

## BRAZIL: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Challenges and perspectives warrant analysis from both a personal and a collective viewpoint. We can not omit making our contribution, especially if it is possible to transform a crisis into experimental solutions, or at least into a union of forces for a new phase of History.

The editor of this journal probably remembered my status as an archbishop who, for 28 years, fought for liberty and equality, for social justice and honesty, as required by the *Holy Books* of Jews and Christians alike.

For this very reason, I consider communication to be the foremost challenge. Communication certainly influenced humankind circa 3,500 B.C., when stories that were previously passed on orally began to be written down, as many experts tell us. I am also sure that, around 1,800 B.C., Abraham, our Father in faith, communicated in a very different fashion from than that of the evangelists, who gathered traditions of communities to convey them to later times.

When I was preparing my thesis on *The Book according to Saint Jerome*, I came upon the surprising fact that Saint Augustine, already a renowned writer, consulted his more daring colleague, who was called Jerome, if it were in fact proper to abandon the system of interlinear translation in favor of a classical language agreeable to Christian ears. Fortunately for us, pope Damasus, in addition to being Jerome's friend, was also skilled in rhymes, cadences and even in composing verses.

What is the challenge for the *Bible* to enter and pervade the lives and the fellowship of citizens in our large metropolises? Possibly there are multiple challenges. Not long ago, a communication expert stated that television, radio and other modern means of communication find daily in São Paulo more than 10,000 facts that should be reported as news to the people. The struggle consists in discovering and conveying those that are of greater interest to the popular masses and in doing so promptly and originally. But when a listener asked, “How many of these news items involve solidarity and other Christian principles?”, the answer was short and disappointing: “Not even one percent, because one cannot find sponsors for more than that”. Christianity has ceased to be Good News, that is, *Euangelion* or “Gospel”.

It is true that lately both the Church in Rome and in Brazil have striven to catch up with or follow the evolution in communication. This was Christ’s demand and his last recommendation on Earth. Why shouldn’t it be ours?

However, other challenges might arouse more young people to face up to them. And no other challenge in Brazil surprises the world more than our social and economic inequality, the direct consequence of which is hunger. Combating hunger is a constitutional imperative, an obligation of the State and an obligation of everyone. If hunger and concentration of income and land were not enough, we are also faced with an extremely poor distribution of education.

Political liberalism was at the foundation of the first modern experiences in democracy. Unfortunately, political liberalism was unknown in Latin America. Today’s challenge is that economic liberalism, which may exist independently of democracy, threatens to smother liberal ideals – that is, ideals that contemplate individual freedom, popular sovereignty, the abolishment of torture, non-retroactivity laws, and so on. One needs only to pay attention to the fact that the domination by the marketplace strangles democratic ideals. For democracy does indeed rest upon popular sovereignty and the respect for human rights. In this sense, one of today’s greatest challenges is developing a criticism of everything that debases and defiles the human person.

Today there are approximately 50 million poor people in Brazil and a further 21 million who are totally destitute. The criteria for determining what is poverty vary from institution to institution, but the reality of poverty certainly involves the concept of inequality and the hard fact of need. It is my belief that the poor are all those who are deprived of their fundamental rights.

In Brazil, 48.7% of all income is concentrated in the hands of the richest 10% of the population (World Bank, 1990), while the poorest 10% hold only 0.8% of all income. In terms of comparison, one might remember that in Germany the poorest 10% hold 9% of the national income and in Paraguay, 2.3%. How is it possible to correct this anomaly?

Planning is surely essential. But planning is only worthy of its name when it leads to action. In Brazil, we tend to confuse plans with planning, and outcomes with results, as pertinently observed professor Alberto Teixeira, of Ceará's Planning Institute, and director of the School of Government in Fortaleza. The most urgent result that planning must achieve in Brazil is to improve the conditions of life for those excluded from society by enabling them to be included in it. Good planning presumes stages, such as:

- Knowing the reality upon which one wishes to act, including its past, its current diagnosis and its future trends.
- Drafting a project, i.e., determining what to do.
- Developing strategic activities that provide the means to do what must be done.
- Putting into practice concrete actions to transform reality.

To merely say that certain areas (health and social welfare, for instance) are in crisis is to avoid seeing the existence of structural problems – giving rise to short-term interventions that obfuscate but do not solve the underlying problems.

Another problem lies in the fact that Brazil does not practice selective importation, and that the Brazilian State, by adhering to a certain type of privatization, has tended to destroy itself. A nation is not built by consumers – as the policies of the marketplace would wish – but by producers and builders of a more equitable society. A right and proper liberalism ascribes all end-activities to civil society and all means-activities to the State.

As an example of public policy, let us examine the question of social welfare. As many scholars have duly observed, among them Amélia Cohn and Fábio Konder Comparato, welfare policies, being essentially social, are thrown in disarray when treated solely as economic policies. Inequality is the great problem that social welfare policies must face. Today, however, all we have are *ad interim* relief efforts.

Social welfare is an ethical and moral imperative, and should be seen and treated as such. Alas, in Brazil, this has been turned into a mere social policy that,

like all others, only reproduce the deep-seated inequality of our society, and actually lead to the deinstitutionalization of rights.

