

Neoliberal Globalization: A *Casus Confessionis*?

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In many Latin American Lutheran churches the challenges of globalization have recently been linked to the act of confessing. In declaring this to be a confessional matter, many Lutherans claim to be following a tradition which goes back to the time of the Reformation. The confessional aspect has also been emphasized by many in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), most recently in the Buenos Aires Declaration (2003) and the Accra Confession (2004).¹ Be it *casus*, *status* or *processus confessionis*, the main focus is to highlight the threat posed by economic injustice and globalization for the integrity of faith, as well as the well-being of humanity and creation.

The notion of confession undoubtedly stimulates the ethical dimension of Protestantism, which in turn focus the churches' and agencies' attention on the challenges posed by neoliberalism. However, beyond the rhetorical aspects, the question is whether these references to the language of *confessio* are related to its historical use, and whether this points to an effective strategy for facing the challenges posed by globalization. We will see that the hermeneutical framework of the two-kingdoms doctrine is needed to "place" the act of confession in its true social dimension, that is, by clearly distinguishing and relating the proper ecclesial and political praxis.

A brief history

The Lutheran tradition understands the act of confession as an intrinsic aspect of the Christian faith. From a biblical perspective this faith, as an action of the Spirit, is an integral reality expressed not only in praise and adoration, but also in discipleship, vocation, mission and in the church's *diakonia*. Adding to this rich conception, however, Lutheranism introduced another meaning, namely, the case of confessing (*Bekennntnis*) in times of *persecution* and *tyranny*.² Although the entire life of a Christian and of the church is a time of confession (in its primary sense), there are historical situations which require a public defense of the gospel and the integrity of faith (*im Fall der Bekennntnis* or *quando confessio fidei requiritur*).

When the *Formula of Concord* was written, this idea of *confessio* originated within the framework of a dispute about matters referred to as *adiaphora*. The case in point was the validity of reestablishing in the Lutheran churches some ceremonies (related to the Mass) and orders of the ministry that had already been abrogated, and were not *per se*

¹ See Foro Sur-Sur de las iglesias miembro de la ARM, 2004. "Declaración de fe sobre la crisis global de la vida." *Mundo Reformado* 54/1 (Marzo 2004), pp. 45, 51.

² "Formula of Concord, Article X (1577)," in Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959).

ordained by God. The party associated with Flacius argued that in times of scandal or persecution, issues that were formerly secondary to the faith become matters of primary confession in order to defend the integrity of the gospel.³ This position was opposed to Melancthon's more congenial attitude, and was eventually reflected in the text of the *Formula*: those issues considered *adiaphora*, or secondary to the faith (*Mittelding, res media et indifferentes*) become primary issues when their imposition violates the evangelical conscience centered on justification by faith.⁴ In this way a threat to evangelical freedom represents "a case for confession of faith" (*im fall der Bekenntnis; in casu confessionis*), as indicated in this text:

We believe, teach and confess that in time of persecution, when a clear-cut confession of faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the enemies in such indifferent things, as the apostle Paul writes, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:11) [...]. In such a case it is not longer a question of indifferent things, but a matter which has to do with the truth of the Gospel, Christian liberty, and the sanctioning of public idolatry, as well as preventing offense to the weak in faith. In all these things we have no concessions to make, but we should witness an unequivocal confession and suffer in consequence what God sends us and what he lets the enemies inflict on us.⁵

This provides the following guidelines for *confession* in emergency situations:

1. Confessing as a public act of engaging the central affirmations of faith is closely linked to a context of political and religious persecution. It is necessary when the gospel truth (centered in justification by faith) is threatened either by ecclesiastical tyranny or through the arrogance of state power.
2. Confessing is necessary when there is a threat of falling into idolatry, as well as losing the freedom given by the gospel.
3. The confession should be clear and direct, for the sake of those who are "weak in faith," that is, who could easily be confused by matters that are not central to the faith (*adiaphora*).

