although they are present in the social conscience, have not been recognised in any international declaration. Among them can be found: the right of each person to be born into and live in a healthy environment, which has not been contaminated, and that of being born into and living in a peaceful society.

It is interesting to note the fact that these generations of rights are distinguishable by their different features. The rights of the first generation defend the individual against State intervention, and should be exercised to the full because they are rights affecting personal liberty. On the other hand, the rights of the second generation, social rights, depend on the intervention of the State, since it is the State who will be monitoring them and ensuring the

means by which they can be exercised. In addition, the possibility of guaranteeing these social rights to a greater or lesser extent depends on the economic and social context of the country. For example, the right to education in an African country is perceived differently to the same right in a European country. In the first case, we are perhaps only talking about a few years of schooling, while in the second case, we assume there to be many years of government-funded education. Unfortunately, because these social rights are so relative, they are very far from being obtained in many countries.

3. The value of disagreement

While discussing agreements and consensus, we must also mention the value of disagreement. Disagreement does have a negative aspect, because it always refers back to a prior agreement. But since disagreement breaks up a consensus, it allows dialogue to flourish. The history of humanity is full of men and women that broke the prevailing social, political and ethical consensus.

Disagreement can form part of a peaceful dialogue so that a new agreement can be reached, but nevertheless, throughout history it has been expressed in a violent way against political, social and religious structures that were trying to maintain the status quo. The ethical value of disagreement depends on the ethical nature of the agreement. One could disagree with Human Rights with the aim of broadening their effectiveness, in an attempt to gain more protection for more vulnerable cultures, threatened minorities, and weaker economic groups. Yet one could also disagree with them for unacceptable reasons, for example, on behalf of a majority that wanted to keep the status quo and maintain a situation of economic or social privilege.

In our world that is growing more complex by the day, we should learn to be able to identify the ethical nature of disagreement. This should be expressed in a peaceful way, that sometimes brings with it the acceptance of situations that are not ideal but that are better to accept in favour of the common good and “pro bono pacis”.

4. The need for an authority

The idea of having Civil Ethics would require the establishment of a worldwide authority to check that these basic principles were being respected. We have already seen concrete examples of such authorities and their possible failings. The types of worldwide authority we see today work in such a way that they undermine the credibility of the idea. For example, the current UN has lost the confidence of many countries that see how it often acts according to the interests of the more powerful nations. How can humanitarian or pacifist interventions that are carried out in some countries and not in others, (when it suits the powerful nations, for example, members of the Security Council) be made legitimate?

Perhaps a process in which world powers were subject to an international authority that could monitor agreements already made, and continue the dialogue process in order to add to

these agreements, would be preferable. Realism is a good adviser but audacity would also be required.

5. The weak aspects of Civil Ethics

In spite of the value of Civil Ethics as a proposed ethical project, it also has its limitations and difficulties.

1) Civil Ethics offers a progressive dialogue process on issues that affect everyone's interests. In this dialogue process, we realise that the larger the group of participants (those people that enter into this dialogue) in order to set these basic principles, the more difficult it becomes to reach agreements. Some of the contents of these basic principles would probably be too generic, in their attempt to encompass every sensibility. On the other hand, if fewer people participate in the dialogue it is easier to reach agreements, but these agreements will only be partial ones, because they are only answering the needs of certain cultural groups. We have already mentioned the criticism faced by the Declaration of Human Rights and the need for the regionalisation of this Declaration, because it only reflected the predominantly western culture.

2) If the contents of these principles remain at a very generic level, so as to include many participants, their implementation will be left in the hands of the Law. And since the Law needs to create concrete laws that can be easily applied, it will use the method of listening to the majority to reach agreement. Law cannot be founded on generic basics, since legislation needs to be concrete and not open to any ambiguities. If this were to be addressed, any ambiguity should be ironed out in the courts and before judges, just as it is carried out in Anglo-Saxon countries. The Law may also choose to leave many legal loopholes in issues on which a social consensus was not reached, in the hope of reaching an ultimate agreement.

