

The Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (III) – The Global Ethic of The New Development Agenda: Ideological And Anthropological Challenges.

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RE: THE POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA, PART THREE – THE GLOBAL ETHIC OF THE NEW DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: IDEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

The theme of this report is the ethic underpinning the post-2015 development agenda. This ethic calls itself a “global ethic”. It differs from the “universal values” of western modernity, which tended to confuse the only true source of universality - that is, the law God himself wrote in the heart of every man and woman -, and certain values that are specifically western. **According to the report of Ban Ki-moon’s High Level Panel on the post-2015 development agenda (see IIS 295 and 296), the global ethic is founded on three pillars: “our common humanity”, the “golden rule” (or reciprocity ethics), and the principles adopted at the Rio+20 conference in June 2012 (declaring, inter alia, that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development). But in its praxis, when it is used to justify policies that are radically against the good of the human person and the family, this ethic demonstrates that it has cut itself from the transcendent source of universality and that it is atheistic and secularist.** The golden rule then puts itself at the service of ideological projects that are inspired by a flawed interpretation of tolerance, equality and compassion: it may henceforth demand, for instance, in the name of ethics, gender training in schools. The global ethic also integrates considerations of a pragmatic order (what works, has an impact) and of a scientific order (science’s Diktats): it drifts towards utilitarianism and scientism. The relationship between the human being and the environment becomes fuzzy. **The most worrisome trend is that of an imperceptible shift from God to the UN and its partners as the source of moral authority and universality.** Benefitting from the “authority” that the universality concept enjoys, a global ethic without God, increasingly secularist and destructive, would then impose itself. This shift is doubtless underway. But minorities watching over the good of the person become aware of the current drift, and a pacific resistance is rising, promising a genuine renewal, as seems to be currently the case in France. Global governance counts on young people, which it treats as its own citizens and not as members of a family (which gives them their primary identity as sons or daughters) to operate

the great global transformations it envisions in the years to come. The UN uses social networks to reach out to them.

We decided to cut this report in two and to dedicate IIS 298 exclusively to the post-2015 strategy of the “global reproductive health community”. As a consequence, the political challenges of the post-2015 development vision will only be addressed in IIS 299.

1.- THE ETHIC OF THE POST-2015 AGENDA

Socioeconomic development is never a merely pragmatic enterprise: the way food, health, education, housing, employment and other socioeconomic issues are addressed is never ideologically neutral. Development cannot happen in an ethical vacuum. Either its ethic is informed by reality, by respect for the human person in its integral vocation to personal love, searching for and open to what is universally true and good, or it is driven by ideological and secularist agendas.

The first chapter of the High Level Panel’s (HLP) report ends with a brief presentation of the rationale for engagement with the post-2015 development agenda. This rationale balances three factors: the first is strictly ethical. The second and third reveal the utilitarian, scientist and imperialistic aspects of the new ethic.

1) Ethical. The following sentence is the only reference to ethics in the HLP’s report: “There is a global ethic for a globalized world based on our common humanity, the Rio principles and the shared ethos of all traditions: ‘do as you would be done by’” (1, p. 6). As here defined, the global ethic rests on three pillars, which substantially differ from those of the traditional universal ethic (i.e. the good, the truth, conscience, the “law written in our hearts”, the family...). **In a world largely “post-traditional”, in which the education of conscience has not, at least in the West, been a concern for the majorities for decades, “the shared ethos of all traditions” is now often reinterpreted in a secularist light. “Tolerance”, “compassion”, “equality”, “non-discrimination” (i.e. the content now frequently given to the “do as you would be done by” ethos) are used to justify cultural acceptance of the contraceptive mentality, abortion, euthanasia, LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual) lifestyles and similar deadly agendas. As for the Rio principles – the principles adopted at the Rio+20 conference in June 2012 – , they start by affirming that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development”: the global ethic is “human-centred”, or “people-centred”. The interpretation of these notions, like that of “our common humanity”, depends on an underpinning anthropological vision.** The anthropology of the “global ethics” is not explicitly spelled out. Global governance’s stance on women, the family, young people, sexuality, however, as we shall see it further in this report and in IIS 298, reveals the secular and individualistic character of its anthropology.

2) Pragmatic. “Moreover,” reads the HLP’s text right after the above-quoted sentence on ethics, “the benefits of investing in sustainable development are high”. The text gives three examples: “Every dollar invested in stopping chronic malnutrition returns \$30 in higher lifetime productivity...” (1, p. 6) The other two examples are of the same type. In other words, the post-2015 agenda must be implemented because it is a good investment. In defining the criteria for the individual human act and for collective action, the new ethic prioritizes “what works”, is

“measurable”, has “the biggest impact”, is cost-efficient and “profitable”. The global ethic can be utilitarian.