A time for confessing *is given* to the believers and the community in anticipation of eschatological tribulations, whose signs are persecution and suffering. Confessing is closely linked to unjust suffering and the cross. In short, it implies a *martyrial* and communitarian act, a defense of the oppressed and persecuted because of the faith, and it is also an act restricting the hold of other authorities over the gospel.⁶

³ See Eugene TeSelle, "How do we recognize a *status confessionis*?" in *Theology Today* 45/1 (April 1988).

⁴ See Martin Schloemann, "The Special Case for Confessing: Reflections on the *Casus Confessionis* (Dar es Salaam 1977) in the Light of History and Systematic Theology," in Eckehart Lorenz (ed.), *The Debate on Status Confessions. Studies in Christian Political Theology, LWF Studies* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1983), pp. 55ff.

⁵ "Formula of Concord, Article X," *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 493.

⁶ See Robert Bertram, "Confessing as Re-Defining Authority: Ethical Implications of Augsburg's 'Time for Confessing'," in Lorenz, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 95ff.

In the later history of Lutheranism, the accent on confession changed. After the Peace of Westfalia (1648), the term *confessio* was utilized as a demarcation between churches rather than signifying a situation of persecution. Confession became synonymous with territoriality. During the nineteenth century, after the union in Prussian territories of the Lutheran majority with the Reformed minority, the category of *Bekennntnis* reemerged.⁷ The term *Bekennntnisstand (statu confessionis)* was used in regions under serious denominational conflicts. It was the basis for maintaining sacramental, liturgical, catechetical and devotional practices which had been jeopardized by the alleged “unification.” But this notion of *status confessionis* had more to do with doxological matters, than with open “persecution.”

Bonhoeffer and subsequent developments

The concept of confession was used again in the well-known twentieth-century *Kirchenkampf*, that is, the German Protestant struggle against Nazism. This had enormous repercussions on subsequent theological developments. While participating in theological discussions leading to the stance taken in the *Barmen Declaration* (1934), Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an essay entitled “The Church and the Jewish Question”(April 1933). Here he argued that the church faces a critical situation when its very essence and proclamation are affected by the state excluding baptized Jews from Christian congregations, or prohibiting missionary work among Jews. According to Bonhoeffer, in such a case the church is *in status confessionis*, since the state’s racist and discriminatory laws pose a threat to an essential aspect of the life of the church as *koinonia*.

Up to this point Bonhoeffer follows the tradition of the *Formula of Concord*. But conscious of the new historical situation, Bonhoeffer retrieves a surplus of meaning from the sixteenth-century formulations. Facing the Nazi threat, Bonhoeffer described the two possible scenarios in which the church can declare itself *in status confessionis*. The first is when the state exceeds its powers and becomes a tyrant (*ein Zuviel an Ordnung und Recht*). The second is when the state is deficient with regard to its responsibilities for social order and the law (*ein Zuwenig an Ordnung und Recht*). “Both too much law and order and too little law and order compel the church to speak.”⁸

It is important to note that Bonhoeffer understands this within the hermeneutical presuppositions of Luther’s political theology. Bonhoeffer clearly relates the church’s time of confession with the problem of misunderstanding God’s two regiments. When they are confused, or when they do not fulfill their divine mandate, or when one domain pretends to exert tyrannical power over the other, we are in *status confessionis*. According to Bonhoeffer,

⁷ Schloemann, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 55.

⁸ Geffery B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (eds), *A Testament to Freedom. The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), pp. 138-139.

[...] when it [the church] sees the state unrestrainedly brings about too much or too little law and order. In both these cases it must see the existence of the state, and with it its own existence, threatened. There would be too little law if any group of subjects were deprived of their rights, too much where the state intervened in the character of the church and its proclamation, e.g., in the forced exclusion of baptized Jews from our Christian congregations or in the prohibition of our mission to the Jews. Here the Christian church would find itself in *status confessionis* and here the state would be in the act of negating itself. A state which includes within itself a terrorized church has lost its most faithful servant.⁹

Bonhoeffer's line of interpretation focuses both on the abuses within or against the church, which directly threaten the clear and distinctive proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments, as well as on the abuse and irresponsibility of the state. This interpretation reemphasizes the importance of the distinction between the two realms, in order to accentuate the different but convergent moral and social roles of both state and church.¹⁰ Thus, when the state fails to maintain order and justice, the church has three options. She can demand that the state "take responsibility," she could "bandage the victims under the wheel," or she may have "to jam a spoke in the wheel."¹¹ This last action would, according to Bonhoeffer, be "a direct political action of the church."

