

booklets

STEPPING ON THE MOON **Eschatology and Politics**



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José Laguna

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Today before dawn I climbed up the hill,
I looked at the heavens crowded with lights, and
I asked my spirit: when we know all these worlds
and gain the pleasure and wisdom of all the things
they contain, will we be tranquil and satisfied?
And my spirit answered: No, we will attain those
heights in order to continue onward.

Walt WHITMAN

José Laguna Is a theologian and musician. His earlier contributions to this collection were: *And if God were not perfect? Towards a sympathetic spirituality* (Booklet 99); *Taking stock of reality, taking responsibility for reality, and taking charge of reality* (Booklet 143); *Evangelical Dystopias*, (Booklet 148).

Publisher: CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA - Roger de Llúria 13 - 08010 Barcelona
+34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com - www.cristianismejusticia.net
Printed by: Ediciones Rondas S.L. - Legal deposit: B 24163-2016
ISBN: 978-84-9730-384-2 - ISSN: 2014-6566 - ISSN (virtual edition): 2014-6574
Editor: Anna Pérez i Mir - Translated by Joseph Owens
Cover illustration: Roger Torres based in a illustration of Bansky
Layout: Pilar Rubio Tugas - Printed on ecological paper and recycled cardboard
December 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Eschatology is the study of the «things that lie beyond,» while politics is involved with managing public affairs, the «things that lie close at hand.» Religion moves back and forth between them both, along a diffuse border that tries to relate the reality beyond to the reality at hand.

Politics and eschatology need one another. Politics needs eschatology because trying to organize the present without an ultimate horizon that envisions the common good can degenerate into mere bureaucracy. Eschatology needs politics because invoking a celestial reality that demands no historical transformation «on earth as in heaven» results only in evasive spiritualism.

Concealed behind the current global financial crisis is an obvious moral crisis that is reflected in the rampant political corruption that appears like a cancer in every corner of the planet. But also concealed behind the financial crisis is an eschatological crisis that is no less important than the moral one. The post-modern collapse of the grand narratives of meaning has left behind a society without a compass and without

a horizon toward which to orient its steps.

No one doubts that today we find ourselves immersed in a change of epoch and that society is advancing at a dizzying speed, but the big question is: in what direction? Who is holding the reins of a horse that in the opinion of many is racing out of control?

Resounding in the streets and the plazas around the planet is the cry, «Another world is possible!» But the «other world» movements need to sketch out the political shape of their proposed alternative if their cry is to be more than a complaint, as necessary as even that may be. When indignation seeks political expression, it requires eschatology to give it direction. The utopian, open-ended desire for «another *possible* world» needs to be for-

mulated in a «eutopian» manner (*eu*=good, *topos*=place) as «another, better world.»

Post-modernity has called into question the three certainties of the Enlightenment that Kant was able to synthesize: epistemology (what can I know?), morality (what should I do?), and eschatology (what can I hope for?). Until a few decades ago we knew how the world worked, we knew how to behave with our fellow human beings, and we had confidence in our progress toward an Arcadian paradise. Since the beginning of the new millennium these certainties have been fractured and shattered. Science now prefers to speak of probabilities rather than laws; ethics reduces its universal normative imperatives to particular pragmatic agreements; and the hope that was sailing smoothly on the ocean liner of endless progress seems to have run aground on a Finisterre that has become a wasteland of technological gadgets.

Any theology that wants to enter into fruitful dialogue with its times must be ready to venture across the shifting sands of this fragile, fragmented present. I consider that the tradition of Judeo-Christian religion has three contributions that it can make to a world in crisis and in search of direction: 1) the hermeneutics of a theological reading of reality as seen by the victims of history; 2) compassion as the ethical imperative and the principle of human relations that surpasses any social contract; and 3) eschatology as the divine promise of a world transformed for the sake of those who now weep. This last aspect is the one to which I will pay special attention in this booklet.

Judgment, hell, glory...

I am intentionally using the term «eschatology» in a generic sense as discourse (*logos*) about the last things (*eschata*) without ignoring the fact that traditional theology uses it to refer to the treatise known as *De novissimis*. Among other things, this treatise studies otherworldly concepts such as judgment, purgatory, hell, heaven, glory, etc. Such study can sometimes go to esoteric excesses in seeking to determine the temperature of hellfire on the basis of biblical data or to establish whether at the time of the final judgment the conflagration of the world will precede the resurrection of the dead or follow it.¹ These are not the eschatological questions that are of concern to Christians who are committed to social causes or political militancy. What these believers wonder about is whether their political action is linked with God's dreams for humanity; they wonder whether «sustainability,» «equality,» or «negative growth,» are new ways of naming the ancient «last things»; they ask whether the secular *eschaton* of «another possible world» converges on the same horizon as the (religious?) *eschaton* of the «Kingdom of God.»

We divide this exposition into three moments: the first will be dedicated to showing the eschatological weakening of present-day politics; the second will examine biblical eschatology and draw out the political teachings contained in it; and finally, we will sketch out the required dynamics of a political praxis that seeks to build the future and not just manage the present.

1. THE ESCHATOLOGY OF POLITICS

On 12 September 1962 President John F. Kennedy presented a challenge to the American people: «I believe that this nation must commit itself to reaching the goal, before the end of this decade, of sending a man to the moon and bringing him back safely to earth.» Scientists at the time considered it an absurd idea since the nation did not possess the technological expertise needed to undertake such a tremendous task. Nevertheless, on 20 July 1969 Neil Armstrong made history by becoming the first human being to walk on the lunar surface. Between those two dates were seven years of amazing scientific advances and public investments that had had to respond to difficulties never before contemplated.

John F. Kennedy made a political decision: he aimed for a goal and mobilized the resources to reach it. These two moments, goal and means, are inscribed in the DNA of all politics that seeks to go beyond the simple achievement of private interests.

What is dreadful in present-day politics is not just the degree of corruption among its practitioners or their subservience to the dictates of the global market, but the total absence of dreams that can inspire people. The ordinary citizen is convinced that voting for the left or voting for the right is all the same because both sides will inevitably support

the same technocratic policies that benefit economic interests. None of them offers a Moon to aim at.

This eschatological weakness affects both the egalitarian politics traditionally categorized as «leftist» and the individualist policies that come under the umbrella of «rightist.» While the former have stopped envisioning the *eschaton* of a horizontal society, the latter have wedded themselves to the desires of avaricious individuals. And in the midst of this confusion we find unsuspected social realities that are calling out for new eschatologies and a new politics.

1.1. On the left: an anorexic eschatology

The failure of «real socialism,» magnificently symbolized in the fall of the Berlin wall, has been magnified by neo-liberals to the point of turning it into the eschatological downfall of the left as a whole. According to these oracles, taking time to analyze the obvious errors and deviations of state-controlled socialism makes no sense at all. What has been called into question is the final *eschaton*: «Socialism has failed as a goal. There is no alternative to capitalism.»

The *last things* that the eschatology of the traditional left has until now promised –the end of poverty, equality among human beings, economic structures that embody freedom and justice, and the creation of a world of solidarity²– have now been consigned to the purgatory of unrealizable chimeras waiting for a redemptive evolution to rescue them from exile.