3) The presupposition of the existence of common values that are already shared by humans is fundamental to Civil Ethics, and constitutes an essential part of their formation. Yet there may be groups that insist that shared values do not exist between different cultural groups.

4) It is difficult to follow the conditions of dialogue suggested in the Discursive Ethic, and their contents will always remain provisional and be subject to later interpretations. This could add an aspect of relativism to their more concrete elements, in such a way that people do not take them very seriously.

5) The proposition of these basic values could give way to an attitude in which these ethics are seen as just more rules and regulations, only with the added advantage that they are 'basic' in nature.

6) In the post-modern world in which we are living, this system presents itself as a proposition that still believes in rationality and in universal projects in the midst of a world that has been fragmented and disappointed by reason. This system believes that men and women can share something in common, even if it is only a state of mind that allows a dialogue to be established in search of what we share as humans. In contrast, many current systems of values do not believe in the possibility of universalisation.

7) The approach of Civil Ethics (known as “ethical dialogue”) assumes that conditions of equality have already been created among its contributors. However, we are talking about a system that presupposes social reform, so that everyone, including people from the Southern World, can participate in it. If this is not the case, this system can only be applied to the Western World, and will only serve to reinforce the existence of differences between South and North. Let’s remember that it was this same logic that was brought to and used in African countries, during the colonialism of the XIXth century,...

We should ask ourselves whether this system, if misunderstood, could be used in future colonisations? Civil Ethics cannot remain in the “doctrine of method” alone, but must also make the conditions for the possibility of dialogue viable. We can see that this system is not lacking in prophetic content if we look at recent events. It is easy for it to become a system that is difficult to apply in violent situations, or situations of widespread injustice.

8) In spite of being included in the education system of democratic countries, Civil Ethics does not claim to be a substitute for ethical education or for values that, in our opinion, should exist in the heart of every moral community, given that all values are linked, and that it is within communities that one should learn models of behaviour. Education is imparted through a system of ethics and from a perspective on life. Education should be systematic and integral, and should not be reduced to just a few values, given that it is necessary to live in a universe of values. Another issue would be, given the diversity that exists today in schools, with children coming from different communities and with different ambitions in life whether education should only cover the values contained in Civil Ethics, leaving the child’s real ethical education in the hands of their parents or particular community. This would not be easy, if we take into account that there will be children belonging to communities that cannot accept certain basics of Civil Ethics, or that may already possess certain principles that contradict these basics. Let’s think about the problems that may arise for children who belong to fundamentalist religious groups (such as certain Nationalist Catholic tendencies, fundamentalist Christianity in the U.S.A., and Islamic groups).

9) In order to define Civil Ethics so that it can be accepted within a system of ethics, we need to emphasise its temporary nature, that is, its aim of deepening dialogue rather than just limiting itself to being a statement of that which we already share.

10) We believe that Civil Ethics, expressed as rights, does not just satisfy a few basic human needs, which as humans we have a right to. In order to further investigate this issue, we will distinguish between at least three different types of requirements.

The basic requirements of justice belong to the first type. They would really be the rights and duties of Civil Ethics, in the universal forum. The rights and duties agreed through social pacts belong to the second type. These would be a concrete form of the first type, as regards positive State Laws. The third type of rights comes from the basic needs of human beings, but cannot be demanded as rights. For example, within these basic needs we would find the request of every man and woman to die in the company of others, to give them hope... When someone close is ill, one feels obligated to be with them, but the sick person does not view this need as a right. With such a need, we feel constrained to respond, but our response is given freely. Such a response arises from an ethic of compassion rather than one of obligation. It is silly to talk of the right of every ill person to enjoy the company of others. The need of the sick person is not fulfilled by the mere physical presence of a person at his side, since what he or she really needs is the presence of someone with whom they have a caring relationship: their husband or wife, children, or someone who is capable of loving them...