This concept greatly influenced both Lutherans and Reformed during the post-war period. For example, in Germany during the 1950s, marked by the tensions resulting from the Cold War and nuclear rearmament, the expression *status confessionis* was used to call the church to take sides vis-à-vis the ethical and political challenges of the moment. Another example is the declaration made by the LWF in Dar-es-Salaam (1977), in which the category of *status confessionis* is linked to the emergency situation created by the South African policy of apartheid. Apartheid is contrary to the very foundation of faith; prohibiting whites and blacks from celebrating together the Holy Supper violates the unity and *koinonia* of the church. Thus the problem is placed on the *ecclesiological* level; what it means to be the church. Yet also by identifying the situation of apartheid as a call to confession it points to the excesses or deficits of state power in the ordering of society. Hence, apartheid is a threat as much to the church as to the whole of society.

We see then that the use of the category *casus* or *status confessionis* permitted Lutheranism to oppose ecclesiastically and ethically Roman Catholic medieval absolutism, Nazi fascism and the racist policies of South Africa. These examples shaped this confessional tradition, giving it a strong profile signaling freedom and resistance. But while the rise of the language of *casus* or *status confessionis* were characterized by deep theological and ecclesiological struggles, today's scenario is much more uncertain. The issue is not whether we should confess or not our faith, but how appropriate it is to turn to the concept of *status confessionis* to guide us in the problems we face today. The effectiveness of this language rested in the visible threat of counter-theologies which undermined not only the existence of the (evangelical) church, but also the truth of the

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

¹⁰ Guillermo Hansen, "La crítica cristológica de Bonhoeffer a la hermenéutica 'pseudoluterana' de las dos esferas," *Lumen: Revista de estudios e pesquisa da religião* VI/1 (Jan-June 2003).

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 139.

gospel. But, where do these counter-theologies appear today? Could we point to neoliberalism and globalization as their contemporary incarnations?

The situation

Some argue, with good reason, that neoliberal globalization erodes not only the state's role towards the common good, but also the stability and the very existence of societies as well as the integrity of the gospel. The tremendous offensive of transnational capital, the proliferation of neoliberal prescriptions, the disease of unemployment, the decline in state social assistance, corruption, the fleeing of local resources to service the foreign debt—all these seem to indicate that this is a “time of confession.” But do they really endanger the truth of the gospel and the very integrity of faith? What is really at stake?¹²

This is a concern shared by many in the ecumenical world. The German Lutheran theologian Ulrich Duchrow, along with the declarations from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Kitwe (1995), Debrecen (1997), Buenos Aires (2003) and Accra (2004) have called the churches to a time or process of confession in the face of neoliberal globalization. It is argued that the ideology and neoliberal practices represent either a violation of the First Commandment of the Decalogue (Duchrow, following Luther), or an affront to the covenant and sovereignty of God (Reformed churches, following Calvin).

While they are rightly alerting the churches to the danger involved in neoliberal economic policies, it is valid to question the appropriateness of approaching this problem appealing to an emerging *status confessionis*, which seems to ask too much in the wrong place. Duchrow, for instance, concludes his analysis of global capitalism with the utopian-messianic proposal of emulating the biblical testimony in the book of Acts with its small alternative communities.¹³ This posits a kind of model which could be applied to economic and political practices. Also, in the Declaration of Buenos Aires, reformed churches from the South sealed its statement with a fuzzy conception of “God's economy” as a counter-proposal to the neoliberal economic model of the global market.¹⁴ Certainly, its emphasis and position challenge us to search for new solutions, but that should not prevent us from

¹² A good example, although taken from the Reformed camp, are the declarations of the Chairperson of the “Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America” (AIPRAL), the Rev. Germán Zijjstra. His opinions are shared by many Lutherans. See *Nuevo Siglo* (Quito) 4/8 (agosto 2004) p.9. Let us notice however that the churches within the LWF have not called to a *confessio* against globalization, but to a double strategy: the strengthening of the practice of the Lutheran global *communion* as a space of ethical formation, and to engage in practices and policies of citizenship affirming just and equitable systems. See LWF, “Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion,” in Karen Bloomquist ed., *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability* (Geneva: LWF, 2004), p. 21ff.

