Toward A Human Political Economic Process: Right Stewardship for Sustainable Livelihoods and Vocations

By Reginald Herbold Green

A. Stories of People's (and Peoples' struggles for justice, participation, civil society.

   a.) I urge that these be 150-500 words and that words be those of persons involved not ours. I rarely find the written up "simple story" as convincing as the participant's statement.

   b.) Therefore I suggest about 7 used as boxes in main text of this chapter illustrating (or parableizing?) some aspect of each of main sections.

B. Examples are useful. However, they are best chosen after the main text is structured. If I can be sent main text by C.T. when it is ready I will send - or bring to Geneva - a handful of examples.

   I would advise against using the Grameen Bank. For one thing it has been overpublicised as if it were the only body with a similar approach. But more seriously it is sustainable only by a very odd financial quirk. The Bank's approach depends on a high ratio of staff to users and an even higher one to loans. The Grameen Bank charges low interest and makes profits. Has it, then, achieved the miracle of the loaves and fishes? No. Its basic income source is interest on deposits with commercial banks (which in some years have exceeded its operating expenses which in turn exceed interest on its loans). These appear to have arisen and to remain very high because the Grameen Bank is a donor's darling and, as it - prudently - is careful in expanding its loan network and volume, has regularly had very large balances on deposit relative to loans. More credit to the GB for squaring the circle this way - albeit they do not usually make the point that a would-be analogue should also seek a de facto endowment! However, it

does mean GB is unlikely to be replicable especially by community level organisations.

On ecology examples we have a problem. There are two rather different kinds of bodies concerned about environmental sustainability. One is concerned with use consistent with reproduction - e.g. Chipko. They are not preservationist in the sense national park, let alone pristine untouched wildernesss, advocates are. Nor do their concerns guarantee the absence of sustainable change - usually quite the reverse. The other is illustrated by at least some aspects of Maori and Native American sacramental attitudes to nature. While using some forest lands for livelihood they are far more concerned about adapting livelihood to sustainability than vice versa and also have usually classified large areas as off-limits for livelihood (as opposed to pilgrimage) activities.

I do not have a solution - only a tension. Clearly turning all forests to sustainable pulpwood production with trimmings and thinnings for fuel can be sustainable and livelihood enhancing. (The same is true, more obvious and more appealing at community woodlot-orchard-erosion/watershed protection-building material-fodder 'forests' in Africa.) But it does not preserve unchanged or 'naturally' changing nature nor even provide access to relatively unchanged nature as do protected wildernesses and controlled natural parks respectively. The latter per contra have distinct limits in respect to livelihood - less so in the controlled access cases in which the problems are of access to livelihood and distribution more often than of inherent conflict.

My personal preference (prejudice) is for seeing the general problem in terms of livelihood with a parallel track for wilderness preservation. This has the merits of not treating human beings as the only dispensable portion of nature and of being potentially practicable. As I well know it is totally unacceptable to "true believers" in conservation! (At the extreme they do wish to preserve the anopheles mosquito in the wild, crocodiles in streams in which women wash and children swim, tse tse flies to drive pastoralists out of established grazing areas, 100% of the Okavango Swamp and its broader environs - all of which would have remarkably high livelihood and deathlihood costs for human beings most of whom are poor and vulnerable.)

Needless to say the above affects not just examples - which need to be consistent with text - but also text. The reader is warned what premises underlie my draft pieces on sustainability!

C. Thematic focuses and draft contibutions to text.

1.) Stewardship

The basis of ecumenical approaches to political economy is stewardship or husbandry. Indeed ecumenical, the church as the community of the faithful, stewardship and economics flow from the same Greek root word. Stewardship is about the husbanding or allocation of scarce resources justly to meet the primary needs of the household (whether family or humanity). These needs go beyond trite lists of minimum material necessities (vital as these are to preserve life and the possibility of human life). They include education and health services, meaningful employment or self-employment, ability to participate in community and broader political economic decisions and their carrying out as well as to benefit from them.