Brazil was inherently dynamic in creating jobs from the 1930s to the 1970s, especially after World War II. But the country's 7% growth rates, one of the largest if not the largest in the world – which took the country to the 8<sup>th</sup> ranking position (currently 10<sup>th</sup>) – did not guarantee a better distribution of wealth, leaving us in 74<sup>th</sup> place in terms of quality of life. Wealth was not better distributed particularly because the military regime preserved the developmentalist project of the ruling classes. Thus, since the 1980s, we have been plagued with growing unemployment, the most important single factor in the increasing number of homeless adults and parentless street boys and girls found in every large or medium-size city of the country.

If the 1980s witnessed an increase in unemployment, the 1990s saw the complete de-structuring of the labor market. During this period, 3.3 million jobs were lost. When added to the 15 million people that should have joined the labor force, we have a grand total of 18 million unemployed. What happened in Brazil during the 1990s was so perverse that even the corporate sector was shaken.

Inequality in Brazil is so ingrained in our culture that we are the only country in the world to have special prison cells for inmates with college degree. In politics, things never happen naturally, nor innocently.

Reforms are now being made in the country, but under the aegis of a mercantile rationale. We would do well to bear Aristotle's warning in mind, that political society is not a commercial society and its goal should be justice achieved through solidarity.

In spite, or precisely because of all the challenges mentioned above, I share the respected opinions of professor Antônio Cândido. We are both optimists with regard to Brazil. In a recent conversation, he mentioned what he calls "healthy aspects" or probable solutions for Brazil's challenges from the sociological and historical viewpoint. He stressed that in 1933 Gilberto Freyre already saw globalization and interracial communion as evolvments that xenophobia would not be able to avoid. In brief, for us, the mixture of cultures and races prefigures the world of the future.

As a healthy Portuguese heritage, we have a certain simplicity shared by most of our elites. Those that contradict this trait, the new rich, are a minority and not even part of the elite properly.

The resistance of the Brazilian population toward hierarchy is likewise a healthy trait for the future world. It is worth remembering that the military career only came to exist in Brazil in 1808 and that promotions in our armed forces were granted to those who studied more. Furthermore, during the military dictatorships that ravished South America in the 1960s and 80s, our armed forces were less violent than those of countries like Argentina and Chile. Fortunately, since the onset of the current process of redemocratization, we have seen a progressive reduction in the army's controlling role over the country's sociopolitical life.

We are also the only country in Latin America to have adopted a closed diplomatic career since 1930, that is, a corps to which one only has access through examinations – very strict, by the way. Itamarati, Brazil's Foreign Office, has stood out in international relations and managed to solve, at least until now and depending on what may happen to Colombia, all frontier issues with our neighbors exclusively through diplomatic efforts, with no resort to the dire resource of war.

Professor Antônio Cândido quoted the *Clima Magazine* Manifesto (see number 12), entirely written by Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, pointing to the czarism that exists in the world and to the fact the Christianity was the first institution in history to speak about equality. He also remembered that Bossuet, in *Cours de histoire universelle*, stated that all peoples improve when brought closer to God's justice.

We must strive to guide “randomness” and to have clear transformation ideologies when creating inclusive policies and cultures, because the needed changes are complex. There is no historical determinism, nor is there predestination. God holds human liberty in too high regard to make the life of any one something contrary to the enjoyment of freedom. God even respects a wish to break away from Him, imposing nothing and always inviting us to love and serve Him. History is in the hands of God, but concretely in ours, we who were created in His image, according to His likeness. Concisely, the Brazilian people carry within themselves the seeds that might lead us to equality.

Also needed are public spaces where qualified debate can take place, among people who truly understand what is being discussed – discussions on behalf of those excluded from society, not of privileges for special groups or segments. However, it must not be forgotten that certain debates – such as those involving welfare, health and education, for instance – do not necessarily have to be technical, but rather political. Policies must be implemented that have been negotiated with so-

ciety and become independent of public management. At the same time, public control of public funds, revenues and expenditures is vital.

Most pressing is the creation of compensatory jobs for those rendered unemployed by technology. Bearing this in mind, economic growth of state and private activities must be promoted. Instruments to protect small properties must be created, and the eulogy of consumption quieted. Let France serve as an example, a country that protects small properties, to the point of prohibiting shopping centers in Paris, which would tend to eliminate the small and quaint food enterprises that give the city its distinctive profile and charm. To counter the eulogy of consumption, Japan, for instance, does not hesitate to grow its own rice, refusing to buy it from Argentina, even at half the cost of its domestic crop.

Brazil, in short, requires a set of policies to adequately protect sectors weakened by unfair competition. In plain words, Brazil needs policies to protect the weak. We are all defenseless, because indiscriminate economical and financial openness was thrust upon us, with a discourse that does away with regional policies and promotes unfettered competition – a myth, to be sure, as this competition is only unfettered for the strong.

Productivity has increased. Whose? For whom?