¹³ Ulrich Duchrow, “El Cristianismo en el contexto de los mercados capitalistas globalizados,” *Concilium* 57/2 (1997), p. 261.

¹⁴ Foro Sur-Sur de las iglesias miembro de la ARM, “Declaración de fe sobre la crisis global de la vida,” *Mundo Reformado* 54/1 (March 2004), pp. 45-57, here p. 50.

asking if this adequately reflect the complexity of our present moment. Does this provide an orientation for viable practices which take into consideration the complicated variables in our ever more complex world? If, following Bonhoeffer, our aim is “to jam a spoke in the wheel” of neoliberalism, prescriptions like the former ones do not provide us with the necessary mediations, that is, the effective means with which to jam the wheel. The “feathers” of enthusiasm are not enough.

The problem is neither the pertinence of the theme considered, nor the commitment of these documents and authors, which we support. Instead, the quandary is two-pronged: the interpretation and definition of the phenomenon of globalization and the subsequent theological hermeneutics of that reality. The first would determine our reading and definition of the phenomenon called globalization, the second, the reformulation of our positions and practices. Although saying so may not be popular, frequently our efforts in search for answers fall into some kind of *moralization* of the crisis, and an enthusiasm devoid of tactics. So what we often call reality is the result of opinions rather than analysis, superficial theological ideas (substituting social analysis for biblical categories), or a semantic mixture that does not help much to focus and clarify the problem.¹⁵

Let us pursue the first direction, using some analytical tools stemming from the realm of sociology, cultural anthropology, political science and economics. Most of the studies dedicated to the subject (García Canclini; Hobsbawm; Giddens; Harvey; Negri and Hardt) indicate that the era of “globalization” cannot be understood monocausally, for instance, just focusing on economic neoliberalism. Globalization is a truly systemic complex shaped by multiple factors and dimensions whose basic structure is the superposition of different logics and networks. Some of the factors which make up this framework are exploding scientific knowledge, the acceleration of transport and communications (bringing distant places closer together), cultural changes and how subjectivity is perceived, the emergence of new social subjects, the crisis of the nation-states, the growing mechanization and computerization of production, massive migration to urban centers, the pluralization of identities and worlds, and –of course- the new ways in which business, trade and finance are brought together for speculative purposes and immediate profit.

The structural roots of this situation can, indeed, be traced back to the transformation of capitalism which became an uncontrollable reality in the 1970s (with the transnationalization of corporate activities accelerated and the new modes of production). This unleashed a growing gap between rich and poor countries and the social polarization within them between globalized elites and localized masses.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is true that the growth of capitalism, in its neoliberal form, erodes the cultural substratum within society, and also the state’s role in regulating and redistributing economic benefits.¹⁷ Yet it is also true that these phenomena developed new crisis spheres that no longer can be

¹⁵ Cfr. Clodovis Boff, *Teología de lo Político: sus mediaciones* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1980), pp. 67ff.

¹⁶ See Zygmunt Bauman, *La globalización: consecuencias humanas* (Buenos Aires: FCE, 1999), p. 8.

¹⁷ See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1989* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 343 and 408.

satisfactorily addressed by redressing economic policies. Let us think, for example, in the growing culture of indifference and the primacy of the individual. These developments accompany and legitimate the neoliberal tide. Yet they denote also cultural and anthropological *camps* from where different forms of sociality may be imagined and practiced. As a result, such diverse themes as subjectivity, desire, gender, art, ecology -to mention just a few- become spheres where neoliberalism may not be openly and immediately confronted, but where its core tenets may be steadily eroded by the pondering on different values and ways of relating in the world.