Stewardship is - necessarily - about production (sufficiency of resources to meet urgent needs), distribution (justice both as to human needs and to contribution to production) and reproduction/ sustainability (investment, growth, conservation, households size and responsible familyhood, safeguarding the creation). To produce more at the price of destroying ecological viability is suicidal. To distribute equitably does little good if there is not enough produced. To maintain ecological viability at the price of human deprivation is neither ecumenical nor - ultimately - practicable.

Stewardship permeates all levels of social relations from personal through family and community to national and international. Responsible stewardship is about caring and about justice equally as well as efficiency in use of resources in production and in achieving economic sustainability. Inefficient resource use does matter - it reduces goods and services available and raises their cost. At the same time it reduces productivity and therefore wages and self-employment incomes. Those usually hurt most severely are poor people.

The justice of political economic stewardship is not and cannot be the full justice of God nor can the peace which sufficiency of production, equity in distribution and sustainability in relationship to nature attain to the full biblical shalom. It is part of the imperfect, partial, vulnerable to reversal but also real, necessary and meaningful struggle for justice and peace within history.

Sufficiency and sustainability are integrally related aspects of stewardship. Unless resources are sufficient, survival will force use of any actions helping to sustain life in the short run, however ecologically damaging or polluting they may be. Equally, unless sufficiency of livelihood and of material well-being - not maximisation of production and consumption whatever the cost - are accepted as the basic goals of political economy, sustainability will always be at risk. Unchecked inequality in wealth and consumption place great strains on ecology. Achieving sustainable production sufficient to meet needs is an attainable goal, however difficult it may be in some contexts. Attaining sustainable growth to match unbridled greed and consumerism feeding on themselves is by definition impossible.

2.) Production - Distribution - Reproduction

As a political economic process and as social realities, production, distribution and reproduction are seamlessly woven together. Who produces what, how and for whom largely determines who has what incomes from which activities and whose are the primary responsibilities and opportunities for reproduction (or sustaining) of humanly created capital, nature and human beings. For many analytical purposes it is useful to concentrate primarily on one of these three themes or - more frequently - on sub aspects within one of them; for any overall conceptualization or articulation of responsible stewardship it is crucial to see them in their holistic inter-relationship.

Production matters. It is a luxury of not poor people to suppose otherwise. If all agriculture still used biblical or even 19th Century technology, half of the world's population would starve however equal access to land and however low agricultural rents and interest charges. But what is produced, where, how, by whom and for whom matters just as much. Maize produced in Nebraska, by combines with owner family plus a few skilled employee labour, to feed prime beef for middle income North

Americans (and upper income consumers in importing countries) has a very different meaning to maize produced by decent income Zimbabwean family farmers, using attainable technology and equipment, growing staple foodstuffs for themselves, their urban cousins and both workers and dislocated persons in their importing neighbours. Both are quite different from tiny 'vacant' land plots, scratched out almost literally by hand by absolutely poor urban 'informal' sector members in drought, war and/or depression blighted towns in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and Southern Africa.

In general - at least from a responsible stewardship perspective - too great a share of production consists of personal, amenity consumer goods produced in rich or upper middle income countries for the use of the upper half- to three-quarters of the households in these same countries. Basic consumer goods for poorer households (even in non-poor countries) and community or social goods (notably education, health services, pure water, environment whether pollution control or public open spaces) are underproduced and too little production and meaningful, decently rewarded employment or self-employment takes place in poor countries.

These patterns are directly linked to distribution. Poor people and poor countries are not, in general, as large or profitable markets as richer ones. Social mobilisation and expenditure of resources is far weaker than private and personal. Consider for example, the stark contrast between saloon cars, highways and public (whether privately or publicly owned) transport; a contrast systematically reinforced by state taxation, subsidy, expenditure policy and one rendered starker by the current fashion for retreating state functions with no community or civil society replacements.