1.2. On the right: a bulimic eschatology

While the left is trying to recover from its social anorexia, the right needs to be cured of its capitalist obesity. The neo-liberal diet of early 21st–century conservative politics suffers from consumerist bulimia. If the capitalism of past epochs sought to regulate itself by attending to collective needs, the capitalism of today has dedicated itself to satisfying individual desires –and desires, by definition, can never be satisfied.

For Massimo Recalti, narcissism and bulimia are the principal pathologies defining present-day capital-

ism: «Bulimia exposes the myth of pure consumption. Bulimics devour everything and chew away at it, but their excesses show that it is impossible to fill the empty hole at the core of their existence; they reveal the deceit at the heart of capitalist discourse.»³

1.3. The market as the only eschatology

Even though a detailed study would reveal the fallacies hidden behind the «eschatological reductions» of both right and left, there is no doubt that the present crisis has left behind a disoriented society whose only eschatological horizon is a fundamentalist market. «With the defeat of socialism in its naïve duel with American capitalism, and with the weakening of the social market-economy model, people today have been left directionless in organizing their activities. The only star visible appears to be the one shining in the firmament of the economy. This new star, unlike the one followed by the Magi of old, shines down not on a poor child but on the market. The market has been clothed in messianic robes: it brings salvation to humankind. The market is supposed to provide the solutions to the enormous problems that piled up at the end of the 20th century. The market is vested with enormous power, but it is not the ultimate reality or the definitive point of reference in society. The market cannot be the supreme norm of rationality in the organization of material things. Nor is the functioning of the market any guarantee that society will use its resources in the best way possible.»⁴

The neoliberal market presents as its eschatological warrant the «efficiency» of the consumerist recipe: societies that feed the avarice of their members produce more benefits for the community than those that place collective needs before individual desires. The market, when left to the dictates of its own laws, produces greater social wealth than a mixed capitalism that is regulated by the state. This is a «law» backed by the authority of scientific evidence.

1.4. Destructured progress

Until the time of the Enlightenment, progress was synonymous with growth in wisdom. From generation to generation, the treasures of knowledge were accumulated and interwoven. Scientific advances were entwined with cultural, social, ethical, and aesthetic advances so as to form an integrated tradition that could be passed down from parents to children.

Post-modernity has fragmented the forms of knowledge and discourse and has frayed the inherited tapestry, which is now transmitted only in the form of remnants: enormous chunks of technology, small pieces of ethics, a few strands of solidarity, and several stitches of culture are bound together to create a tangle of cloth and thread incapable of generating harmonious progress.

The hypostatized market is made into the sole instance of political and eschatological reference: «outside the market there is no salvation!» The result is an idea of progress that comes to be understood as mere accumulation of consumer goods. All kinds of

progress –scientific, social, democratic, cultural, etc.– are valued in terms of economic indicators. If they help to increase GNP, they are defined as progress; if they fail to produce economic benefits, they are not. Thus we celebrate and bless as development the incorporation of newly emergent economies like China, India, Brazil, and South Korea into consumer capitalism, without ever questioning whether, for example, South Korea's joining the train of Western «progress» is not connected to the fact that it now has the highest suicide rate in the world.

For U.S. political scientist Francis Fukuyama, we find ourselves now on the eschatological horizon of the end of history, which is reducible to owning video recorders and stereo sets: «The state of consciousness that allows for the development of liberalism seems to have stabilized, just as would be expected at the end of history with material abundance assured by a modern free-market economy. We could sum up the contents of the homogeneous universal state as a liberal democracy in the political sphere, united to easy access to video recorders and stereo sets in the economic.»⁵

We have unlinked our idea of progress from the search for truth, goodness, beauty, justice and equality that characterized the enlightened, humanist *eschaton*, and so we find ourselves with an eschatology of deconstructed «last things» and with a politics incapable of moving us forward. Such is the judgment of the professor of political and social philosophy Daniel Innerarity: «Our language dealing with change has become deconstructed, with all that that supposes regarding historical

time and political intervention. In the language of progressives, revolution has been replaced by modernization. It is the rightists who now speak of 'reforms,' while the extreme left makes critical statements but produces no critical theory of society, much less a program of action. A good part of what is said and done consists merely of heroic posturing in the face of the market or else simple melancholy.

All this is symptomatic of a time when politics has been stripped of the type of action that could produce a change for the better. And this is happening during a period of constant and

unstoppable cultural, social, and technological change. People no longer hope for any change of a *political* nature. Of all social realms, politics is the one that seems most paralyzed; it has ceased to be an engine of change and has become instead an administrator of stagnation. This situation is judged differently, depending on whether one is a liberal lamenting the slowness of reforms or a leftist complaining about the absence of alternatives.»⁶

Eschatological anorexia and the divinization of economic progress –thus is summed up the state of present-day *realpolitik*.

2. THE POLITICS OF ESCHATOLOGY

There is no politics without eschatology, just as there is no eschatology without a political dimension. Obviously politics does not constitute the totality of human existence, nor does it encompass the entirety of human hopes. Claiming that politics is necessary in religious eschatology does not mean reducing the salvation expressed by eschatology to a simple change of social structures. What is undeniable is that the Judeo-Christian tradition considers history, including its political dimension, to be the privileged place of God's revelation.

The foundational experience of Jewish religion is the conviction that God intervened in history by freeing his people from slavery in Egypt. But this was not just an exceptional intervention; rather, God has continually intervened in history. The God who freed the people under Moses is the same God who helped Gideon conquer the Midianites with only 300 men (Judith 7); he is the same God who helped David, a boy with five stones and slingshot, overcome Goliath (1Sam 17,32-54). With the establishment of the monarchy, God intervened through his kings, such as David and Solomon, and even through foreign monarchs like Cyrus, founder of the Persian empire, who

freed the Jewish people from their Babylonian exile and allowed them to return to Palestine (Esdras 1).

The Old Testament promise of a land «flowing with milk and honey» and the Gospel announcement of a Kingdom of God in which the hungry will be fed marked out transcendent eschatological horizons at the same time that they empowered concrete political practices: a great people went out into the desert after Moses in search of the Promised Land, and Jesus anticipated the presence of the Kingdom by feeding more than five thousand men (Matt 14,21). Jewish and Christian eschatologies refer both to the «beyond» and to the «near at hand.» The theo-

logical and philosophical disjunctives that attempt to separate the historical and the transcendent aspects of eschatology are foreign to the biblical mentality. The Kingdom of God is a future promise and at the same time a present reality. The «Our Father,» as a Judeo-Christian prayer, is a clear example of the simultaneity of the two moments: «Your will be done *on earth* as it is *in heaven.*» Saint Paul's «now but not yet» is the temporal expression that best defines the «eschatological politics» of the Bible.

If the messianic-prophetic religions are expert in anything, it is in «producing hope.» Judaism and Christianity possess eschatological knowledge that they must place at the service of a society that is in search of horizons. It is not a question of Christianity's offering an infallible prescription, as if it were a lifeboat for a society adrift. Far from proposing such totalitarian ideas, our goal is to drink deep from the well of «political» wisdom to be found within our religions and to draw out the useful lessons they offer our convulsed age.