In this way the central problem is not simply located in the mechanisms of “empire” or economy, but includes social, cultural and political processes which are both susceptible to the expanding dominion of the neoliberal logic, as well as places of tacit resistance.¹⁸ Therefore, it is not so much the strength or seduction of neoliberal *ideology* what must be feared, nor its advance as a *totalitarian* ideology, but the expansion of its ideas and logic into spaces that are vulnerable due to an unprecedented political and social crisis. This crisis appears in the religious foundations of the Christian faith as well as in the ideologies and institutions of modernity. Thus, if as Christians we are talking about resistance and confrontation, this should not consist of direct “assaults” with alternative *economic* proposals, but rather be based on a “war of positions” in the various domains of society and culture, including the church. In other words, it is a struggle around symbols and representations which may not touch the economic core directly, but which may certainly erode its cultural presuppositions.

We live in uncertain and “liquid” times; never before have we encountered such a volatile and complex situation. In light of this complexity, a one-dimensional analysis of the problem of globalization would result in a limited contribution of the Christian church to this multi-dimensional phenomenon. If globalization is only confronted in terms of its economic dynamic, then old structuralist interpretations are repeated which tend to isolate phenomena that in daily life are linked to the logic of culture, society and institutions. Romantic prescriptions of “the small messianic communities” or what is allegedly “God’s economy” have symbolic value, but result merely in short-term strategies for a select group of people. In a plural, complex world, affected by diverse interests, is this recommendable or practicable? One thing is certain: the flutter of some moral feathers will not detain the advance of the neoliberal *Juggernaut*.¹⁹

¹⁸ This is one of Michel Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s thesis in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

¹⁹ The “*Juggernaut*” is an image that Anthony Giddens borrowed from Hindu mythology in order to describe the situation of uncontrolled instability and catastrophe which characterizes modern societies. The *Juggernaut* or *Jagannath* -which carries the image of the god Krishna- was taken in procession and many faithful threw themselves under the wheels as a sacrifice to the deity. Anthony Giddens, *Consecuencias de la Modernidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1993), p. 58.

Jamming the wheels of the Juggernaut? Church, politics and citizenship

As tempestuous as these dynamics are, the theoretical and ethical despair that abounds in our societies and our churches should not surprise us. This calls for interdisciplinary and multidimensional mediations for interpreting the dynamics of globalization in order to provide a clearer picture of the matter. This reaffirms the methodology of liberation theology.²⁰ But although the social analysis is crucial, churches have to go further. As heirs of the tradition of the *status confessionis* we know how to react to political oppression and persecution and to build resistance from there. But a situation where there are no open attacks on the gospel or the church, as was experienced in totalitarian states,²¹ disorients us. In the public arena, language of “idolatry” and references to the threat to “God’s sovereignty” does not carry significant weight. The crude reality is that economic neoliberalism associated with globalization does not depend on a totalitarian strategy in the sense of a political program of confrontation and domination, since it acts as the very negation of politics. Its force lies in the ability to penetrate the interstices and fissures of societies undergoing serious economic, political and cultural crises. This is why many find it difficult to analyze something which appears so fluid, flexible, elastic, but which nonetheless keeps undermining cultures and traditional political institutions. As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman posits,

In order to acquire a true capacity of becoming an entity, resistance needs an efficient and persistent attacker. However, as a consequence of the new mobility, capital and finances almost never find themselves in the occasion to conquer the inflexible, sort out the obstacles, or overcome or mitigate resistance ... capital can always leave in search for more peaceful scenarios... why confront that which can be avoided?²²

In light of this, let us return to the three criteria from the *Formula of Concord* and ask, how pertinent is it to interpret our present situation theologically as a time of *confessio*? The first criterion, persecution, presents us with an obstacle: transporting into our times a language that was devised to counteract *persecution* and abusive practices requires a clear identification of today’s totalitarian referents. Yet, as Bauman points out, today we face situations that are more elusive; they can only be “imagined” as totalitarian, but the “core” of the system is always in flux. It is as though the *pax neoliberalis* make us imagine things in order to divert our attention. Aren’t some of the churches’ social statements somewhat quixotic? If the noble Spaniard Don Quixote saw enemies where there were only windmills, today the troubled consciences of many churches and theologians reify as idolatrous multiple and multidimensional *processes* that in fact do not have any single “center” which could focus effective resistance.