11) One of the greatest criticisms that Civil Ethics has received is the danger of undervaluing differences and particularities. In spite of its aim to achieve globality, it asks us to return ethical experience to the community. The system of ethics offered can only be lived out within certain communities. This is why we see the return of ethical experience to communities. Ethics are born within communities, where plans for life and happiness are developed.

This return to the system of ethics held by particular communities means that little moralistic tales may arise in the heart of these communities, far removed from the ideological and metaphysical approach. Such great ideologies, like those of the XIXth and XXth centuries, have always been used by groups that held dominion over others. This meant that the illusion of an inter-community system of ethics was made to seem a Utopia, since it always supposed the forcing of one group's system of ethics on everybody else.

Civil Ethics avoids the risk of changing one particular community's system of ethics into a universal system, as this would allow the bigger ideologies to drown out the smaller ones particular to certain communities. Civil Ethics, without giving up the bigger (universal) picture, changes it into a series of basics (so it can remain general and refer to issues that were agreed upon), in this way allowing the continued existence of several systems of morals linked to specific communities.

6. Other basic ethics

It would be fitting to say that the path of Civil Ethics, which we have just examined, is not the only one. There are others, even if they may be excessively minimalist, for example, that which was presented by H. T. Engelhardt⁵. This author suggested a system of ethics based on the "principle of permission". This principle had the virtue of allowing very different people, from the point of view of their moral values, to live alongside each other, ("strange morals", he called it). This proposition allowed the existence of particular communities, each with their own particular values but without any interference between

them. The more different the communities or individuals may be, the more we can appreciate the virtue of this suggestion.

Other philosophies attempt to persuade the population to create shared ethical principles through the fear factor, so that the threat of ecological disasters may lead to an ethical relativism. Similarly, H. Jonas, when faced with the dangers of new technologies, put forward a new moral imperative for human behaviour: “Work in such a way that the effects of your actions may be compatible with the continuation of human life on the Earth, or when expressed negatively: work in such a way that the effects of your actions may not be destructive towards the future possibility of life, or more simply, do not endanger the conditions necessary for the indefinite continuity of humanity on Earth”⁶.

Others come from a negative perspective searching for those aspects that would be unanimously rejected, in spite of the good they may possess. For example the route proposed by Partha Dasgupta: “My idea is that, in studying an extreme form of ill-being, we can then reach an understanding of well-being”.⁷ It will then be easier to reach an agreement, through dialogue, on the more extreme wrongs of society.

E. García Valdez, who defends this approach, suggests that the steps towards looking for these wrongs should satisfy some basic requirements: “1) Do not harm the diversity of those involved. Moral principles should not prescribe types of behaviour that force those affected to make the sacrifices of a saint or hero. The more one respects others, the more one favours one’s own life (...); 2) Do not allow situations of privilege to occur that go beyond any reasonable partiality. This second condition prevents the appearance of hateful egotists, whose needs and desires are satisfied at the cost of others. In more common terminology, one’s self-fulfilment as a person –realising one’s own needs and desires- should be compatible with the same need for fulfilment of the other members of our species”.⁸ These two conditions come down to two principles, the first removes harmful behaviour on a personal level, and the other refers to justice at a community level.

Others, like R. Petrella, suggest “four social contracts” on an economic level that should be taken on by all citizens. The objective of these agreements would be to stimulate worldwide development in the most acceptable way, from a social, human, economic, environmental and political point of view. These contracts consist of the development of a few shared principles: principles of efficiency, responsibility, belonging and universal tolerance. These four agreements would be:

- 1) “about basic needs” (in order to overcome inequality),
- 2) “cultural” (tolerance and dialogue between cultures),
- 3) “democratic” (with a view to a world governing body),
- 4) “of the Earth” (for a sustainable development).⁹

As we can see in this discussion between philosophers, different variants appear that are a reflection of the difficulties which the building of a common ethics brings with it, even if they may only be “basics”. In spite of that, it is now more necessary than ever to confront the challenges with which humanity is faced. Dialogue can reach “agreed rights”, and generate shared values that allow us to collectively confront the challenges facing us.