3) **“Scientific”**. After the three examples just referred to come the sentences: “And we cannot wait before moving to sustainable development. Scientists warn us that we must aggressively move beyond current voluntary pledges and commitments to reduce carbon emissions or else we will be on a path to at least a 4-degree Celsius warming over pre-industrial levels by this century’s end. According to the World Bank, such ‘4°C scenarios’ would be devastating” (1, p. 6). **In the last resort, the course of our engagement is dictated by scientific claims. In fact, the global ethic gives us no choice but to implement the agenda for imperative “scientific” reasons. The new ethic is scientist. Let us remark incidentally that in this *postmodern age*, scientism relies on scientific research and consensuses - not any longer on scientific facts and certitudes, as in the age of modernity, to impose its rule.**

2.- THE REDEFINITION OF “UNIVERSALITY” IN THE POST-2015 AGENDA

In the language of the United Nations, the word “universal” is associated with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where it has a double dimension: horizontal and vertical. Horizontally, universal means “concerning everybody”: every people, every culture, every individual etc. In its horizontal dimension, universal is now frequently substituted by the word “global” in the UN discourse. Vertically, universal refers to the law that God has written in every human heart, and that every human being, therefore, can recognize in his or her heart and conscience. This latter dimension of universality grants the concept the moral authority that it enjoys. When openness to God is dropped, universality is cut from its living source.

The word “universal” is often used in the HLP report, but exclusively in its horizontal dimension. The agenda concerns “everyone in the world” (1, executive summary): it is a “universal agenda, for which everyone must accept their proper share of responsibilities” (1). “The transformations... apply to all countries. They are universally relevant and actionable” (1, p. 7). Making them a reality “must be a universal endeavor” (1, p. 29). “All” the goals “should be universal” (1, p. 29). The report also states that “the UN can lead in setting the agenda because of its unique and universal legitimacy” (1, p. 21). Here associated with “legitimacy”, the word “universal” acquires a moral meaning. **According to IIS, the ample use of the word “universal” in the report indicates a powerful but implicit trend to shift the authority that comes from the transcendent source of universality to the UN itself and the post-2015 agenda, which thereby would become the “universal” source of authority. But if the UN closes itself to the vertical dimension of universality, it substitutes itself to the only legitimate source of authority and becomes itself the source of a universal ethic, in the stead of God.**

3.- **AN INCOHERENT MIX OF LIBERALISM AND *NEO-MARXISM*, NOT INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

When sustainable development emerged as a “new paradigm” at the end of the Cold War, it was presented as a “third way”, a road running in between socialism and liberalism. This road was presented as the only possible option for humanity in the future, therefore as mandatory “for all”. As already mentioned in IIS 296, “integration” has been the key challenge for its advocates: integrating economic growth with social equity and environmental protection has so far been a nice ideal with no teeth, an inconclusive enterprise.

The post-2015 agenda heavily focuses on integration. But its building blocks, imbibed as they remain with neo-Marxism and neo-liberalism – do not seem to be reconcilable. Sustainable development is no way out of ideology.

In addition, there is no indication that the agenda’s “social values”, such as solidarity, are motivated by a genuine search for the good of the other. What seems to prevail is a materialistic vision of existence as wellbeing for all. On one side of the balance, there would be the pursuit of wealth, empowerment, well-being, health, pleasure (an obsessive focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights), realization of one’s potential – implicitly perceived as the ultimate purpose of human life. **On the other, there would be equality/equity, participation (of “all”), inclusion, solidarity, non-discrimination and other salient values of the global ethic, interpreted as they often are in a *neo-Marxist* way.**

As a collection of past ideological residues, the post-2015 development agenda substantially differs from integral human development and from the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. It is not within the purview of this report to elaborate on this observation, which raises complex but vital questions for the future of humanity.

4.- “BALANCING” PEOPLE-CENTREDNESS AND THE INTERESTS OF THE “EARTH”

The new ethic, as expressed in Rio principle 1, posits human beings “at the centre of concerns for sustainable development”. But it also stresses environmental concerns more than any multilateral agenda has ever done before: “in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it” (3, principle 4). At a time of an undeniable need to better steward the environment, no one can be against this apparently common sense principle, which seems to redress some of the abuses of modernity’s approach to growth at all costs while claiming to ensure the centrality of human beings.