Fair remuneration (to small farmers and artisans as well as to employees) and enabling labour productivity to be high enough for fairness relative to needs to be sustainable out of production is central to responsible stewardship. By increasing the incomes of poor households and countries it would make them more attractive markets as well as enabling them to begin to approach meeting their basic material needs. Employment is equally central. Concentration on archaic methods of production or employing three people to do the work

requiring two is not a sustainable answer - witness Mitteleuropa (Central Europe) and especially the new states of Federal Germany today. But to tolerate high levels of open or disguised unemployment is a waste not only of lives but also of the potential for occupation and production which could give dignity and meaning to many of those lives. In the context of unmet priority needs - both social or community and private - and of massive use of resources on at best amenity, fashion driven, probably unsustainable and certainly ungeneralisable consumerism (usually in low employment to output ratio products) to contend that 10% to 30% levels of open, full unemployment plus 10% to 50% partial or disguised unemployment are inevitable, is as much economic nonsense as social obscenity.

Redistribution is an important, but secondary, aspect of distribution. Safety nets are needed for those who cannot yet, temporarily cannot or because of age or disablement cannot again produce enough to earn their own personal and household needs. These necessarily are met - whether adequately or inadequately - by redistribution within households, extended families, communities and/or the state. The historic centrality of households and family is - except for children - eroding, most notably in the North but also in the South; the scope and nature of private charity precludes its taking a pre-eminent role; most communities have either very many or very few resources relative to those in need of safety nets. The central obligation falls increasingly on the state and cannot be shifted to other shoulders (as opposed to dropped along with the human beings who then fall through the net) in the foreseeable future.

Similarly in one sense all social, community or state goods provided for public use are also paid for from redistribution. This remains true even if there are partial fees or user charges while if the services and goods are fully privatised their social aspects (and external economies, e.g. of health and education to overall productivity and to the health of those with whom they come in contact) are lost, and the majority of those needing them are excluded. However, nationally or from the perspective of civil society as a whole, provision of these goods is a matter of distribution and of making access to them realistic for all. It is one of equity

(analogous to fair wages) rather than of redistribution in the same sense as safety nets.

Reproduction certainly includes human life but is not limited to it. Reproduction of created capital - whether knowledge or machines; highways or mother and child care clinics; sea, road or rail tankers or skilled professionals - is essential to maintaining and, altering the balance of or raising overall levels of production. In that sense accumulation is not merely not wrong but is essential to attaining and sustaining viable levels of production and distribution. Accumulating the means to wage aggressive war is indeed bad but because of the use not the capital creation. Mindless piling up of consumer goods or the selfish, greedy pursuit of wealth or power for its own sake also stands condemned by responsible stewardship but is basically about remuneration, allocational priorities and redistribution and only trivially about accumulation in the political economic sense.

Isiah (65:2) was speaking of accumulation in this sense - as well as of equity and security in the fruits of honest accumulation - when he wrote:

> Men shall build houses and live to inhabit them,
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> plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they shall not
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> build for others to inhabit, nor plant for others to eat.

He was also illustrating that the cultural context of any social order directly influences the way economic analysis is worded and the assumptions underlying its applied forms or prescriptions. Isiah says men (not persons, let alone not men and women) will build - inhabit, plant - eat because that was indeed the reality in the Kingdom of Judea.

[Sections in [ ] are explanatory notes to author not proposed text!]

[The second half of this paragraph relates to a widespread tendency of some branches of the ecumenical movement to use the word accumulation as a synonym for greed-consumerism-exploitation. It appears to stem from a curiously superficial reading of Marx - indeed of one phrase in a polemic - leading to the supposition he was opposed to expanded reproduction and the

accumulation needed to make it possible. That use of words, if not reversed, leads to very sloppy analysis and to political economists suspecting our literacy, sanity or both. Doubtless the Red Queen in "Through The Looking Glass" is right that words mean to the sayer/writer what he/she means by them but the result of applying that concept to justify usage which is totally unconventional is usually closer to the Tower of Bable than to Pentacost!]