The great advantage of agreeing on basics only is the respect for the diversity of cultural values and ethical systems. We believe that it is the most humanitarian option, because it values all men and women, and at the same time, it is modest enough to not give in to a

uniform mentality that believes it knows the truth and has the solution to all problems. This proposition, while requiring participation, emphasises that the solutions are for everybody, and that the weakest (whether they be people, territories or cultures) are not prejudged in the new global scenario.

4. ETHICS AND CHRISTIAN MORALS

In this last chapter we will look at how religious ethics fit in to this proposal, as the Christian confronts the idea of Civil Ethics. Any other system of ethics, whether religious or not, should also clarify its position in an ethically diverse world. We believe that the Christian community could have two options in principle: remain closed in its ghetto of believers or, if it really wants to obtain an effective presence in a diverse society, enter into the dialogue proposed by Civil Ethics. Other “possible” alternatives would involve converting everyone to their way of thinking, or forcing their ethics on others.

Let’s remember that Civil Ethics is seen as a lay form of ethics, that is to say, it makes no reference to God. So then, it is perfectly compatible with religious ethics within a diverse society. Civil Ethics recognises that in people’s ethical lives there are some basics which we all share as humans, and some beliefs that will not be a part of it. These common basics are understood as being required by the whole world. On the other hand, the ethical or religious principles of certain groups, communities and religions are understood as an invitation, rather than an obligation.

1. In dialogue

If as Christians we wish to share ethical issues with other men and women in this diverse and fragmented society, the only way we can do this is by accepting the idea that we all share some common basics, so as to emphasise the fact that we can live together. So we can begin then to look for these basic ethical values. The dialogue process will be a way in which Christians, along with all men and women, can try to build a better world, such as was proposed in the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes*: “Nevertheless, the Church, while totally rejecting atheism, sincerely professes that all people, believers and non-believers, should contribute towards an effective construction of this world in which we live, which would be impossible without a genuine and prudent dialogue” (n.21). “Through fidelity to their conscience, Christians unite with other men in their search for truth and to solve all the moral problems that arise, not only on an individual level, but also on a social one” (n.16). For its part, the World Parliament of Religions contributed to the issue of Worldwide Ethics by creating an ethical declaration in 1993, in order to show how different religions contain some common ethical principles. For the World Parliament of Religions a new world order is not possible without World Ethics, understood as a “basic agreement on a series of linked values, fixed criteria and basic personal attitudes. Without such an ethical consensus of principles, every community sees itself, sooner or later, threatened by chaos or dictatorship, and its individuals, by distress”.¹⁰

Believers should enter into the dialogue proposed by Civil Ethics aware of the fact that, - inspired by the presence of the Spirit-, we can approach the truth. For believers, God is not absent from our world and our reality, so we should consider this dialogue between different

ethical backgrounds as a sign of God wanting His Reign to be for all people. Throughout the history of humanity, God has progressively shown the most humanitarian way to live. In other words, in His Revelation, He has respected the progressive nature of human learning. If God has accepted this, then we, who believe in Him, should also accept that the discovery of truths, through this dialogue, is a slow process, in which only partial truths may be reached; including tolerating behaviour which as believers we perceive to be wrong.

2. The Church in dialogue

As Christians we cannot retreat into a ghetto, enclosed within our community of believers; we should go outside, to proclaim the Good News, and we should listen to others in order to learn, given that this new humanity needs to be built by all. This approach is possible, because as Christians we are living a faith that affirms that God's Spirit is present in every man and woman, and in every reality in this world. We believe that retreating within a faith community can only be due to either insecurity when faced with the world or a very negative view of the world (as if the world does not form part of this community). This attitude would also suggest that good, or the very presence of the Spirit, could only be found within this community.