We have ceased to identify the persistence in the national political scene of people who hold antidemocratic values. Improving the distribution of income does not seem to occur to us. We have lost faith in, and unceremoniously blame democracy, our only chance to a more equitable life.

So far, social commitments have been no more than rhetoric. Combating hunger is a constitutional norm: the Constitution determined a series of obligations whose non-fulfillment lays bare the enormity of crimes against the nation. Laws must be enacted that are inclusive and democratic, and contribute to establish not only the culture but also the reality of human rights.

To put an end to poverty the country must begin to grow again, distributing income through public policies in the areas of health, education and transportation, among others, and distributing assets in the form of housing programs and land reform.

We must not forget that education and skills are not mere economic needs, as some economists would like us to believe. They are much more, a fundamental and inalienable right of every human being.

In first world countries, such as the United States, Germany and Japan, the industrial sector remains highly important. We must not continue granting the marketplace all the freedom it has enjoyed: we must politicize and democratize economic relationships.

To resolve the impasse, Brazil needs to find a consensus between the middle classes, the working classes, and certain corporate sectors. In other words, we need a national project to rebuild our structure of production, redeeming the healthy aspects of Brazil's openness to develop policies for the social inclusion of the outcasts. We need to have control over the flow of capitals, protecting certain industrial sectors through public regulations, in a transparent and democratic manner, to avoid bankruptcies and unemployment.

A transparent and precise audit of our internal and external debts can no longer be postponed, allowing us to start once again making investments, with political initiative and efficaciousness, to eliminate social exclusion and overcome injustice, need and social inequality. It is more than time to say no, on an international level, to the oppression by the richest and to not-always-explicit forms of neocolonialism.

Santa Catarina, my home state, was known for its small properties. Today it has become a huge latifundium, and the *catarinenses* are migrating to faraway Acre. A true land reform is indispensable – assuring the settlement of people in the countryside, humanizing the cities, and eliminating monoculture and the hunger of a large part of our population.

The concentration of assets in the hands of a few is not God's will: it is a sociopolitical problem, one that requires deep changes in structures and mindsets.

Brazil is the second country in the world in concentration of land. According to the National Institute for Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA), 2,000 latifundia occupy an area corresponding to 2.5 times the territory of the state of São Paulo. The 1965 Statute of the Land is now 35 years old. During this whole period, Brazilians have waited for the land reform specified therein, and it is sad to see that today, in addition to the large landowners, many intellectuals have also come to consider land reform an outdated claim.

Land reform will undoubtedly become an important factor in the redistribution of income. Another measure, the taxation of the richest, has been unduly polemized in the name of equality and respect for human rights. But inordinate spending must in some way be criminalized in a country where children live in the

streets and die of hunger while the rich affront decency, decorum, ethics and even the most basic notions of solidarity by squandering away in frivolities. Moreover, they are not alone, as white-collar criminals continue to suck dry the public coffers and the domestic market.

I repeat and insist that social welfare, retirement pensions, medical assistance, education at all levels (including for pre-school age children) are the duty and obligation of the State and must be characterized as a moral and ethical issue, never an economic one. Speaking of economics, when one has ample money for blatant mismanagement and dilapidation but miserly withholds funds to implement social justice and invest in the human person, what one has is misgovernment, a diseducation of society as a whole.

Mindsets are non-critical and, as such, conservative. Mindsets can explain away discrimination, prejudice and so many other irrational behaviors. In Brazil, unfortunately, side by side with the aforementioned traits that justify our optimism, we also have the strong presence of an authoritarian, pro-slavery, inequalitarian and selfish mindset. A broad national project for education at all levels must be developed, leading Brazilians to become aware of and criticize their mindset, so as to eliminate the introjected oppressor that dwells within us (a concept of my late friend Paulo Freire).

Public education at all grades and levels must be guaranteed, with quality public schools and qualified, well-paid teachers. Education is a duty of the State; it is a fundamental human right. But public education in Brazil is being abandoned, while private schools, by and large, are already a write off. Illiteracy in Brazil must be eradicated once and for all, and book culture must be fostered.

According to Betinho<sup>1</sup>, the ethics of democratic resistance is based on the principles of liberty, equality, diversity, participation and solidarity. For this ethics to be put to good use, the private must be subordinate to the public; the common interests of the many must assert themselves, while respecting the few; laws must exist that determine equality for all while respecting diversity and freedom as conditions for the exercise of citizenship.

1. The late sociologist Herbert de Souza, founder and leader of the Citizen's Action Against Hunger and Misery, and For Life.



This ethic humanizes. Politics and ethics always walk hand in hand. The question is knowing where they are going to and in favor.

The fundamental demand is to establish a Civilization of Love, as our dear late pope Paul VI advocated. This requires authentic human rights (the core of the Gospel message, His Holiness used to add) fostered through peace, liberty, equality and participation, that is, through social justice.

Although turned toward God and mediated by Jesus Christ, the heart of ethics lies in each and every human being – unique, non-repeatable, irreplaceable and necessary. The heart of ethics is, in short, human dignity. This joint assertion by lay society and by religion of the value of each and every individual has enabled genuine dialogue, coexistence and action. But we still have a long way to go.

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