2.1. Monarchy, Republic, Democracy, Anarchy?

Before getting into what the Bible teaches us about politics, we should note that the Bible offers no practical instructions about what political system is most in accord with the divine dream for humankind.

Patriarchs, kings, princes, judges, emperors –the people of Israel kept adapting their political models to the

practices of each epoch without sacralizing any of them. The Old Testament prophets made sure that no political system would forget the two constants that are maintained throughout the whole of Hebrew history: God's covenant with his people and the suffering of the most vulnerable.

Nor does the New Testament throw any light on the political contours of the «Kingdom of God» announced by Jesus. If we expect the gospels to give us answers to practical questions, we will end up as perplexed as the sons of Zebedee. We will ask: who will sit at the right and the left of the King? will we still have to pay taxes to Caesar? will the Kingdom of God restore the Davidic monarchy? Rather than set out a particular political model, Jesus marks out a clear horizon: «freeing the captives, giving sight to the blind, liberating the oppressed, and announcing the jubilee year of the Lord» (Luke 4,18-19). He also explains how authority should be used: «If I, your teacher and lord, have washed your feet, then you also should wash the feet of one another» (John 13,13-14). And he issues a warning against abuse of power: «You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave» (Matt 20,25-27).

The roadmap of «biblical politics» is marked by God's sovereignty, which relativizes all forms of human power, as well as by God's concern for the fate of the defenseless.

3. FIVE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ABOUT POLITICS

«The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. No one will cause damage or destruction on all my holy mountain.» (Isaiah 11,6-9)

«I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They

shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.» (Isaiah 65,17-21)

«Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.» (Luke 6,20-21)

3.1. Expressing hope

The Bible is pregnant with promises and dreams. The utopian expressions of biblical eschatology sketch out the

contours of an ideal world. Far from considering such promises to be impossible chimeras, believers have faith that they will be fulfilled. Yes, a day will come when poverty will disappear from the face of the earth, when there will be no more hunger or grieving, when everyone will have decent houses in which to live and fields to feed themselves! Such conviction does not arise from a sober assessment of the present but from a promised future for which God has given his word and to which believers cling, confident that it will come to pass.

All human beings, whether believers or not, are constitutionally eschatological, as Laín Entralgo put it: «Human beings, by simply being who they are, must hope; they cannot not hope.»⁷ Expressing hope is the radical affirmation of our humanity, and at the same time it is a refusal to accept the present as the definitive word about reality.

Individuals and societies need to define their future horizons with utopian dimensions if they don't want to remain trapped in an eternal present. Utopia is not the superfluous luxury of an idle society; it is a political necessity for peoples on the move.

«Thus shall you say to the Israelites: 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. ... I declare that I will bring you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey'» (Ex 3,15-18). If the people are to stand up to Pharaoh and set out on a journey, someone must first announce a goal. A leader must

proclaim a real alternative to slavery in Egypt: «There is a land flowing with milk and honey!»

The logic of the Pharaohs of every epoch attempts to neutralize all expressions of hope. Installed in an absolute present, the Pharaoh fears any discourse that breaches the walls of the status quo and allows people to glimpse the paths of liberation that lie hidden behind the extravagant pyramids, the useless airports, and the real estate bubbles.

A few years ago the Puerta del Sol in Madrid was covered with posters and banners declaring: «If you don't let us dream, we won't let you sleep!»; «Another economy is possible!»; «Jobless of the world, you have nothing to lose but your chains!»; «The barricade closes off the street but opens up the way!»; «We were sleeping, we were shaken, and the plaza we have taken!»; «We already have the Sun [Sol], now we want the Moon!»; «We're not knocking at the door, we're knocking it down!»; «Our dreams don't fit in your ballot boxes.» These dreams of the 15th of May movement were an explosion of controlled indignation, but they were also the eschatological expression of a society that had «decided» that reality was changeable. Confronting the neoliberal rhetoric of inevitability, the movements for «another world» propose a utopian discourse concerning what is possible and desirable. The first step of all social change requires recapturing the language that has been co-opted by power.

The utopian expression of hope is ridiculed by the logic of Pharaoh, which reduces it to ingenuous toasts to the sun. Slogans announcing «a land

flowing with milk and honey» appear sterile –until one day a dissident community decides to stop building pyramids and to go forth in search of it.

Religion is very conscious of how important it is to express and maintain eschatological discourse in the face of quick-fix rhetoric. What is never announced is condemned to non-existence. The political campaign that carried Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States in January 2009 began on 28 August 1963, when Martin Luther King declared, «I have a dream!»

3.1.1. Vindicating the ideologies

Because of its abstract, indeterminate character, utopian expression runs the risk of «standardizing» eschatologies. When that happens, we need to employ ideology as the political formulation of utopia.

All political stances present themselves as defenders of universal principles. Political projects quite opposed to one another may abstractly agree, for example, about defending human rights (which, to be sure, is another eschatology affected by anemia). Those on both right and left may profess to defend the same values of freedom, justice, and solidarity. It is only by exploring more deeply into their ideological expression that we can discover the wolves that hide behind the sheep's clothing.

Ideology helps to bring down to earth in public debate an eschatological metaphysics that is necessarily abstract. As the Argentine philosopher Mario Bunge states, ideology is the part of a broader worldview that

is concerned with social matters.⁸ The current confrontation with the dominant neoliberal thought makes it urgently necessary to recover and reformulate ideologies.

It is especially noteworthy that political parties use the term «ideology» as a political football. To accuse others of making «ideological» proposals is a reproach frequently used in the political arena to invalidate an adversary's arguments. In reality, however, the only way of revealing the cards hidden in the sleeve of any political proposal is by examining its ideological expression.

We should not ignore the fact that ideology may lose its eschatological tension and degenerate into ideologization. There is always the danger that ideology will respond to the manipulative discourse of the ruling classes, as Marx warned. Despite the need for precaution, we claim that the ideological rearmament of politics is necessary as a means for discerning its true aims. The ideology that inspire neoliberalism is individualist, elitist, and authoritarian, while the ideology that inspires the social democrats is systemic, inclusive, and democratic. Which direction will be taken by politics that has renounced ideology? How can we decide about social practices if we are unable to provide an ideological formulation for our goals?

For the Marxist philosopher Ernest Bloch, what remains of past ideologies and worldviews is precisely what was utopian in them, what they possessed that pointed toward the future. Beyond semantic questions, what vindicates ideologies is their affirmation of the utopias of political discourse.

3.2. Maintaining hope: leadership and management

Reality and hope use the same account books. Reality implacably records in the social «assets» column the ever widening gap between rich and poor, the children whose hunger never ceases, the child soldiers snatched from their families. Hope records in the social «debit» column the end of hunger, the right to free and universal education for children, and equality of opportunity for all. The obviously lopsided imbalance requires the faith of hoping against all hope, whether on an anthropological or a religious level.

In the face of the voracious termites of the present that seem determined to devour any alternative future, politics and religion need to develop structures of resistance that encourage the kind of leadership that marks out the Promised Land as the final goal and provides careful organization of the stages of the suffocating desert journey.