The acceptance of this moral proposition by the believer has a lot to do with their basic theological conception of the Spirit and of Revelation. For this reason, certain theological stances that are more sceptical regarding the presence of the Spirit in the world, whose vision of the world is excessively marked by the presence of sin, or who deny that human beings can achieve good without believing in God, find it hard to consider the proposition of Civil Ethics as a positive one.

The acceptance of dialogue should also presuppose, on an intra-ecclesiastical level, a community that is presided over by harmony. Only in this way can we testify to a new method of understanding dialogue, in a world in which dialogue has been manipulated many times. Let's remember the words of Paul VI: "The Church should head towards a dialogue with the world in which it lives. The Church then becomes word, message, dialogue" (*Ecclesiam Suam*, num.73). The Christian community, in its internal life, should be governed by a loving dialogue that is capable of also loving those who don't think in a similar way¹¹, in which ethical values are shown and communicated, and not imposed on others. At the same time, a community that sincerely believes in dialogue should believe in the presence of the Spirit in every reality in the world; in other words, it should see the world as, not just being full of sin, but rather full of the Holy Spirit¹². It should be a Church that has more faith in the Holy Spirit and in which it may be necessary to create a new and more spiritual way of understanding the Church.

3. Truth and tolerance

As believers we should accept that it is only through dialogue that we can reach these basic values which may mean, on occasion, that we have to tolerate evil, which is not seen as such by others. This tolerance should not just be seen as a lesser evil, representing the

impossibility of wholly obtaining good. Tolerance is more a reflection of one's love for one's neighbour, choosing not to impose one's own truths and respecting that others have not yet realised the value of the cause they are championing. For the believer, this tolerance should not, in any way, represent an abandonment of one's principles, given that dialogue must continue; that is to say, one must continue going deeper until the basic values begin to widen. The believer must realise that, until an ideal community of dialogue is obtained, the results will always be temporary.

The believer must enter into this dialogue convinced of the fact that he does not possess the whole truth¹³. He must also be aware of the fact that many times in the history of Christian morals, stances that did not really belong to the Natural Law were supported and became, like the unchangeable Natural Law, laws that were linked to customs or cultures. The ethical issues that preoccupy humanity may become the framework through which Christian ethics reveals itself to the world –to other specific communities- as a standard-bearer for a humanitarian plan for all.

For all these reasons, the subject of Christian morals should find itself at ease in the middle of an ethical proposition that forces it to communicate with all men and women, and that respects its principles allowing it to continue within a community of believers. Often the problem isn't the impossibility of finding a shared principle, but rather using judgement to decide if a new situation falls into the principle or not. The entire world would agree to respect human equality and respect the individual (on the understanding that the UN Declaration of Human Rights would not be questioned and would be considered as the basic content of Civil Ethics), but would we all agree on the subject of human genetics? This is more difficult to decide upon...

4. Civil Ethics and Natural Law

Accepting the proposition of Civil Ethics means ignoring the intuition at the basis of Natural Law, a classic idea in Christian morality. St. Thomas Aquinas, while systematising the meaning of Natural Law states that the entire world, by making use of their reason, is able to grasp the main principles of this Law, in the knowledge of which there can be neither error nor ignorance. In regards to the principles derived from this Law, St. Thomas believed that there could only be error in a few cases. We believe that the basic agreed contents of Civil Ethics move in a similar way, at least to the second level (immediate conclusions drawn from the main principles).

For Civil Ethics, those individuals who did not enter into agreement will be seen in the way that St. Thomas saw those who did not accept the immediate conclusions drawn from the great principles. In the time of St. Thomas, it would have been exceptional for people not to draw these immediate conclusions; today, instead, it is not.