Reproducing and sustaining are very close to being two aspects of the same processual reality. Sustaining a forest depends both on responsible use and responsible management of natural and/or artificial propagation (reproduction) of trees. Reproduction (more usually today recovery) of air or water quality means action - necessarily involving both the direct allocation of resources and changes in production patterns - to sustain, restore or improve. That sense of reproduction is integral to sustainability of production both of personal goods and services and of social goods and services in general as well as to that cluster of social or community goods and services which can be called human environmental (air and water quality, open space, household space, ability to move about). At one extreme the greenhouse effect (global warming) - however caused - threatens death by famine and by flood and at a more mundane level industrial and agricultural pollution reduce the quality and raise the cost of ensuring non-toxicity of water as well as destroying aspects of nature even when not directly life nor production threatening.

The logic of production-distribution-reproduction from an ecumenical perspective of the political economic process is nether intellectually particularly complex nor in contradiction with most technical economic analysis. Complexity arises at the level of choice and of allocation of scarce resources among household consumption, social goods, accumulation, safety nets and environmental stabilisation. Controversy arises because the stewardship logic challenges the logics of consumerism, of greed, of accretion of individual power outside social control and of the minimalist state. These logics are those of powerful institutions, social groups, states and individuals and are therefore both incorporated in much applied political economy (whether bourgeois or Marxian) and argued and defended forcibly by those whose interests are served by them.

3.) The Centrality of Human Work

Human labour and the social relations in which it takes place are central to stewardship. Work is not properly viewed as a curse or a necessary evil which allows, but is separate from, meaningful life. Certainly arduous toil - or even not so arduous but boring work - under conditions of dictatorial control and of exploitation undertaken to eke out survival or to run after consumerist bandwagons can be a curse and is not likely to be very meaningful let alone creative. But those are flawed work, flawed perceptions and flawed social relations.

Work - in the fuller sense of vocation or calling (which used to be seen to relate to most occupations and most workers and not be limited to a few professions and people) - is much broader and more important, as well as more fulfilling, than these examples of human labour at its most deformed and degraded. Work is a process of participating in creation both because it is central to production and because what a person does and his social relations with others at work are central to what he/she is and becomes.

Labour is the basic means to meeting material needs. Equally important it is a self-reliant way contributing - if social relations and remuneration or productivity in the case of self-employment are sound - to human dignity and fulfilment. While not the whole of work these are by no means trivial values.

Equally labour is the basis of production - a concept quite distinct from value theory. The greatest differences in productivity, for all countries except a few natural resource enclaves, arise from differences in quality and commitment to doing a job of labour rather than from differences in natural resources or capital stock even though the importance of these is undeniable. That fact underlines the importance of education and of training and of human relations and social structures in work. Authoritarianism and treatment of workers as machines is ultimately productively unrewarding; low, and especially falling, real pay per person day is almost always associated not only with low labour productivity but also with low increases (or even declines) in productivity. "The labourer is worthy of his hire" is usually perceived as a statement of social principle, but it is also a sound guide to remuneration policy.

The relationships of labour to production and income, to other persons at the workplace including fellow workers, managers and owners, and to opportunity to perceive the tasks accomplished as meaningful and creative are at the centre of human institutions from family and local community through civil society (including but not limited to trade unions, political parties and religious bodies) to national governments and international bodies in content, style and power structures.

Both part time work and women in the non-home workplace need to be seen in the foregoing perspective. The problems posed by part time work relate primarily to social protection, remuneration and - less uniformly - the quality of the work itself. It is insecurity - of continued employment and of safety nets if employment ceases for any reason - which is the gravest drawback, not working less than 40 hours a week which is, in itself, a choice many workers would wish to make. Women in the extra household workplace (as well as in it) have been historically, and in a majority of cases still are, discriminated against. The social relations and work/career patterns of the workplace are designed for an archetypal 40 to 50 hour a week, 40 to 50 week a year, 40 to 45 year on the job male worker. They are hardly optimal for most male workers but even less so for women who also work at home as parents. The impact of this discrimination by job modelling is intensified by the unsatisfactory structures of most part time employment and by low real wages (or consumerism) when they force both wife and man to work full time outside the home to maintain what they perceive as an acceptable standard of living. Women's right to employment access is one thing; being driven to take up such employment by economic necessity is a very different thing.