The sociologist and theologian Gerald A. Arbuckle⁹ emphasizes the ways in which biblical wisdom was concerned with creating the conditions necessary for maintaining both good organization and utopia. In his analysis of the Exodus narrative, he shows how Moses' father-in-law Jethro became aware that Moses was becoming more concerned about organizational matters than about keeping the people's hopes alive: «You will surely wear out, both you and these people who are with you, for this is too heavy a burden for you; you are not able to do it by yourself. You are to be a representative for the people to God, and you bring their disputes to God; warn

them of the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do» (Exod 18,18-20). Jethro then counseled Moses to allow the people to choose some God-fearing men to take care of day-to-day matters: «Put them over the people as rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. If you do this thing, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will be able to go home satisfied» (Exod 18:21-23). A similar decision is narrated centuries later in the Acts of the Apostles, when the first Christian community chose deacons to minister to the needs of the widows (cf. Acts 6,1-4). Relieved of that organizational responsibility, the apostles could attend more effectively to their principal task: prayer and proclamation of the Good News.

Whenever politics keeps people forever busy and deprives them of hope-inspiring leaders like Moses, it condemns them to remain forever in Egypt.

At the height of the huge public-health demonstrations in Madrid, called the «white tides,» Javier Fernández-Lasquetty, who was then in charge of healthcare for the city, challenged the health workers of Madrid to draw up a viable plan that would improve on his own proposal to privatize hospitals and other health services. But asking the workers to be planners and managers was like asking Moses to discard the staff that had helped him lead the people through the desert and to busy himself with the scales for weighing manna. By making managerial reason the only possible way to solve problems, Fernández-Lasquetty was trying

to neutralize the dream of free universal health care, a dream that had once been a reality.

3.3. The roots of the dreams

Up to this point we have not been making much distinction between the terms «dream,» «utopia,» «project,» and «promise,» but from a biblical perspective there are enormous differences between divine promises and human dreams. The most evident difference is the source of each: the promise always comes God, while dreams can also come from human persons. But there is another, more subtle difference that usually goes unnoticed; it is related to the «interests» that nourish dreams and promises. Hidden behind every political eschatology are more or less conscious purposes, and often they are more or less perverse. Not all political dreams are rooted in seeking the common good.

Once its romantic halo is removed, Kennedy's «moon dream» was responding to strategic interests of the cold-war period; it was concerned with the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. The recorded conversations between the U.S. president and NASA administrator James Webb reveal that the main interest of the president was not reaching the moon but getting there before the Russians: «If we reach the moon second, that's fine, but we will always be second. ... I am not interested in space, just in the battle against the Russians.»

Biblical eschatology is not naïve; it does not go running after just any utopia. It knows about false prophets,

charlatans who recount visions of their own devising and not from the mouth of the Lord (Jer 23,16); they are like the prophets of Baal who tell the king what he wants to hear (1Kgs 22,13) or like the false messiahs who lead the people astray (Matt 24,24).

Schooled in the hermeneutics of suspicion, the Bible alerts us to the covert agendas of prophets and messiahs who, taking advantage of the turmoil of a world in crisis, propose eschatologies linked to their bank accounts. Without passing moral judgment on persons, we have serious questions about the «altruistic» messianism of Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook, and his crusade to grant free access to the internet to billions of persons in the most impoverished countries. Fortunately, Jon Fredrik Baksaas, a consultant for the Norwegian company Telenor and an associate of Zuckerberg, reveals in the letters that his boss hides: «It is expensive to provide this connection, but without such proposals we'll be left out of new future businesses. The vision of the future is *to create new clients* who don't know how much the internet can bring them.»

We should be alert to the talk in conferences and congresses about the «educational challenges of the new millennium.» They often recommend heavy technological investment in schools in order to meet the new demands of the digital world, but such recommendations are usually promoted by companies whose main interest is the sale of computer equipment. No less suspect is the fact the evaluations of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which de-

termine educational policies in many countries, are sponsored by an economic body, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). When the economic sector is dictating school curricula, we do well to ask about the hidden intentions of politics and eschatologies.

We don't want to lapse into an outmoded Luddite mentality¹⁰ and call for the destruction of technology. (It was the Luddites who in the 19th century rebelled against industrialization by destroying mechanical looms and threshers.) We simply want to warn people about the eschatological fallacy that lies behind our generation's idolatrous worship of technology. We need only observe the work of late-model drones in present military conflicts to conclude that not all technical progress is necessarily humanizing.

3.3.1. *The fate of orphans and widows*

The spurious interests that influence political decisions are highly heterogeneous, but the whole of biblical history is driven by a single divine interest: concern for the fate of orphans and widows. The divine dreams of Moses and Jesus draw their inspiration from the same source: a God who frees us from slavery, hunger, blindness, and exclusion.

The persistence of God's interest in the conditions of the most disadvantaged people needs to be translated into the realm of secular politics: what is the suffering to which the dream of globalization responds? what ills are remedied by the European political dream? does the dream of the welfare state help the very poorest? Paraphras-

ing Epicurus, who declared futile all the words of philosophers that didn't assuage some pain, we affirm that all politics that does not respond to the suffering of the most vulnerable is equally useless. We share Jon Sobrino's indignation at a democracy that fails to put the poor at the center of either its politics or its utopias:

«[...] Even if we accept the values of democracy and minimize its limitations, hypocrisies, and also its crimes (above all those committed by democratic governments against Third World peoples both within their borders and beyond), we recognize that democracy does not make the poor the center of its reality or even the focus of its utopias. When the ideal of human rights was formulated two centuries ago, it had in mind English freemen, white men in Virginia, and the French bourgeois, but it excluded many others, including their compatriots –such as the English and French farmers or the American Blacks and the slaves– though it did not deny that they were 'human beings.' At the center was always the 'citizen,' and things have not changed completely since then. People are unequal already at birth. We therefore need to formulate a contrary thesis that is decidedly partial: 'human rights are the rights of the poor.' And from this we conclude that the Church (and politics as well, we would add) not only must help the poor but it must consciously place them at the center of reality. It is not enough just to cite the ideal of the common good.»¹¹

3.3.2. «Situated» eschatology

Biblical eschatology is not generic; it does not proclaim so diffuse an ideal as a «fraternal, just, and egalitarian society.» Rather, it announces a land flowing with milk and honey, and it promises it to concrete people suffering under the slavery of Egypt. It declares blessed those who are *now* suffering poverty, those who are *now* experiencing hunger, and those who *are* now mourning (Luke 6,20-21). The promises of God always involve liberation from concrete suffering.

The eschatological metaphor of a great universal banquet to which all humanity is called finds concrete form in Jesus' invitation of the poor, the wounded, the blind, and the lame to his table. When he proclaimed that publicans and prostitutes would among the first to enter the Kingdom of God (Matt 21,22), he was simply reaffirming an eschatological scenario with a dialectical formulation: heaven is the place for those who are denied any place by society. It is therefore impossible to think of Christian salvation apart from concrete suffering.

Christian eschatology is «soiled» with the mud of the crucified peoples of history. Eschatological discourse about «the last times» is dialectically related to the fate of «the least and the last.» This difficult dialectic is one that systematic theologies and neutral political theories tend to minimize and obscure.