²⁰ Cfr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Mirar lejos,” in *Páginas* 93 (1988), pp. 63-97.

²¹ Of course there are other types of “attacks” and “dangers” but they have to do with the social postmodern and culturally pluralistic context in which we live. But it would be an exaggeration to speak of a deliberate attack on the gospel.

²² Bauman, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp. 19f.

Trying to identify clear profiles in a diffuse and multidimensional reality may help to recreate the climate which in the past characterized some theological postures, but at the cost of expending all energies to counter a liquid flux of power. In the era of globalization, economic interests and forces have the supreme capacity not only to slip away when directly attacked, but also to ensnare vulnerable areas in the political and cultural spheres. Hence, it is useless to accuse neoliberalism of being idolatrous or sinful, not because from a Christian perspective this is “untrue,” but because it creates the illusion that this sinfulness can be overcome by means of some kind of conversion or moral offensive with a clear target. In this vein it is an ineffectual maneuver to affirm—as the Buenos Aires Declaration does—that neoliberal ideology entails a *theological vision* opposed to the biblical one. Neoliberalism is not a theology, much less a counter-theology, but simply an *a-theology*.²³ Therefore building resistance cannot rest on these foundations.

With this we advance to the second criterion from the Formula of Concord, *idolatry*. Idolatry, mammon and rampant selfishness are correctly identified as being ruthless realities in our present context. But, to be frank, who is shaken by accusations of idolatry, or calls to reestablish God’s sovereignty? Do the revamping of the *status* or *processus confessionis* really affect the economic and political dynamics of our societies? The fact is that in a pluralistic and institutionally secularized context, this type of call to *confessio* does not have in itself the power to unleash a praxis that can actually challenge the powers that be.

As for the last criterion—clear and unambiguous confession because of the “weak in faith”—is this perhaps an urgent need? It is, especially if we are mindful of the theological anthropology of *simul iustus et peccator*. However, in light of the above, we suspect that the reiterated call for *status confessionis* seems to be more a reaction from the “weakness of faith” in our contemporary world, than a clear affirmation of the gospel for the sake of others. The undoubted crisis which churches experience today may be accompanied by a more profound theological crisis. To take refuge in new biblicisms (including “popular” and of the “left”) will not take us very far. At most, it will lead us to combat windmills, to dilute ourselves in messianic utopianisms or to launch a hunt for heretics (today, in the “ethical” sense after Uppsala ’68). But they will not lead us toward the fundamental *cultural* and *political* task which the new time requires: to reconstitute the institutional and social web as an effective resistance and counter strategy against the onslaught of transnational capitalism—as Hardt and Negri thoughtfully remind us.

In short, the present call to a *status confessionis* against economic neoliberalism is not appropriate. The language of confession was intended to confront situations affecting the integrity and the truth of the gospel. It was a call to witnessing, not a platform from

²³ The notion of neo-liberalism as theology was popularized in the 1990s by the historian Eric Hobsbawm. But many fail to identify the irony with which he “theologizes” neoliberalism: for Hobsbawm neoliberalism is “theology” because it lacks the scientific basis and hence it cannot be refuted in the sense of Popper’s criteria. Hobsbawm by no means suggests that the liberal economists have quasi-religious pretensions or even that theology would be a praxis that would free or transform the hard objective realities. See Hobsbawm, *op cit.* (note 17), pp. 547f.