The dialogue proposed by Civil Ethics, would be the instrument used to search for agreement upon certain issues among all individuals. Continuing the analogy with the thoughts of St. Thomas, he would say to us that dialogue would be the instrument by which individuals that do not accept these principles can escape from their error or ignorance or from letting themselves be guided by their passions, in such a way that they will be drawn towards acceptance. On the other hand, Civil Ethics understands dialogue as a convergence, in that everyone moves closer to the truth, not only those who still have not joined the

consensus. For this reason also, individuals who have already agreed upon an issue must be ready to allow themselves to be questioned and possibly to modify agreements, when the dialogue of new individuals is incorporated.

5. Civil Ethics and Christian Morals

Consequently, the proposition of Civil Ethics allows Christians to participate in the building of basic shared morals, in order to be able to confront the shared problems of our society. In this way, when Christian ethics enters into discussion with civil ethics it never denies its origins. At the same time, Christians will live out their ideals to the full within a community of faith. These ideals will play a critical role in relation to the basic ethics lived out by society, in such a way that Christians will have to continue their involvement in the dialogue process in order to amplify these basics. These basic values do not have to be the morals that Christians live by, but rather the values that are common to all men, whether they be believers or non-believers.

We have always spoken about basic morals in such a way that we insist on their *basic* nature, but let's remember that the series of values we have outlined are far from being basic. This is because they are not adhered to by every country that has accepted them, such as is the case with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In practice, these basics may be too much for many people. Christianity cannot deny the fact that its ethical dimension goes beyond merely the group of people that share the faith. Jesus' plan proclaims universal fraternity in such a way that, from its beginnings, Christian communities possessed a zeal for bearing witness to their faith in a comprehensive and enthusiastic way. For this reason, Jesus' way of life was admired by pagans, and considered as being worthwhile. Christian theology is at the basis of this universality due to the fact that all men and women were created in the image of God (Gen. 1,26) and because of this, there is something that we can share with all humans.

CONCLUSIONS

The acceptance of a *basic form of ethics should not then assume the dissolution of Christian ethics*, which is a particular way of life. This is because the agreements reached will always be provisional (such as with Civil Ethics), and also because the different Christian communities should not give up attempting to broaden these agreements. Civil Ethics, as we have previously mentioned, should be understood as an ethical work in progress, constantly being recreated and modified. This fluid nature of the agreements is due on the one hand to the new challenges and problems that constantly appear in our society, and on the other hand, to the different codes of behaviour and ethical systems that co-exist in our society.

In the second place, agreements are very important for Civil Ethics, but so are disagreements, because these are what keep the dialogue process from grinding to a halt, in their continuous search for the truth. A set of principles, like Christian values for example can, at any given moment, represent a source of discord among the diverse collective of Civil Ethics. The acceptance of basic values, as we have already said, presupposes a tolerance for and acceptance of certain issues that could be considered by Christians as being wrong. But this tolerance should not signify an abandonment of one's principles, or the impossibility of pursuing dialogue.

A Christian will live in accordance with a series of basic Civil Ethics, but without giving up putting forward their own ideals through dialogue. This may sometimes occur in the form of a disagreement. Those who helped society to progress were always people that violated social convention. Prophets were people who went against social consensus, and were brought into direct confrontation with the status quo. This confrontation often ended with the death of the prophet. Yet ideas of genuine prophets last, and when all is said and done, they are fulfilled. The following generations bring back the image of the prophet and may even mythicise his person or canonise him as a saint. So it is these prophets that help the dialogue process to move forward, because their legacy lives on. For example, if no one had challenged social convention, society, including Christians, would still tolerate slavery.

Let's be clear on this matter: when we speak of disagreements and breaking with convention we are not, under any circumstances, talking about an action through the use of power or force, but rather through bearing witness. Jesus of Nazareth broke religious convention by bearing witness, from a position of weakness and servitude, and not through the use of force or power. His example was followed by many prophets who chose to speak out against injustices through service and without resorting to violent means: "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (Mk.10, 45).