Jon Sobrino has made a fresh attempt to vindicate the need for a dialectical approach to the reality of the impoverished, as opposed to the bland discourse we now hear: «Today great

stress is laid on things like dialogue, negotiation, and tolerance, while anything like confrontation is so avidly avoided that it would seem that the poor have fallen from heaven (or considering the horrors of this world, it would be better to say that they had risen from hell) and that problems will be solved by some invisible hand that will overcome the greed of the powerful and soften the injustice, falsehood, and violence built into society. Instead, there is a tendency to avoidance. In such a situation, we must remember the basic biblical and historical truth so correctly proclaimed at Medellín and Puebla: 'There are rich people because there are poor people, and there are poor people because there are rich people.'»¹²

Walter Brueggemann claims that empires prefer theologians (and politicians, we would add) who see reality and all its diverse parts as a systematic whole, and who consider polemics as unworthy of God and as the cause of dissensions opposed to the common good.¹³

When theology distances itself from the places of suffering, it ends up hollowing out hope and making what was announced as a journey of liberation into a code of imperial conduct. And when politics distances itself from the contexts of exclusion, it elaborates elitist eschatologies that busy themselves with maintaining a welfare state for the few.

Post-modernity is mistaken when it seeks to resolve its existential anxiety with the Christian religion. Christianity's main concern is not with finitude or nihilism but with injustice and the suffering of the innocent.

3.4. The «cosmic» scandal of bare feet

The task of politics is broader than concern for the living conditions of the very poor; politics is also concerned with military, financial, educational, international, and other kinds of issues. Even the fiercest capitalist system has its ministry of social affairs to provide assistance for the most disadvantaged.

Secular politics can coexist with the «inevitable» quota of social exclusion that every system produces, but «biblical politics» cannot. In biblical politics the existence of even a single poor person who is sold in exchange for a pair of sandals (Amos 2,6) is an indictment of the whole imperial structure. It is a scandal of such proportions that it threatens global stability.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel wondered about the disproportionate indignation of the prophets: what difference would it make if in some part of ancient Palestine the rich failed to treat the poor well? In reality, the «crimes» denounced by the biblical prophets did not exceed what we would consider «normal» in any part of the world. What society does not have its share of poor people, scorned outcasts, corrupt politicians, or unjust judges? Was it not excessive, incongruous, and absurd that because of some trivial acts of injustice committed against some insignificant and impotent poor person, the glorious city of Jerusalem should be threatened with destruction and the whole nation with exile?¹⁴

«Biblical politics» is not impartial; it takes the side of the least and the last; it demands that society be organized in such a way that primary attention

is given to the needs and demands of the most vulnerable. This has been the great «sin of omission» of leftist politics: dismissing poverty as merely the side-effect of unquestioned social progress and promoting mainly the emancipatory demands of satisfied citizens. This is what González Faus seems to be pointing out when he distinguishes between an «economic left» –committed to defending the basic rights of human beings to decent food, housing, health, and education– and a «cultural left» concerned about satisfying people's individual desires.¹⁵

In «developed societies» people become indignant because they have to wait in line in the waiting room of a public health clinic, forgetting that, according to the World Health Organization, two billion people in the developing countries lack access to essential medicines. A few decades ago Margaret Thatcher complained about the National Health Service of Great Britain, which she thought would be improved by privatization: «I want to choose the doctor I want, when I want.»¹⁶ It is easy to issue demagogical criticisms, but it seems undeniable that First World politics has abandoned the cause of the most vulnerable in order to defend the privileges of the elites.

We have seen the encouraging rise of citizen campaigns demanding a halt to housing foreclosures, asking for public subsidies for treatment of hepatitis-C, collecting funds for research on «rare diseases,» or denouncing the attack on the «hot return» of foreigners who succeed in crossing borders. Such campaigns clearly indicate that civil society must organize politically since its «professional politicians»

have stopped worrying about the needs of the «shoeless folk» who trod their streets.

3.4.1. *The «always» of the poor*

Perhaps one of the most frustrating texts of the New Testament is the one where Jesus predicts that the poor will last as long as history: «The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me» (Mark 14,7). Without going into exegesis that would distract us from our main purpose, we can consider this prophecy as a simple description: in the long history of humanity there have always been poor people and there always will be. The «always» of the poor thus becomes a hard question running through all of history, a dynamism of crucifixion that changes forms but confronts every society.

The historical presence of the cross is the *ultimate reality* to which all politics and all theologies must respond.

Will the Kingdom of God come as the culmination of historical progress, or will it occur as an alternative that ruptures such progress? Is it enough to keep making «small adjustments» that help toward the coming of a new heaven and a new earth where there will no longer be death, mourning, or pain (Rev 21,1-4), or must we work for a radical change of structures? Without the sting of any kind of suffering, these are questions that allow of every possible type of answer. However, from the perspective of a theology and a politics concerned about the causes of the excluded, there can be no equivocation about what answer is required: «another world is necessary, here and now!»

Only those who on earth enjoy a life without problems can afford to «wait for heaven.»

3.5. God, Lord of (transformable) history

Creator, Lord of hosts, Liberator, Judge, God incarnate. As the Bible sees it, God is acting continually in history: God is the Lord of history.

The sovereignty of God is often used as a theological argument in favor of his omnipotence, but there is another, no less important argument that derives from the divine power that intervenes and alters history: history is transformable, not predetermined. Divine lordship opens up unsuspected paths for history. As Ignacio Ellacuría puts it, if we could not conceive of God intervening in history, then «we would not be able to conceive of God as the full, rich, free, mysterious yet close, scandalous yet hope-inspiring Being that he is. Instead, he would be conceived as the motor that drives natural cycles, the paradigm of eternal sameness. He might have an ‘after’ but not an open future, and in that sense he would not be the impeller or the goal of a necessary evolution. Moses approaches Yahweh and the actions of Yahweh not to maintain the existing situation but to break with the process, and it is that breaking with the process that makes present in history something that is more than history. Nature can be ever more closely scrutinized both in its far distant past and in its elemental depths, but that nature is already given and its evolution is basically fixed, while history is the field of novelty and

creativity, but also a field where God can reveal himself 'more fully' only by effectively making 'more' history. And this will be a greater and a better history than that which has existed until now.»¹⁷

The miracles related throughout the length and breadth of the Bible reaffirm this thesis that reality is transformable. Giving sight to the blind and speech to the mute, feeding the hungry multitude, curing lepers, and driving out unclean spirits are actions that break with the social predestination of persons suffering those evils that condemn them to banishment. They are proof that tomorrow does not have to be an inevitable continuation of today.

3.5.1. *Eschatopraxis*

Biblical politics may be defined as eschatopraxis. The biblical miracles are an anticipation in the historical «here and now» of the future promise that will be completely realized at the end of time. They are actions situated on the eschatological horizon of the Kingdom of God. They make it present by anticipation, and they reveal its full possibility.

Eschatopraxis does not seek to create an already defined future. It is not a question of conforming «here on earth» to a perfectly delineated divine order «there in heaven.» Nor is it reduced to making a report on the final evolutionary state of a natural process. It is not simply a seed planted in good soil which finally produces the fruits that it contains in potency. Eschatopraxis seeks to create the conditions of possibility that will allow the birth of a new historical reality. This is one of the great teachings

that religion can offer any politics that wants eschatological reinforcement: politics needs to plan actions that seek to «anticipate the future.»