The new ethic, however, does not clearly define the nature of the relationship of the human being to environmental protection. *It gives environmental protection an imperative, non-negotiable, absolute character.* The “Earth”, described as “our home”, is always capitalized, as if it were a supreme and absolute principle. **The global ethic’s language on the environment departs from that of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The relationship of environmental protection with human development is seen more in terms of “balance” of ecological and human interests than of a clear supremacy of man over nature, according to the Creator’s design.** The search for “balance” reflects the secular character of the new ethic: if there is no life after death, why should human life be cherished more than other forms of life, vegetal and animal? This “balance” may result in population control policies, which are implicit in Rio’s principle 8: “to achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should ... promote appropriate demographic policies.” What the UN means by “appropriate demographic policies” is plain in the 1994 Cairo Fourth International Conference on Population. The “global norms” of Cairo help us interpret this principle as meaning, inter alia, population stabilization through “universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights” (SRHR). While human beings would be “entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature” (Rio principle 1), the question is whether and how “harmony with nature” conditions human rights.

Lastly, let us remark that **the ethic of “environmental protection” occupies so much space that it seems to fill the vacuum left by the deconstruction of morality.**

5.- THE SECULAR ANTHROPOLOGY OF SO-CALLED “PEOPLE-CENTREDNESS”: PEOPLE AS CITIZENS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

In its proposed “Goal 10” – “Ensure good governance and effective institutions” - , the HLP refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ first article: “every person is born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The HLP affirms that “this truth is at the very heart of a people-centered agenda and reminds us of how high we can reach if we reaffirm the value of every person on this planet.” (1, p. 50)

But where is the evidence that the new, **“people-centred” vision** will be for real persons, families, fathers, mothers, children? The above-mentioned utilitarian character of the new ethic affects the interpretation of its proclaimed “people-centredness”. **“People” are viewed primarily as citizens of global governance,** requested to be its implementing agents and “partners” and to abide by its secular ethic. “It is through people,” reads the HLP’s report, “that we can transform our societies and our economies and form a global partnership” (1, p. 50) - the goal of the post-2015 development agenda.

Moreover, by “people-centred” the UN has meant centred on the “needs” and “rights” of the secular citizen. The global ethic has excluded from its anthropological vision the person in its holistic complexity: the person who transcends the “citizen”, the person made for love, member of a family, father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, brother or sister, rooted in a given culture, believer. This exclusion has resulted, not only in reductionism, but in secularist radicalism.

6.- INSTRUMENTALIZING YOUNG PEOPLE TO IMPLEMENT THE GLOBAL AGENDA

The UN is aggressively reaching out to young people, who “are 1.8 billion strong” (the largest generation of youth the world has ever known) and “one quarter of the world’s population”, to lead the global transformation envisioned in the new development agenda.

One of the fundamental flaws of the UN’s outreach to young people is to treat them exclusively as citizens, citizens of global governance, abstract individuals who would not be a member of a family, a son or a daughter, which is their primary and most fundamental identity. Young people are asked to unconditionally identify with the global ethic, as if parents were not their primary educators, as if religion played no role in their lives. They are particularly coopted by the UN in its most morally decadent agendas – sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender identity.

“The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development” (Rio principle 21). Today’s adolescents and youth must be “subjects, not objects, of the post-2015 development agenda. They need access to the right kind of health (including access to SRHR) and education to improve their job prospects and life skills, but they must also be active participants in decision-making” (1, p. 17). Preparing them for this “role” will go through education, which will need to be globally reformed accordingly.

In his Five-Year Action Agenda ending in December 2016, the UN Secretary-General identified “Working with and for Women and Young People” as one of his top priorities. He appointed a “special envoy on youth”, Ahmad Alhendawi, who on May 17, launched a first in a series “Google+ Hangout”, urging young people to engage with the UN. Mr. Alhendawi said one of his goals was to promote mechanisms that bring youth closer to the work of the UN and advocate for putting youth into the post-2015 development agenda. Speaking along his side was Prateek Awashi, programme analyst at the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) which currently co-chairs the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) and is the spearhead of the global sexual revolution at the multilateral level.

Another way the UN is trying to harness the “power of youth” is through the UN Volunteer Programme, which would be “mobilizing an armada” of young people from the north and south to join the organization on a temporary basis in the so-called “UN family”, including UNFPA, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN World Food Programme (WFP), UN World Health Organization (WHO), UN International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2).

Sources: Sources:

- 1.- A New Global Partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. May 30, 2013.
- 2.- UN Press Release. May 17, 2013. UN envoy urges 'uniting for youth' with first in series of virtual Google+ Hangouts
- 3.- Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. June 2012.