Women's work in the home is as important - creatively and in meeting basic household and social needs - as any other. The basic problem is not so much that it is not literally paid for by a wage as that it is often not perceived (by most men, but also by many women) as 'real' work giving dignity, independence and a sense of accomplishment. It is therefore in a much deeper sense perceived as unremunerative.

Unpaid work more generally is or should be remunerative. Social and community involvement does - or can - be creative, rewarding and contributory to the quality of social relations, the life of the

community and that of the worker. The primary problem is that only persons who have adequate incomes - usually from wage or own production remunerated employment (or past employment in the case of retired persons) - can afford to work without material reward no matter how high the non-material remuneration. An important secondary one is that such voluntary work is sometimes seen as a cheap way of offloading social responsibilities by the state and as a rather pharisaical and ostentatious display of virtue or means to uncriticised personal power by those with the funds to indulge themselves in this way.

The possibility for work to be creative depends primarily on social relations and on education. However, it also depends on access to complementary resources. For a near majority of the world's people those resources are land and the means to till (or graze) it; for almost all the others they are employers with the equipment, capital and knowledge to provide employment. In both cases the link to natural resources, ecology and sustainability is vital. The lower the creativity and productivity and the higher the inequality or greed (whether for power and wealth or - more broadly - for consumerism) the greater the dangers to the natural and the human environments and the less realistic it is to view most work as a tending of nature or participation in the ongoing process of creation.

4.) Technology: Master or Servant?

People create technology and decide how it is to be used. To assert otherwise is either fatalistic or an attempt to evade responsibility or a ploy to evade criticism by pseudo mystification.

Technology can be a force for helping enable poor people to become less poor - some improved seed, water access and technique packages have done precisely that. It can increase national output from precarious to adequate levels - whatever its distributional limitations the Indian "green revolution" has made major contributions in that direction. It can save lives - limited in impact on overall health and well-being as they may be, vaccination coverage increases have saved literally millions of infant and young child lives.

Technology can also be a force for mass destruction - "smart" bombs are not intelligent, well intentioned creatures. It can be used to amass

fortunes without regard to the pecuniary or human welfare of users - new but not improved drugs hard sold to doctors are a glaring example. It can kill - whether as a collateral side effect (to use the grotesque terminology of defenders) as with over-powered and under-engineered motor vehicles or with willful intent as with poison gas.

It would be foolish to deny either the importance or pervasiveness of technology. It would be unrealistic - and neither creative nor well attuned to responsible stewardship - to seek to halt the overall process of technological change.

The real issues from the perspective of a political economy of stewardship are which technologies, for what purposes, controlled by and/or accessible to whom, for whose benefit. Technology is never totally malleable but neither what exists, is used or is developed is technologically deterministic. In the case of improved seeds it is possible to breed for any category of user or set of climatic or input conditions but not for all at once. What choices are made depend ultimately on which farmers matter to political (or corporate for commercial breeding) decision takers. Equally technology does not consist of magic bullets - appropriate improved seed without access to land, water, inputs, credit, fair prices will be of little value to the landless or near landless peasant household. Equally immunisation, growth charts, oral rehydration and well mother and child clinics do not constitute health for all but are building blocks which can be used by people (including most especially those who are to be healthy) to begin constructing health.