In his dialogue with Bloch, German theologian Jürgen Moltmann distinguished between *futurum* and *adventus*. *Futurum* refers to what will come to be in a natural process of historical development; it is a future that is calculable and predictable. *Adventus* implies a historical break that allows for the emergence of a new reality that did not exist before. Biblical politics is fully aware of how slow the process of historical genesis is, but its configuration clearly comes from the *novum* of an anticipated future.¹⁸

3.5.2. *Beyond predestination*

Although it is possible to find Christian foundations for the idea of progress as predestination (it was Saint Augustine who fused the Greek idea of growth or development with the Jewish idea of a sacred history), it is also true that biblical eschatology, in presenting God as capable of transforming history, breaks with a mechanistic conception of history. In the Bible we continually meet up with a newness that calls into question the «natural laws» that supposedly direct historical progress. Thus we find in the Bible the newness of offspring born of sterile couples, the child who defeats a fierce giant with only a slingshot, flowers that bloom in the desert, and Jesus risen from the dead.

For believers, history is not predetermined. Since God intervenes in history, they have hope that God will bring his creation safely home. I deliberately use the term «hope» (*Hoff-*

nung) and not «waiting» (*Erwartung*) because, in contrast to the passivity implied in the latter, hope is conceived as active expectation. The master arrives suddenly and expects to find the faithful and prudent servant providing his household with food in due season (Matt 24,45); the bridegroom expects to be received by vigilant handmaids with their lamps brightly lit; the lord will return and ask his servants to render accounts of how they have used his wealth (Matt 25:1-30).

If history is not predetermined and can take whatever direction God and human beings want to give it, then politics takes on a transcendent eschatological responsibility. Christians aspire to make their political action contribute in some way to the historical coming of God's Kingdom. We deliberately avoid the theological dilemma of opposing faith to works. (For Protestant theology the affirmation that it is possible to «construct» God's Kingdom is at the very least an aberration; according to Luther, «God will do it all for us»). We also distance ourselves from the debate between «realized eschatology» (according to which the Kingdom is already present and does not substantially differ what is to be hoped for from the future) and «consequent eschatology» (which places the future of God's Kingdom's outside of history). Our position attempts to integrate both aspects; it is well represented by the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes. All the gospels agree that, in order to work this miracle of feeding the hungry multitude, Jesus first asked his disciples to share what they already had (five loaves and two fishes). In this way human solidarity

became an integral component of the supernatural action that was able to feed five thousand men. Similarly, the «political» action of Moses was inscribed within the liberation action of God. The «horizontal» mysticism inspired by Ignatius Loyola has coined a fortunate expression to describe the «collaboration» between God and human beings: «Work as if everything depends on you, even though you know that in reality everything depends on God.»

The conception that history is not predetermined but can be oriented toward yet unknown futures is also shared by many secular eschatologies. In *The Principle of Hope* the atheist philosopher Ernst Bloch expresses the same idea: «Life is as little concluded as is the self that works in this 'outer world.' There would be no possibility of refashioning a thing according to desire if the world were closed and made up only of fixed, consummated facts. Instead of that there are simply processes. ... Within process all that is real is transposed to the realm of the possible.»¹⁹

3.5.3. «Forcing» history

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul speaks of how the whole of Creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth in the hope of sharing fully in the glory of God (Rom 8,18-25). The image of a painful birth is a good metaphor for describing the enormous difficulties that must be overcome by the historical realities now seeking to come to the light.

The end of apartheid, women's suffrage, and the eight-hour workday are «secular miracles» that show the pos-

sibility of the historical *novum*. «Social miracles» are not novelties that fall from heaven but are the result of bold efforts to «force» reality in the direction indicated by the eschatological dream.

The irruption of historical novelty arises out of the struggle against the inertias that seek to maintain the present status quo. The still unfinished conquest of human rights is a clear example of how the «eschatological» affirmation of the common horizon of human dignity must continue to battle

against the social forces which join together to prevent its existence.

For Javier Muguerza, «dissent» is the term that best defines the process by which new social realities are incorporated into the ambit of already recognized rights: dissident groups question a social and juridical order that does not recognize them as subjects of rights, and they undertake a struggle to change that reality.²⁰ There is good reason to distrust the «eschatological quality» of political proposals that meet with no social resistance.

4. WHAT REALITY GIVES OF ITSELF

That God can with his power intervene in history and transform it is an affirmation of faith that, as we have seen, is endorsed by the Bible in countless ways. However, apart from divine interventions, without necessarily excluding them, what most interests us in this regard is discerning what political actions are susceptible to anticipating this eschatological *novum* that is not predetermined. Or more concretely: how can we anticipate the «other possible world» that we so long for?

This question is a transcendent one that does not admit of simple or hurried answers (it's too easy to resort to revolutionary pamphlets and guerrilla tactics). In our judgment, forging an alternative reality requires the elaboration of a new political paradigm which 1) develops the «myth of progress» beyond the concept of modernization; 2) critically assesses the *eschaton* of globalization from the perspective of the world's multicultural reality; and 3) fuses *polis* and *domus* in a single horizon that integrates justice and caring.

In Ignacio Ellacuría's philosophy of «historical reality» we find an ex-

planatory framework that offers many possibilities for creating a new political paradigm that unifies praxis and transcendence. For Ellacuría, «historical reality» encompasses all other forms of reality (material, biological, personal, and social); it is the realm in which all those realities «give more than themselves.» In historical reality we are given not only the highest form of reality but also the open field of the maximum possibilities of the real.²¹ Only if reality can «give more than itself» is it possible to contemplate an eschatologically inspired politics that is capable of inaugurating totally original futures.

4.1. Beyond progress. The future as empowerment

The history of Western culture is the history of the culture of progress. *Homo habilis, homo ergaster, homo erectus, homo neanderthalensis, homo sapiens, «homo digitalis,»...* Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, «Silicon Age,»... Tribal societies, slave societies, theocratic societies, egalitarian societies, democratic societies, «global» societies, ... The story of history is one of progress. Human beings and human societies evolve upwardly toward a better future for all. We live better than our parents lived, just as they lived better than their parents did.

A new political conception of progress is needed, and it must do more than renew the conception that has prevailed until now, which is nothing more than the Aristotelian paradigm of moving from potency to act. According to Zubiri, this is the way that modernity has thought of history: it is simply the unfolding of potencies that the human race has possessed since the beginning of time. In this deterministic conception, history remains a prisoner of that which nature or matter or spirit—depending on the philosophy being followed—already had in potency at the beginning of time and which simply passed into act thanks to historical processes.²²

Instead of this accumulative, deterministic conception of historical evolution, Ignacio Ellacuría proposes a vision in which history is conceived not only as the *factum* of what exists—a totally determined given—but as the *faciendum* in which praxis allows a whole new reality to come to light.