So disagreement should be expressed through tolerance and witness. The way to make others understand the values of certain practices or the Christian way of life should be primarily through bearing witness.

The love that Jesus asked of us for our neighbour requires us to live out clearly in our own lives the values that he championed. It is only in this way that they will be seen and appreciated as values, and not as impositions. Dialogue, example and service are the best ways of expressing our love for our neighbour in today's world. This is why, for example, a faith community such as Christianity, that does not accept abortion, should clearly show just how much it values human life from the moment of conception: welcoming and helping

mothers without any financial resources, giving aid to single mothers, and helping in family planning. These actions are not only of humanitarian value today, but also of prophetic value, denouncing injustice as well as proclaiming the value of human life, of maternity and paternity.

In this way then, we make living together in such a diverse society possible, respecting the diversity of other ethical systems, without giving up on our own values and moral convictions. We should accept the existence of certain shared basic ethics, and play an active and faithful role in the process of ethical consensus, through the strength that gives us faith as a community of believers.

Notes

1. The paradise of the philosophers Marx, J. Habermas, the contractualists (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Nozick...), J. Rawls, respectively.

2. See the campaign initiated by Oxfam: www.oxfam.org.uk.cuttthecost

3. We point to two other authors qualified in this area, the first being A. Cortina in the field of philosophy, and the other M. Vidal in the field of theology.

4. These rules are set out by J. Habermas, *Conciencia moral y acción comunicativa*, Barcelona, Península, 1985, p. 110-113. According to Habermas, they were established by R. Alexy in *Eine theorie des praktischen Diskurses*, in W. Oelmuell (comp), *Normenbegründung, Normendurchsetzung*, Paderborn, 1978.

5. H.T. Engelhardt, *Los Fundamentos de la Bioética*, Paidós, Barcelona, 1995.

6. H. Jonas, *El principio responsabilidad*, Barcelona, Herder, 1995, p. 40.

7. Partha Dasgupta, *An Inquiry into Well-Being and Destitution*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.8

8. García Valdez, E., *Acerca de la universalidad de los derechos humanos y su posible fundamentación*, en *Los derechos humanos en un mundo dividido*, Fórum Deusto, Bilbao, Universidad de Deusto, 1999, p. 109-110.

9. Grupo de Lisboa (dir. R. Petrella), *Los límites de la competitividad. Cómo se debe gestionar la aldea global*, ed. Sudamericana, Buenos Aires 1996, (pp. 187-201).

10. *Hacia una ética mundial. Declaración del Parlamento de religiones del mundo*, H. Kung: K. J. Kuschel eds, Madrid, Trotta, 1994, p.23.

11. L.G. num. 37.

12. Some speeches from the Church can be catastrophist or excessively highlight society's wrongs. This perspective, even without denying the Church's ability to face reality, puts forward an image of a Church that views the world with fear at the same time giving the impression that it is above sin, and that it cannot appreciate the good things in the world.

13. On this point we can see how Civil Ethics is different to the Natural Law put forward by St. Thomas. The latter presents itself as something that is already aware of the truth, given that other variations were seen, as we have previously mentioned, as the fruit of error, ignorance or of having let oneself be guided by one's passions. He accepts that in some cases, these principles cannot be applied to concrete situations. The concrete situation does not undermine the validity of the principle, but rather allows one to see that, if applied, it would go against one of the primary principles, which is hierarchically found above these immediate conclusions drawn. St. Thomas gives the example of having to return one's goods to one's master when you know he is going to use them to attack the country. The principle, that things must be returned to one's master (the immediate conclusion drawn from a greater principle), would not apply to a concrete situation, because one would see that it goes against the greatest principle: *Do good, avoid evil or act in accordance with reason* (S. Th. I-II, q. 94, a. 4, c.). Nevertheless, we can see that the objective of Natural Law was to obtain moral unity, given that it proceeded from the idea that morals were shared by humanity.