To argue that technology is market determined is close to being a tautology. The key questions turn on who determines the markets, how, and for whose benefit. Whether poor farmers are markets for seed, fertiliser and tools (and therefore whether these are produced and marketed with them in mind) depends on agricultural policy. Weapons of mass destruction are produced for markets, too but the markets depend on state armaments policies which may well be invisible and even competitive but with the invisibility of defence establishments and the competition of arms races. Clearly not all encouragement or discouragement of technology is best handled via market management (taxes, subsidies, income distribution policies) but much is. If

access to forest logging rights depends on sustainable management profit motives will be surprisingly effective in finding ways to afford and to use sustaining technologies. If polluters actually do pay massive fines for exceeding socially acceptable levels of environmental contamination they will locate, adapt or develop technologies to meet those levels. That they choose to pay fines smaller than the cost of meeting pollution limits is also a fact; one readily projectable from mainstream economic analysis. But some technologies are so potentially lethal that administrative regulations or bans are needed. For example, while a nuclear reactor on an earthquake fault line may well bankrupt the building company that is small comfort if in a quake it causes a nuclear disaster; fluor carbons are economically viable and socially useful at local and national level but their global agglomeration erodes the ozone layer.

The basic concerns of stewardship turn on using resources in a human and environment centred way. Technology is a resource to be developed, produced, accumulated, used. It is neither a blind self-driven monster nor a benign self-activating power for good. Human beings create it and decide how it is to be used. The responsible steward's concern are which human beings and which uses.

[I hope this is what is wanted. It is a precis of the earlier AGEM volume's central message. That section of it by the by is basically Xavier Gorsotiaga's and only secondarily mine, albeit I fully concur with it.]

[P.S. To # 4 - Julio had an example of importance of transistor to poor people in Nicaragua but I can't reconstruct it from my notes. Please check with him!]

5.) Production, Problematics and Potential Syntheses

Economics - and even more political economy - is about scarcity. The alternative name for stewardship - husbandry - stresses that aspect of preserving and allocating prudently (husbanding*). Stewardship, like almost all creative human activity, is therefore to a large extent about choices. These choices are especially hard when the desirable uses exceed the available resources or two ends which are each

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* [Spousing is not a satisfactory substitute! Etymologically the word has no gender connotation!]

desirable (or at least innocuous) are in partial conflict with each other. Further, responsible stewardship within history does need to take account of the potentially possible. For example, land reform in the Philippines is difficult but over time conceivably attainable and necessary from an ecumenical political economic perspective. Halting all feeding of grain to livestock and ensuring the saved grain went to hungry people is not attainable; luckily it is also by no means the only (or even the best) way to enable poor people to produce and/or buy more grain.

More production is important. The Biblical injunction "blessed is he who makes two ears of corn grow where only one grew before" (or "two blades of grass" for pastoralists) is directly relevant to hundreds of millions of households. But except for basic necessities more of the same is not usually a responsible solution.

Access to affordable transport is a basic need; ownership of a saloon car is not. Moreover, universal access to saloon cars is neither practicable in cost terms nor would it be ecologically sustainable if it were. Even present numbers in rich and upper middle income countries from the USA through Korea create massive infrastructural and pollution costs locally and contribute to ecological damage and the global warming threat across frontiers. Further, the "car culture" impoverishes many families who could find far more rewarding uses for their limited resources if they did not feel socially constrained to have an automobile. However, how to demystify the car, make its users pay the full indirect costs (probably reducing vehicle numbers and usage) and to influence who does and does not have a car is not simple beyond making public transport more physically and economically accessible. The individual car is not a particularly noxious good; some households genuinely do achieve greater welfare or enjoyment from a car than from alternative uses of income beyond that required for literal necessities; vehicle and fuel sales have proven surprisingly inelastic in the face of higher vehicle and fuel taxes; pollution reduction has technical limits; administrative selection of eligible car owners would be a bureaucratic nightmare leading officials into temptation - and corruption.

Ecological sustainability is an achievable goal consonant with enough production for each household to have enough if household, community, national and international distribution structures are appropriate to ensuring need is met and greed restrained. But total preservationism is not possible (nor particularly natural) - some land now under forest or in open desert will need to be cultivated; some forests can be safeguarded only by increasing their humanly directly useful production and thus altering their makeup.