The truth of reality is not what is already «done»; that is only a part of reality. We must also observe what is being done and become aware of what is yet to be done in order to understand the complex role played by historical praxis in the transformation of reality. «History should not be understood as continuous progress whose final goal is the ideal *topos*, because that would place the meaning of history outside history itself. History is not predictable, nor is it fatalistically determined to move in just one direction. History is produced, it is created, through human transformative activity. That is why Ellacuría, along with Zubiri, criticizes the conceptions of history that understand it as a process of maturation or unveiling.»²³

The real is not identical to the now existing. In the future, possibilities can come to exist that do not now exist. The real includes both what now exists and what is possible. The historical dynamic is a process of enabling and empowering by virtue of which reality is continually shaped and transformed. Human history is simply the successive creation of new possibilities along with the elimination or marginalization of others: «There is a back-and-forth play between what things can offer to human beings of themselves and what human beings can draw out of things as possibilities. This is most definitely the kind of play that characterizes history: we never completely discover the systematic set of possibilities that human beings and things are capable of bringing to light, depending on the situation in which humans and things relate to one another; only when history comes to an end will all the real possi-

bilities have been exhausted, and only then will the full truth of human reality be known. And this will be so only as a matter of fact because it could happen that, on the path by which possibilities are realized and brought to light, some of the best possibilities will have been irretrievably abandoned.»²⁴

History –the historical reality– is not predicted but produced; it is created when humans act according to the system of possibilities offered in each situation and at each moment of the historical process.

Nobel economic prize winner Amartya Sen also uses the category «ability» to refer to progress. According to Sen, politics should not be judged only in terms of increased material goods; it should also be judged by its ability to generate conditions which allow every person to transform their rights into actual freedoms.

This «capacitating» progress must always be related to the material conditions of the disadvantaged majorities if it is not to be confused with the demand for privileges for the elites. Simply defending the expansion of freedoms, without achieving fair distribution of access to the conditions needed for their exercise, benefits only those who are already best off. «The true struggle for freedom requires the transformation of the actual situations that most impede or obstruct the social, political, and economic freedom of the great majority of the people.»²⁵

4.1.1. Social «anomalies»

If historical newness is not determined by the predestination of natural law, where and how will we be able to per-

ceive the real possibilities that have still not become actual?

We were anticipating the answer to this question when we spoke above about Creation undergoing the pains of childbirth, in which new social realities are struggling to come to birth. The seed of the historical *novum* must be sought in the social *anomalies* that disrupt the inertia of established society. In his reflections on the model of university desired by Ellacuría, Hugh Lacey encouraged universities to initiate research on the present-day *anomalies* that could possibly be sources of social possibilities of the future. In the Latin American context, the Ecclesial Base Communities and the «people's organizations» were proposed as examples of *anomalous* alternative practices capable of engendering future realities.²⁶

There are many examples of new initiatives: cooperatives for ecologically-minded consumers, collective financing alternatives (such as crowd-funding), help for people whose homes are repossessed, time banks, fiscal objection, the «slow» movement, downward growth, free distribution of software and cultural works through «copyleft» licenses, ethical banks, platforms for welcoming immigrants, etc. –these are just some of the thousands of small cracks in the wall of fatalism. They are social *anomalies* that are by no means just anecdotal or accidental; rather they constitute the testing ground for realities that anticipate the future.

It is vitally important to reaffirm the transcendent value of small collective and/or domestic actions. When thousands of persons unite together

in a non-profit cooperative in order to supply themselves with renewable electric energy, or when a neighborhood association decides to promote activities for the benefit of the local youth, they are showing how reality «gives of itself,» going beyond the inhospitable paths predetermined by univocal progress.

The historical *novum* germinates in and grows out of these social *anomalies*, as insignificant as they may appear. We do well to remember that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds that a man sows in his field (Matt 13,31-32).

The social *anomaly* that is the foundation for all others is the constant historical presence of the «crucified peoples.» The «always» of the exclusion to which we have already referred is an unmistakable sign that the historical present has still not created the «capacitating» structures that allow all persons to have access to a freely chosen life.

The *undeniable reality* of oppression does not appear simply as something to be eradicated, as if poverty were just another problem to solve. Rather, the oppression itself is where the truth of the historical process is discovered and where, «by reason of the victim that is denied, steps can be taken toward a new life with attributes of creation.»²⁷ It is on that reverse side of history, alongside those excluded from predatory progress, that hope and liberation can be found. In the «Hegelian» history that advances toward a *telos* of perfection, there are always facts that do not fit with the system, a sort of «historical debris» that must either be ignored or included as an ex-

ception. This debris, says Paul Ricoeur, «is what history really is.»²⁸

4.2. Beyond «globalitarianism»

It is not altogether true that the liquid modernity in which we now flounder is totally devoid of eschatology. Although I spoke at the beginning of a directionless, disoriented society, there does exist one horizon that has de facto imposed itself as an unquestionable social *telos*. I am referring to the *eschaton* of «globalization.» We do not know what the future will bring us, but what no one seems to doubt is that the future will either be «global» or it will not be at all. Globalization thus appears to be an incontestable dogma, and there is relentless persecution of the heretics who question its virtues and demand reinforcement of national states and recognition of the importance of localities.

Our own reflection on eschatology and politics must necessarily confront the dogma of globalization in order to discern what it holds in store for the impoverished masses. Such discernment should begin by distinguishing between «globalization» and «globalitarianism.» Globalization is a fact; globalitarianism is an ideology. It is an undeniable reality that we live in a global economy in which merchandise moves freely from one end of the world to the other. Unification of the planet is an unquestionable *eschaton* to which all humankind aspires. That is an eschatology in which we are interested.

The ideological use of the term «globalization» is associated with the

idea of universal salvation, which envisions the globalized world as per se homogeneous, harmonious, inclusive, and egalitarian. «What the term ‘globalization’ explicitly suggests is that we live in a world that is on its way to perfection: beauty is the perfect roundness in which all the points on the surface of the globe are equidistant from its center. Such a globalized world is preached as the eschatological good news for which all peoples have longed since ancient times. And now it is being preached with even better arguments and with greater possibilities than those put forward by Fukuyama in his theory of the ‘end of history.’»²⁹ It is not necessary to demonize the globalizing phenomenon to be aware of its ambiguities. The globalizing eschatology is expressed primarily in terms of the novissima of market, privatization, competitiveness, deregulation, and free trade. The constant papal calls to «globalize solidarity» seeks to redirect development which, left to its own devices, does not lead to the best of possible worlds.

4.2.1. Globalization keeps its distance from concrete suffering

For María José Fariñas, globalization as the one and only social horizon is a myth built around corporate interests and designed to ignore the needs of the very poor. In her view, «globalization is pan-economistic, monocultural ideology at the service of a particular group; it is inaugurating a new, ever more intense process of hegemonic domination or colonization on a planetary scale. [...] The present processes of globalization of the economy and finance are

in reality a war of liberation on behalf of capital, which will inevitably lead to a new dictatorship of the global market. Such processes are a direct attack on the social and cultural structures of modern democracies that try to promote solidarity and equality.»³⁰

Given the de-localization inherent in the globalizing process, there is an enormous danger that social institutions will be divorced from the real life of individuals and, what is worse, from the concrete suffering of the most disadvantaged. Such an unlinking has already occurred in the economic sphere: global financial transactions can now be carried out with «virtual money» that is not connected to particular times or places –or even to particular persons. Public debt is bought and sold between countries, multinational corporations change the location of their factories solely in view of economic profitability, businesses set up their headquarters in nations with the lowest taxes, the «right to contaminate» can be bought and sold (a ton of CO₂ is now worth 17 Euros), and countries like Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, India, and South Korea are engaging in the new phenomenon of agro-colonialism by buying up fifty million hectares of cultivable land on the African continent.

