

## **"STOP THE WHEEL BY BLOCKING THEIR SPOKES"**

I was thinking about my 2008 circular when, like a biblical river of milk and honey, I was invaded by a veritable flood of messages of solidarity and affection on the occasion of my eightieth birthday. Since I can't respond to each and every one of you, and also because Brother Parkinson has his whims, I am asking you to accept this circular as a personal and profound embrace of renewed gratitude and communion.

I am reading a biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, significantly entitled *Tendríamos que haber gritado* [We should have cried out]. Bonhoeffer, theologian, Lutheran pastor, prophet and martyr, was assassinated by the Nazis in the concentration camp of Flossenburg on April 9, 1945. He denounced the "cheap grace" to which we often reduce our Christian faith. He also pointed out that "whoever has not cried out against Nazism has no right to sing Gregorian chant." Just before his martyrdom, he finally came to this militant conclusion "We have to stop the wheel by blocking their spokes." It wasn't enough to come to the aid, in specific cases, of victims who were crushed in the Nazi system, which, for Bonhoeffer, was the wheel. Nor can acts of patronizing charity and patch-reforms suffice for us today in face of the wheel, which for us is neo-liberal capitalism with its total market spokes: those of profit at any cost, of macro economic and cultural dictatorship, of terrorism of the State, of the new wave of the arms race, of religious fundamentalism of the ecological devastation-suicide of the earth, water, fauna and air.

We cannot remain at the level of astonishment at structured evil, accepting the unjust inequality between people and communities as a question of fate. We cannot just accept the existence of a First World that has everything and a Third World that is dying of starvation. The statistics multiply and we are becoming aware of more dramatic numbers, more inhuman situations. Jean Sieglar, the UN relator for Food who has enormous experience, affirms that "the world order is an assassin since today hunger is no longer inevitable." And he also states that "to devote millions of hectares to the production of biofuels is a crime against humanity." Biofuel cannot be a festival of irresponsible profits. The United Nations is warning us that global warming of the planet is advancing more rapidly than had been thought and that, unless urgent measures are adopted, it will lead to the disappearance of 30% of animal and vegetable species; millions of people will find themselves deprived of water while droughts, fires and flooding will abound. We ask ourselves anxiously who is going to adopt these "urgent means."

The major sources of agricultural capital, with its growing measure of agrobusiness and water-business, are moving into the rural areas, concentrating land and income, expelling rural families and sending them off to wander about without land, without a place to be. They are swelling the violent peripheries of the cities. Dom

Edwin Krautler, the bishop of Xingú and president of CIMI [*Conselho Indigenista Missionário*] points out that "development in the Amazon region has become synonymous with deforestation, burning, clear cutting, and killing." According to Roberto Smeraldi of Friends of the Earth, the contradictory politics of the World Bank "promises to save the trees" on the one hand and on the other "helps to pull down the Amazon region."

Nevertheless, Utopia continues. As Bloch would say, we are "creatures filled with hope" (and encouragement). Hope goes on, like a thirst and like a spring. "We hope against all hope." The recent encyclical of Benedict XVI speaks precisely of hope. (It is unfortunate that in this encyclical the Pope never quotes the Second Vatican Council, not even once. It was the Council that gave us the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Joy and Hope. Let it be said in passing that the Second Vatican Council continues to be loved, denounced, silenced and locked into the past. Who is so afraid of Vatican II?) Faced with the discrediting of politics throughout most of the world, our 2008 Latin American Agenda makes a bid for a new politics. We go so far as to "ask that politics be an exercise in love – a major piece of dreaming." It is a love that is quite realistic, militant, that undermines reactionary structures and institutions, built on the hunger and blood of the poor majorities reduced to serve the shared world domination of a plutocrat minority.

For their part, alternative bodies and projects react by trying to create awareness and to provoke a holy rebellion. The 2009 World Social Forum will take place precisely in the Amazon region of Brazil and will have the Amazon region as one of its main themes. The XII Inter-ecclesial gathering of CEBs [Base Ecclesial Communities] in 2009 will also take place in the Amazon region, in Porto Velho, Rondonia. Our political militancy and our liberating ministry increasingly need take up these major challenges that threaten our planet. "We choose life, then" as the slogan of the 2008 Campaign for Fraternity announces. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us that "all creation is groaning and suffering the pain of giving birth" (Romans 8, 22). The cries of death encounter those of life in this universal birthing.

This is a time of paradigms. Today I believe that the major and most urgent paradigms to be put forward are those of **basic human rights**, **ecology** and intercultural and inter-religious **dialogue** as well as pluralist **living together** among persons and peoples. These four paradigms affect us all because they confront the upheavals, objectives and programs experienced by a mistreated humanity, while remaining nevertheless full of hope.

Stumbling along and filled with ambiguity, Our America is moving toward the left. "New winds are blowing across the continent." We are moving "from resistance to offence." Overjoyed, the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala [*the Latin American equivalent of Turtle Island*], have welcomed the Declaration of the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that affects more than 370 million people in 70 countries of the world. And they are insisting that it be implemented.

While it was not the Pentecost we dreamed of, in Aparecida our Church in Latin America and the Caribbean provided an experience of encounter between bishops and people and it confirmed the main lines that are most characteristic of the Liberation Church: the following of Jesus, the Bible in daily life, the option for the poor, the witness of the martyrs, the communities, an inculturated mission, political commitment.

Sisters and Brothers: what spokes are we going to break in our daily life? How can we help block the wheel of fate? Will we have the right to sing Gregorian chant? Will we know how to incorporate in our lives those four major paradigms by translating them into daily practice?

Please receive a close embrace in subversive hope and in fraternal communion with the Gospel of the Reign of God. We are always moving toward Life.

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**Circular 2008**