which to launch effective political action. If we adopt a broad vision of what the gospel means, we may agree in the emergency situation that we live; but one should do so without confusing the *promise* of the gospel with that of its social *realization*, i.e., the gospel and the law. Scandalous though it may sound, neoliberal globalization is not a *direct* threat to the gospel. Rather, globalization undermines these dimensions that Bonhoeffer saw as being essential to assure the space for living together –the public sphere and the state. Mediations, such as the law and political order, are divine-human means of action seeking to secure peace and justice, expressing the values of the gospel in an external and temporal form. These mediations must neither be confused with the gospel itself, nor become an extension of the church. Consequently, what is at stake is neither the gospel, nor the “sovereignty” of God, nor the church. What is affected is the *world*, and the *human* capacity to develop cultural and political strategies of resistance and change. In other words, it is the dimension that Lutheranism has depicted as the “temporal” sphere, built on love and expressed through the *usus politicus legis*.

A theology that emphasizes these aspects could only point us to the real danger we face: the burst of the logic of capital into those other spheres which make life a proleptic manifestation of the promise of the gospel. What should be given priority in current theological work is the slow fracture of the *public space* as the realm of political decisions inspired by certain moral convictions, rather than the so-called “alternative” economic order which Christian communities might embody once they become aware of their *confessio* heritage. As Eric Hobsbawm indicated, today humanity’s destiny depends on restoring the *authorities and public structures*.²⁴ The public space of politics and power, of compromises and negotiations, is the place *par excellence* where Christians and non-Christians are being united by the divine call to exercise their *citizenship* in favor of an order that guarantees and promotes a peace, equality and a justice able to prevent us from the worst effects of power asymmetries.

The two kingdoms revisited

Proposals to combine the language of *confessio* with the problems of globalization fail for three reasons: they are articulated on the basis of a political theology that does not explain how God relates to the political realm; they support a moralizing solution to deep structural, cultural and social problems; they do not promote the urgent need for exercising citizenship in heterogeneous spaces with the goal of redressing a rising yet unequal tide. These proposals confer a “spiritual” logic on the “temporal,” forgetting the proper mediations which govern these two spheres. It is not sufficient to list biblical quotations or to embellish “confessional” language with moral content, expecting that this will mobilize a kind of counter-offensive or a particularly *Christian* alternative to neoliberal globalization. In the long term, it will create a climate of suffocation and even of ethical and spiritual cynicism. What is at stake is too important to fall into these traps.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

We need a theological vision that can help us to visualize not only all the dangers neoliberalism poses for the gospel, but mostly for the *world*. Consequently, a good theological interpretation should account for action by the church as well as by citizens in their different spheres. For the Christian conscience, both spheres are closely linked, but even so, they have to be differentiated. Without the gospel, which forms the *ekklesia*, there would be no record of the promise that awaits creation. From there we engage in a world from a vision and from values of an order based on God's peace and justice; this nourishes our public engagement.²⁵ Nonetheless, from a political perspective, the church is not an apt *instrument* for efficiently working out these values. It is not that the church cannot do so institutionally when the situation allows it, but because the core of its existence, the gospel, is not in itself an efficient *means* for realizing this political project. Here we see the importance of political and civic vocation, without which there would not be any chance to implement the human and social values we consider essential. Theological discourse should emphasize the peculiar world that the Christian practice of faith and love creates. It can also highlight the necessary political and civic mediation to realize these values, while acknowledging the variables in spheres in which so many interests converge. Theological discourse creates an essential space for socialization through narratives and stories which offer meaning and a sense of identity, while the political is affirmed as an indispensable instrument to realize collective goals.

Once more, we can learn from Luther and Bonhoeffer, whose perspectives maintain at the same time the unique role of the gospel and the church as well as the relevance and mandate of social and political action. They knew that the "spiritual" and the "temporal" are means by which God does his work in order to recapitulate in Christ all things. But while in the "spiritual" sphere the means of action is God as Holy Spirit, in the secular field divine action is mediated and refracted through social institutions and orderings. In the spiritual field, there are no ambiguities, since the task is that of communicating *agape* as an eternal attribute. In the temporal field, the law exists as an instrument to harmonize divergent human interests; justice is furthered in the midst of people's asymmetric demands. The political and public organizations are the institutional mediations for implementing the goals of such justice.

