

Global Solidarity Under Serious Challenge - And What Can We Do?

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***Abstract:** 30 years after the end of the cold war, the illusion of a growing global solidarity is over. The paper points to five extremely serious challenges making humankind's efforts to establish a global order built on a commitment to democracy, peaceful resolution of conflicts, international cooperation and a global effort to end poverty seem out of reach. These are the challenges: (1) the growing global crisis of democracy, (2) the spread of religiously or ideologically motivated extremism and populism, (3) neo-liberal capitalism which threatens to leave behind half of humankind, (4) the catastrophic consequences of climate change and the breakdown of our natural environment, and (5) artificial intelligence. The paper then asks: how can we, the world, face up to these challenges? What could and should Indonesia do? What do these challenges imply for the witness the followers of Jesus are called upon to give?*

Key-words: global solidarity, serious challenge, international cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

30 years after the end of the cold war, we can even pinpoint this to February 24, 2022, the illusion of a growing global solidarity is over. For many of us, the fact that a big country, without being provoked, attacks another, non-threatening country, was a serious shock. We might remember Francis Fukuyama's "*The End of History and the Last Man*" of 1991 where he argued that, with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, mankind's ideological evolution had come to an end, with liberal democracy becoming the final form of human government. Fukuyama really looks ridiculous now. What makes the cold-blooded Russian aggression against a non-threatening neighbor so terrifying was that people thought that such behavior was over for a civilized country.

But the *mene-tekel-fares* had been long on the wall: Ongoing tensions in Eastern and Southern Europe, the total destabilization of the Middle East with dominant cooperation by the United States, the general political and economic mess in Africa, the only slowly growing awareness that the threatening climate crisis is a real global crisis, also that somebody like Donald Trump could become president of the United States.

FIVE EXTREME CHALLENGES

In this paper I want to point, in a very cursory way, to five extremely serious challenges making humankind's efforts to establish a global order built on a commitment to democracy, peaceful resolution of conflicts, international cooperation and a global effort to end poverty seem out of reach.

The first challenge is *the growing global crisis of democracy*. Democracy is essentially based on a general consensus, the consensus that the social system of the respective society is just and acceptable. Which is in general the case when a constitution is based on the recognition of human rights, particularly on the acceptance of all religious, ethnic and cultural identities. The democratic system is stable if both government and opposition are recognized and everybody can exercise their democratic freedoms.

This democracy is under extreme stress. In India, long a secular state, a big Hindu majority growingly denies equality to Muslims (180 million people) and Christians. In the Middle East, democracy never took hold. Africa is a corrupt and bloody mess. Democracies in Latin America are breaking down. Most worrying, because not really expected, is the growth of populist movement in established Western democracies. When one third of US citizens believe that their last election was stolen, then the basis of democratic tolerance is crumbling. In Germany, parties like the AFD, movements like the *Reichsbürger* or Pegida (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*), re-enforced by islamophobia and hatred for migrants, now an additional 20 percent of the people that are victims of covid-conspiracy-theories (like Cardinal Ludwig Müller): They are no longer in the democratic fold. And then, the great challenge is of course embodied by China: building social coherence not based on respect for human dignity, democracy and freedom, but on stability and economic security. Democracy is in real danger.

The second challenge, felt not only in Indonesia, but being behind the violence in the Middle East and being felt everywhere, is the spread of religiously or ideologically motivated extremism. This is mostly religiously motivated, exclusive ideologies, not afraid of using violence and terrorism.

The third challenge is simply the inability of humankind to abolish hunger and to guarantee every human being on earth a life where her or his human dignity feels respected. How could Karl Marx have been so totally wrong! Marx thought that capitalism would collapse because of its own internal contradictions. But capitalism never looked like collapsing. In parts of the Western democratic world capitalism has been socially tamed by the *Sozialstaat* (social state), becoming a *soziale Marktwirtschaft* (social market economy). But even these countries are said to be on the way to becoming so-called one-third societies where one third of the population - those outside the labor process, the disabled, old people without families - are not longer sure what to eat at the end of the month. In the US, the lower middle class is slowly gliding into poverty. This happens in the most advanced capitalist countries!