The global financial economies function independently of the real economies of countries, peoples, and individuals, thus creating an ethical rupture that frees markets of any responsibility for the social consequences of their actions. By allowing free circulation of capital and goods but closing borders to human beings who have to risk their lives on fragile boats,

globalization does not open the way to true progress.

But the struggle to eliminate cruel immigration laws continues; many people are criticizing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Pact (TTIP), which will promote globalization with more capitalism and fewer rights; people are engaging in a bartering alternatives that connect the economy with the real value of things; and there is more consumption of seasonal products produced by local farmers. These are all «other world» *anomalies* that seek to link the various types of progress to the real lives of people.

4.2.2. Globalization as homogenizing progress

I ended the previous paragraph speaking specifically of «types of progress» in the plural because I wanted to criticize the idea of one exclusive type of progress that homogenizes everything. Behind the myth of globalization is hidden a kind of development that imposes a uniform model of Western life as ideal for all cultures.

Rejecting such ethnocentrism, we defend multiculturalism and a multiplicity of ways for different localities to develop. The «historical reality» of Ellacuría opposes the «enlightened» visions of history in which universality is achieved by measuring all peoples and nations on a hypothetical scale of lesser or greater development whose vanguard is found in the Western nations. Ellacuría proposes a systemic vision which has room for diverse models of development and allows for a true sense of corporate identity or universal society.³¹

There is no universal law that says that there is only one model of development and that everyone must use that model. Progress is not univocal, nor is it necessarily globalizing. We must break with the idea of «developing countries» that are traveling as the caboose of the «developed countries.» Opposed to the mechanistic and causal conception of progress there is a vision of systemic growth that allows us to speak of types of development that are simultaneous but not necessarily convergent.

4.3. The politics of care

In the ancient Greco-Roman world there were two great realms of experience, the domestic (the *oikos* or *domus*) and the political (the *polis*). Private life and public life were seen as two complementary anthropological spheres, but our modern age has made them antagonistic: in the private sphere one pursues individual, personal goals that are totally independent of the common, general sphere and therefore independent of values and functions of a collective nature.

A new conception of politics seeks to restore the complementarity of *polis* and *domus*. When I have spoken of social *anomalies* as actions that make alternative futures possible, I have intentionally mixed public actions (opposing immigration law) and domestic actions (consuming locally produced products) because I maintain that politics must include both spheres. Politics should not be relegated exclusively to the realm of public institutions and professional politicians. Our ways of consuming, of relating to one another,

of dealing with the world of labor, etc., have more political relevance than we usually grant them.

Apart from the public repercussions of our private decisions, the effort to unite *polis* and *domus* is intimately related to the urgent need to reconcile «social contract» and «fraternity» in political discourse and practice. Providing for the common good cannot be separated from the «domestic» needs of food, shelter, education, and affection. Politics that understands itself exclusively in terms of the exercise of power does not respond either to the demands or the needs of a citizenry that is defined «politically» by their participation in collective and private spheres.

Following Lucía Ramón, we believe that it is vital to create a new politics that unites justice, care, and social transformation.³² We need to find eschatologies and politics that are capable of putting care for the weakest at the center of our concerns. We are not talking about making concessions to the sentimentalism of a society with a guilty conscience. The kind of care we are concerned about does not derive from facile criticism of a «heartless politics» but from the ethical demand for a «politics with a future,» molded by the social *anomalies* of the most disadvantaged.

Without care there is no future! That is the warning that the ecological movements have been proclaiming for decades in the desert of globalization. This warning is based not only on the argument of sustainability (which is ultimately still a utilitarian consideration) but on the affirmation of absolute ends—life, beauty, biodiversity— which

must be preserved above all other interests.

4.3.1. Kingdom of God: *polis* and *domus*

The political project of Jesus affects both *polis* and *domus*. Scripture scholars agree that the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus was concerned with the sphere of political religion (in the Aristotelian sense of the common good) and that the gradual institutionalization of Christianity shifted the Kingdom from the political context to the domestic one. «To the extent that the Christian movement spread through the empire and included more and more pagans, it renounced its immediate aim of influencing public policy and restricted itself to the households which were the basic structure of that society.»³³ This was a historical evolution that failed to understand that the metaphors and actions with which Jesus announced his Kingdom did not separate the political and the domestic spheres. Thus, apocalyptic images of the radical transformation of the world, amid the roar of battle and rumors of war (Matt 24,5), exist alongside parables about a father who forgives his wayward son, a shepherd who cares for his flock, a farmer who plants a seed, and a woman who finds a lost coin. This fusion of horizons, which is what makes Jesus' «political» proclamation of the definitive reign of God over history so original, has more to do with the tender relations of a Father-Mother concerned for the weakest children than with an army of angels that changes the course of the world by the might of a sword (Matt 26,53). «The *oikos*, the guaranteed existence

of a nucleus of human family and minimal living conditions, is the utopia of the poor.»³⁴

4.4. New realities, new eschatologies, new politics

Globalization, ecology, feminism, genetic therapy, digital gap, bio-energy, religious pluralism, information society –these are only some of the new social realities and sensibilities that are searching for a new political practice and a new eschatological discourse.

As historian of science Thomas S. Kuhn understood, a change in scientific paradigm requires new epistemological discourse to explain the «anomalies» that earlier scientific models can no longer justify.

We are immersed in a change of epoch in which a new paradigm that is still under construction requires us to reformulate politics and eschatologies. Ideologies of the «right» and the «left» are no longer able to give satisfactory answers to the new social «anomalies» that keep emerging.

Politics and theology must take on the challenge of rethinking reality in terms of the new paradigm if they don't want to be relegated to archeological discourse. The challenge is not just to understand what is happening but to engage in eschatological praxis as we build the world we want to happen. That history is progressing is evident. Whether it progresses in ways that will help the poor depends, among other things, on our politics and our eschatologies.

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SOME QUESTIONS TO REFLECTION

1. What would the new eschatology and the new politics that the author calls for actually be like?
2. In the description which follows can you identify factors that drive both our personal and our social behaviour?
3. What alternatives to the neutralisation of hope do you think it is possible to find on the personal and on the social level?
4. How can one defend the transcendent value of small-scale collective or domestic actions? Is the Kingdom of Heaven like a grain of mustard seed in fact?
5. When you come to decide who our representatives should be, do you take into account who offers a new kind of politics combining justice, compassion, and social transformation?
6. How would you sum up the main things you have learnt from this booklet?

Cristianisme i Justícia (Lluís Espinal Foundation) is a Study Centre under the initiative of the Society of Jesus in Catalonia. It consists of a team of university professors and experts in theology and different social and human sciences, who are concerned with the increasingly important cultural interrelations between faith and justice.

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N. 162, December 2016

Cristianisme i Justícia

Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona
 +34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com
www.cristianismejusticia.net



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