Accumulation is vital to reproduction and expanded reproduction to meeting material needs more fully tomorrow. But what is accumulated through investment in education, land improvement, environmental protection, better housing, appropriate technology, plant and equipment, public transport, etc., cannot be consumed today. The questions of choice are not easy ones especially in very poor countries. The turnpike theorem "proving" consumption over 100 years will be higher with more investment and more rapid growth is not a responsible real world answer - poor human beings will be dead long before the gains materialise. But consume now and let the next generation look after itself ("What has posterity ever done for me?") is even less responsible as a guide to conduct.

Need - beyond certain physical necessities - is not a timeless, universal reality with automatic printout objective correlatives. It is both culturally determined, technologically constrained and related to the average availability of resources. To argue that a peasant household does not have an absolute need for a bicycle, a radio, two changes of clothing and ability to provide decent burials for household members in order to survive is usually true. To proceed to argue that there is no valid need for these is a trivialisation of the concept of need.

The decent burial example illustrates the cultural dimension. The majority of the world's people do see it as a basic necessity, but in the North and in cities much less so than a century ago or than in the South and rural areas today. Further, it illustrates how a need can, by social practice, be made ruinous to poor households and a solemn paying of respect acknowledging our inheritance of the world from our ancestors in trust for our descendants turned into greedy consumerism

and ostentatious display. The Islamic rules limiting funeral rites and requiring prompt burial in a simple cloth shroud were in large part aimed at precisely these perversions of need into unnecessary burden and/or greedy self-aggrandisement.

But to say that many choices are complex and hard and that few - if any - answers (except wrong ones) are simple, timeless and universal is not same thing as to deny that there are guiding principles or that it is usually possible to identify worse and better (or at least less bad) courses of action. That acceptance of human imperfection and equally of the obligation of striving - with a real chance of success - to reduce imperfection is basic to the human condition as understood by Christianity. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that it confronts the practitioners or would-be practitioners of the political economy of stewardship.

[I believe we do need some section like this. Otherwise we are setting up as Romantics or Philosophes, <u>not</u> as Christians. Perfection belongs to eternity and God not to humankind in the here and now. Furthermore, if we don't state the dilemmas and difficulties we will, a) be scoffed at by those who know them well and, b) will needlessly disillusion those who eagerly grasp what we have to say in the misguided belief it is a short easy highroad to a New, Newer, Newest New Jerusalem! Applied political economy - like applied theology - needs to be <u>in</u>, not <u>out of</u>, as well as <u>in</u>, not <u>of</u>, this world.]

6.) <u>Economic Distribution, Social Relations and Power</u>

Economic distribution and social relations both depend on who is organised and able to participate in decision taking. In short, who has access to power and can hold decision takers accountable.

The three main structures of political economic organisation for which strong claims are advanced today, are capitalism; centrally planned authoritarian economies of Marxist origin; social democracy. Few national systems are totally one or the other and some have elements of all three but usually one is - or has recently been - dominant. Authoritarian, state dominated capitalist economic systems (technically fascist or corporatist except that both words have connotations and

associations limiting their usability) are common in the South but at the level of principle have few defenders.

Capitalist economies in their modern form emerged first in Western Europe between five and six centuries ago but have expanded their reach to at least some countries on all continents except Antarctica. These economies have concentrated on growth of output and of profit using private (including corporate) ownership of assets and markets largely controlled (individually at times but more often collectively) by property owners as their main political economic and social relationship organising tools. As a result, access to production, employment, natural resources created assets and consumption has been very unevenly distributed and private goods and services have had higher priority than public. The role of the state has been perceived as to facilitate private production and employment and to provide certain services which were necessary to social and economic reproduction but unattractive to private capitalists. The exclusion of the state and of civil society from key economic decision has - especially in the North - weakened as more and more social and economic groups organised and secured genuine access to the political decision taking process.

Centrally planned, authoritarian economic systems professing Marxist principles have existed in Central Europe, the USSR and the South. Their definition of socialism has been state ownership with centralised economic decision taking. Most did reduce absolute poverty significantly as well as approaching full employment and in reconstruction after war and/or from very low initial output per person achieving rapid growth and fairly broad access to basic services and consumer necessities. However, beyond that point they have tended to stagnate economically, technologically and socio-politically with absolute inefficiency in use of labour and created capital and very high levels of environmental damage. Participation in decision taking has been limited for all but a few and civil society (including religious bodies) co-opted, coerced and/or repressed.