The simple problem is that capitalism has no systemic elements to make for equality. In productivity, capitalism has outrun all kind of socialisms, as shown so clearly in China. The problem is much bigger than the growing social inequality in “normal” capitalist countries. There are two problems capitalism structurally cannot solve. First, the splitting of the world into - slowly, or quickly - prospering countries - hopefully Indonesia belongs there - and failed

states. From a capitalist point of view, focus on the lower 50 percent of humankind - and of the lower 30 percent within generally prospering states - does not make sense. It lets them rot. The second problem is that attention to the saving our climate and nature adds to expenses, thus makes no sense from a capitalist point of view.

The fourth challenge are the catastrophic consequences of climate change and the breakdown of our natural environment. We are really in great danger of not achieving a significant part of our identified climate saving policies. I believe that humankind will definitely not take the harsh measures demanded to avoid a climate catastrophe. Thus the catastrophe will come. It will begin to be felt within 20 years. Warming of the atmosphere, rise of the oceans, widespread flooding (with one third of Bangladesh under water and 30 million Bangladeshis trying to enter India which, in the meantime, will have built a wall around Bangladesh with machineguns on top of it every 200 meters; one third of Jakarta, place of three million people, will be under water too). The climatic catastrophe may be quite extreme.

The fifth challenge is the development of artificial intelligence (AI). Yuval Noah Harari predicts in “21 Lessons for the 21st Century” that in 2050 50 (fifty!) percent of the human population will be “irrelevant”. In Indonesia, that could be 140 Million people. It means that what they do, how they live or whether they die, whether they are happy or angry, have something to eat or not, is of no importance to the other 50 percent. The real challenges of AI are - at least - two. The first challenge can be shown by the so called death algorithm. There must be an algorithm that tells a self-driving car that is going to crash whom to kill: the little girl running suddenly into the road in front of the car, or two elderly persons on the pavement or the three passengers within the car if it is crashed into a wall? But deontological ethics of Kant, and also the gospel, do not allow to grade people according to their different values. AI will act according to a utilitarian ethics which does not accept absolute values.

The second, still more fundamental challenge is this: AI will probably take over from humanity. Silicon valley takes over from Washington, Beijing and Moskwa: It will become Hegel’s world spirit as Roberto Simanowski suggests. From acting like a nudging nanny, it will become a benevolent dictator, where there is no appeal - so as Hans Jonas (*The Principle of Responsibility*, 1984) said already 40 years ago that such a dictatorship was necessary if we wanted to save our planet from disaster. Thus, is humankind finally relieved of responsibility over itself?

AND HOW TO FACE THE CHALLENGES?

Dear friends, you certainly do not expect me to make any suggestion on how we can handle these five challenges in a way that the lives of humankind become better, better in the most general sense both of having “a better life”, but also better in the sense of developing better moral standards (an example: that most civilized countries have abolished the death penalty is

clearly a progress of humankind in ethical awareness). I am not even sure, whether a happy end is possible.

I shall do something else, in the short space allotted to me. I shall point out principles which we should absolutely insist on, under all circumstances - without being able to say how we would best do it. These are principles we should not let go down the digital drain. They are on three levels. First on the global political level. Second, specifically in Indonesia. Third, what does this mean for us, believers in Jesus?

What to demand of global politics?

I limit myself to three points, leaving out, with great regret, values like democracy and human rights which, of course, we should fight for too. But facing the five-fold catastrophic scenario I have pictured, I believe we have to absolutely defend, and absolutely try to get a global consensus about three policies: First the absolute rejection of war to solve any problem. There must be no war! This implies also the principled rejection of violence as means to solve conflicts. The only violence permitted is self-defense and what is necessary to upkeep the law. Thus, war must be absolutely ostracized.

The second point is the abolishment of hunger in the world. At this moment there are at least 800 million people suffering from extreme hunger. This can, and must be ended. There must be a consensus that we, collectively, make sure that nobody has to go to bed hungry.

The third point is, of course, an effective consensus that we have to live in a way that does not destroy our planet, and us with it. Probably, AI will take over, if necessary in a brutal way - because AI does not care.

What about us in Indonesia?