In this way a dynamic theory of the two kingdoms²⁶ would permit us to maintain the radicalism of the call of the gospel, so that Christianity is not diluted into a kind of moralism that is really useless for both church and world. In this aeon we can not solely live out of the gospel, nor can we exclusively seek to restore God's "sovereignty" or project ecclesial practice on the whole of society. But a dynamic vision of God's twofold regiment calls Christians to live out their political life by exercising citizenship, which always implies the use of power according to *ends* that agree with the heart of the evangelical promise.

²⁵ See Guillermo Hansen, "La comunidad cristiana: el encanto de una práctica," *Cuadernos de Teología* XVIII (1999), p. 38.

²⁶ Ulrich Duchrow has been one of the most important theologians recuperating this theory derived from Luther. However it is strange that it is not used more vigorously in his recent discussions about the church and globalization.

When we lack the appropriate theological framework, *status confessionis* or similar language appears to become associated with proposals that are somehow disproportionate and cannot become effective in history. In the real world, there is no direct line from our (Christian) values to their socio-political mediations. We cannot transpose our alleged “holiness” onto the world, but we need to find an appropriate political expression for our commitment to and love for the poor. Without recovering a faith that is mediated through political action, we will continue attempting to jam with the weak yet colorful feathers the destructive wheels of neoliberal globalization.

If we do not recover this call to public life and citizenship, we will fall into one of the most dangerous traps of this *Juggernaut*: disappointment with politics, saying –as Argentines frequently do in times of turmoil– “let them all [the politicians] go away.” True, politics is in crisis, but to ignore it and withdrawn away from commitment because “all politicians are corrupt” is to play with the specter of authoritarianism and/or to favor the wantonness of neoliberal strategies. Politics should be legitimated anew as a field for searching for solidarity and equitable goals, but without false illusions or utopianism. In such circumstances and especially in the midst of crisis and corruption, not to be engaged in militant citizenship means to work “against love” (Luther).

The categories of the two regiments thus liberate us from the anxiety and anguish of believing that all alternatives should be borne on Christian shoulders, or to believe that all that happens in the world seems to be a plot against Christian values. Likewise, it gives us a new framework for interpretation, emphasizing the world of politics. The public arena is the space where we live out our Christian and civic vocation, and where the counterproposals against disillusion could be channeled. In this way, we avoid falling into the same logic which imposes an economic-reductionistic interpretation of globalization. We reaffirm with Hobsbawm the importance of motivating a new ethical commitment within public institutions and democratic political parties—the only means of stopping the pillage. This requires a cultural revolution, not moral hysteria. A revolution which embodies new forms of citizenship –even on a global scale.

Lastly, the theory of the two kingdoms allows us to place the language of confession along the lines suggested by Bonhoeffer. If the epoch of Nazi totalitarianism meant too much state (*Zuviel*), our times are characterized by too little state (*Zuwenig*). This by no means implies a call for a bygone omnipresent state, nor the enclosing of our conception of the state to the “nation-state” model. Rather, it is a call to engage with the very idea of state and public realm, and its multiple requirements and contributions to civil society, globally as well as locally. A strengthening of democracy, citizen’s participation, intermediate organizations and a positive appreciation of politics, are the indispensable tools to combat the growing ruptures and social inequalities. It is legitimate to claim that a weak state poses a *status confessionis* for the church inasmuch as we affirm that God is acting in the world not only through the church, but also through the state and public institutions to support spaces for life and equity. A call for a *status confessionis* should clarify that the challenge of the neoliberal *Juggernaut* obliges the church to speak out, not because its essence is under direct attack, but because the field of public institutions is under the pressure of an avalanche of unprecedented proportions. Our *confessio* is a call to

collaborate in promoting citizenship and to reject the illusion of being consumers of the twenty-first century in the garb of citizens of the eighteenth.²⁷

²⁷ See Néstor García Canclini, *Consumidores y ciudadanos: conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (México: Grijalbo, 1995).