Social democracy (under a wide variety of names) has sought to provide safety nets to limit market actor-caused inequality of results and has also striven to reduce inequality and to set minimums. It has stressed

at least some aspects of civil society and achieved broadening or organisation of people and political participation. In some variants it has been concerned with sustainability and environmental protection. However, both in regulation and in service provision its extension of the range of the state has become highly bureaucratic and tended to depersonalise social relations.

While social democracy is usually associated with Northwestern Europe this is too narrow a perspective. Many aspects are present in economic systems as diverse (and resistant to the term social democracy to characterise them) as the USA and Tanzania. Further, the material and bureaucratic - though much less the participatory and civil society - aspects can be traced back in practice to Bismarck's Germany, Haron er Rashid's Mesopotamian Empire and the Chinese Empire at the time of Confucius. In this perspective the Sabbath and Jubilee years of the Old Testament do constitute a social democratic vision albeit one not observed in practice.

Authoritarian capitalist states with centralised economic control by the state are common (some would argue that they included the central and Eastern European planned economies). The best known current examples include Iraq, Israel, Burma and South Africa. Civil society is routinely controlled and co-opted and sometimes (and especially for groups of people systematically denied access) coerced and repressed. While the basic economic mechanism is the market as well as much of the directly productive capital ownership both heavy market intervention and administrative direction significantly alter the results from those under private capitalism to the benefit of the state, its controllers and favoured social, religious and ethnic groups. For these there often are safety nets and sometimes even participation somewhat analogous to social democracy. However, in every case large (often in total majority) groups are virtually totally excluded from access to decision taking and from more than limited and exploited access to the fruits of the economic process.

[I realise this is a group we did not discuss at Geneva. But it is a significant one. My evident distaste for it may influence the example I've cited but they are all striking examples of a single socio-economic-political model. I cannot off hand think of a benign case albeit

Bourgiba's Tunisia was a relatively much less nasty one. My view that the denial of the common humanity of humankind is virtually inseparable from these systems is deductive from the actual cases not inductive logical necessity analysis. It certainly is not unique to them and varies among them in who is excluded and in degree - Tunisia was rather low on the scale indeed, arguably almost off it.]

In all cases political and economic power are closely and complexly intertwined and significant participation in one area is almost certain to lead to growing participation in the other while per contra systematic political economic exclusion is a major barrier to meaningful political participation. Participation is achieved primarily by organisation of communities or groups to create centres of power which cannot be totally ignored, e.g. trade unions, community associations, on occasion religious groupings. Individual access to participation is frequently possible without any general broadening of access but usually means co-optation as the price of access; a risk which also applies to civil society bodies (not least religious ones).

7.) The Pervasiveness of Political Economy

The principles and processes discussed above operate at household, community, national and international levels. Alternatively they operate on all household scales from the unitary family to the totality of humanity. The nature of social (including gender), political and economic relations at each level affect and interact with those at other levels. The particular issues and manifestations, the scale and the possibility of direct personal contact, participation and holding accountable, however, do differ with time, place and cultural context as well as with the level/size of unit.

Inequality and injustice at global economic and political levels limit participation, resource availability and environmental sustainability (in short the whole of stewardship) attainable at all other levels. This is particularly - but not only - true of poor, politically and economically peripheral national economies, communities and households and for environmental issues such as desertification, soil erosion, deforestation and global warming.

Likewise, unjust stewardship and restricted participation nationally both worsen the results of inequality at global level and weaken the struggle to achieve more responsible global stewardship. Third, the presence of unequal participation and inadequate concern with the needs of others within civil society organisations (not least religious ones and many trade unions) limits their credibility and their ability to play a prophetic or an advocacy role for the political economy of stewardship. Finally, unequal participation and inequitable distribution at household level (particularly but not only on gender lines) provide no basis for responsible stewardship more broadly.

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