We can be happy, because, in comparison with many other countries, we are doing quite well. But there are ominous signs on the wall. Our democracy seems to go down the drain. Deeply embodied intolerance is re-enforced by extremist religious ideologies, ideologies that approve the killing of innocent people in the name of God. Then, while our rich upper classes get richer and richer, not to speak of the crazy rich, more than 30 million Indonesians are stuck in extreme poverty and at least 50 percent of the population, about 140 million of our sisters and brothers, still live precariously. At the same time, our rivers and sea sides are clogged by plastic and other waste.

One thing should be clear: Our Pancasila nation, the national unity from Sabang to Merauke, will only survive, and religious extremism will only be rejected by the majority of our people, if Indonesia is not split vertically: 50 percent getting richer and richer, and 50 percent feel forgotten. Thus our first priority, under all scenarios, must be the elimination of poverty and the establishing of social justice.

The second priority for Indonesia is based on the insight that Indonesia can only survive, if we are ready to accept each other in our differences. As we did at the *Sumpah Pemuda* (the “Youth Pledge” from 1928): Thus we must strengthen our commitment to tolerance: both on the social-cultural, and the religious and the legal level. We must on principle accept that we, Indonesians, as Indonesians, have different ethnic, cultural and religious identities. The tolerance must be the fundamental norm of us entering AI.

The third thing demanded of us is to end - I am ashamed to say it - the cheap lip service both our political establishment from the president down to local leaders, and of us, the people, give to the safeguarding of our planet. It is clear that maybe within only 30 years the global consequences of the warming of the atmosphere and the oceans, the fouling of water, land and sea by our plastic and other waste, and the flooding because of rising sea levels will be felt by tens of millions of Indonesians. Up to now we are just doing nothing seriously. It doesn't look promising.

And we, followers of Christ, where are we challenged?

Of course, what is demanded of all humankind, and what we have to make real in Indonesia, involves us followers of Jesus too. We do, of course, have no formulas on how to face up to the five super-challenges humankind is facing. And we have just to do the same, and give the same commitments, as all the others.

But we certainly have a vocation. I leave aside the growing insight that our beloved Catholic Church is facing a serious crisis situation, that she has to reform herself, especially facing up to the terrible scandal of sexual abuse of young and dependent people by priests and religious people and by bishops and superiors covering up. But, again, I do not enter into this.

What is demanded of us, facing the five challenges that threaten the future of humankind, is nothing else than doing what the risen Christ told his disciples: We are called to become His witnesses in the world. Witness to what? Witnesses to what Jesus told us and showed us: That we are not left alone in the world, that everyone of us is personally loved by God. The center of our belief is the almost incredible fact that in Jesus God Himself joined us. That with Jesus we know that we are not alone, God is with us. There will be hatred and the cross, but belief in God and love will win, every tear will be washed from our faces. We do not know how to end wars, feed all people and handle AI. But we are called to be witnesses for the fact that God loves us and that we should surrender to God. From us is demanded to become witnesses, credible witnesses of God's kindness, love, compassion, of God's forgiveness and healing power. We do this by not despairing, by consistently not giving room in our hearts to hatred, injustice and violence, by supporting everything that is good and positive in our Indonesian society. Allow me to quote our beloved (also: sometimes to be criticized) SBY (former president Susilo Bambang Yudoyono): we should make a million friends and zero enemies. Maybe in a more real way, we followers of Christ should be a support for everything that is good and positive in our society.

Of course, we will have to do the handling of the five challenges together with our whole nation, together with all humanity. But our testimony will only be honest if it becomes concrete. Let me point to three things that would make our testimony clear for everybody: First, we really have to love all people; even those that do not like us, even people threatening us. Secondly, on all levels - in our private lives, in our parishes, at our working places, in politics - if we get the chance, we have to translate into reality our preferential option for the poor. We must be together with the poor, the poor must feel safe with us, they should be full members of our parish communities. We should never forget. If we look for Jesus, we will find Him among the poor. And thirdly, we Catholics should adopt a personal style of life that is fully in compliance with what is demanded by the all-out effort to save the planet from catastrophe: by not using plastics, scaling down our consumption of meat, manage our waste in a most up-to-date way, by avoiding unnecessary travel.

These are huge challenges we face, indeed. We do not know how things will develop. But our faith says, we will not be left alone. With Jesus, God is with us, His Spirit is with us.

Thank you.

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