

# Globalization and its consequences for artisanal fishermen and their families

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## I. Inside the globalization process; the poor in their multitudes

An excellent, learned book<sup>1</sup> by two internationally renowned Brazilian theologians, Hugo Assmann and Jung Mo Sung, draws a picture of globalization at a time when the process had not yet been “taken over” by the neo-liberalist economic movement.

The giant strides ever gathering momentum by science in the last 50 years, and all the novel forms of communication and automation that science has made possible, constitute advances that until recently were simply unimaginable. Our daily experience, however on a planet where everything is interlinked tells us that all this development is accessible in one way or another to anybody with a television set (p.16).

Technological development and the globalization it has led to – the world is at all times an interconnected, a united world in a Global Village for all who have access to the various technologies – would be something neutral and open to the widest variety of potential applications. It could contribute enormously to what Pope John Paul II calls the civilization of love.

At the same time it is practically impossible to imagine what direction this globalization might have taken and what it might have led to if it had not been brought into being, applied and expanded, as a function of unbridled capitalism, with its concentration of wealth and power and its disregard of countless imperatives, and making no ethical concessions where the ever proliferating masses of population are concerned.

Among the many consequences of this latter-day culture and disregard of ethics, is the mounting and generalized contempt<sup>2</sup> for the poor. Anyone unable to share in or contribute to the functioning of the market economy, with its excess consumerism, where profit and accumulation of wealth are the sole values, will be denied from the start any cultural or social value.

For the same reason, among the requirements of the plan to set up the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), is that the governments of member countries shall first attain parallel economies and trade. The powerful American corporations, which demand that their government imposes the adoption of this infamous system, know full well that economies and trading “in parallel” provide subsistence for a fair portion of the countries (and poor working people and their families), including Brazil.

Note that “exclusion” of the poor is not an option depending on the will of certain persons but is the reverse of the same coin bearing on its obverse the concentration paradigm. The two processes are structurally complementary. The consequences of this are enormous. The posture is, too, counter-ethical and is devoid of values other than those inherent in the system itself.

Brazil is living under the influence of these globalization mechanisms and as a result has for several decades been made dependent on the powerful of this world.

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<sup>1</sup> Competência e Sensibilidade Solidária [Competition and a Concern for Solidarity] (Vozes, Petrópolis 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Contempt: Webster has: “the feeling with which one regards something that is esteemed low, vile, or worthless”.

Artisanal fishermen and their families are among those classes of the poor that “*should never have existed*”. The Federal Government and the governments of the respective States, in their different ways, are actively working against those whose livelihood is on the sea by interfering with and placing obstacles in the way of their carrying on their trade and by raising administrative difficulties and anything else they can think up to translate their contempt for these poor people in to practice.

Brazil has millions of landless – her *Sem-Terra* – as well as the millions of those without a roof over their heads, and millions, again, without work; and in this way, with each day that passes, the ranks of those without hope are further swelled . Many of our fisherfolks’ children attend school and are trying to complete the elementary grades, and, thanks to – what appears to the writer to be – their above-average intelligence, hope to continue their schooling. But to what purpose? What are they going to do afterwards? Many of them join the multitude of the unemployed and the without-hopes. Then the drug and crime viruses find ample terrain for propagation. And the children of the people – the crime-inclined ones – bear all the blame (the powers that be are of course never to blame ...!).

To complete this first part one may be allowed to quote the prophet Isaiah, where (5.8), in his wisdom, he says: Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field until there is nowhere left and they are the sole inhabitants of the country.

## **GLOBALIZATION AND ARTISANAL FISHERMEN**

### **II. In the eyes of the Government institutions THE POOR MAN IS WITHOUT VALUE**

From 1962 to 1989 the fisheries sector was administered by the Department of Fisheries Development (SUDEPE). This was set up by Ministerial Decree No. 10/62, as a federal-level institution within the Ministry of Agriculture. Among its terms of reference were the development of fisheries and fisheries “extension” to monitor production and promote the socio-economic development of fishing communities. In addition SUDEPE had a Consultative Council, whose membership included one representative of the fishing community.

When SUDEPE was wound up by Act No. 7.735/89 and in its stead was created the National Institute for the Environment and Renewable National Resources (IBAMA) as a federal self-governing body reporting to the Secretariat for the Environment, fisheries as an economic activity disappeared from the scene of national policy. IBAMA failed to see that sustainable extractive fisheries represented the solution for certain ecosystems. Simply such fisheries meant administrative work that no-one could be bothered to do, a responsibility that no one wanted to shoulder. It was this attitude that led to the destruction of the mangrove stands in Brazil’s North-East in the interests of fish-farming. The destruction process is today only being held up because of the protests of the local people and the environmentalists.

Those worst hit are the poor because, to qualify for the benefits provided under the Act, one has to satisfy conditions and, fill in forms, when both conditions and forms are continually changing and requiring endless journeys and countless forms to fill in. Sometimes the process comes to nothing when the wretched papers reach Brasilia, by which time all of it will be outdated and one goes back to square one and hopes that the revised forms will one day reach the local services (there being no guarantee, of course, that they will).

### **III. At the level of the fishermen themselves – THE REACTION OF THE POOR**

From 1985 to 1988 the artisanal fishermen had what one can call the “fisheries constitutive assembly”. Here it must be remembered that without Padre Alfredo Schnüettgen, who died in 1990, it would be impossible to carry this project through to completion.

Brazil’s 1988 Constitution accords recognition to artisanal fisheries, and to its representative organizations, the Fishermen’s Settlements (*Colônias de Pescadores*), which have trade union-type status (no doubt thanks to the “Constitutive Assembly” that never was).

Following Padre Alfredo’s death, the Fishermen’s Pastorate for the South federal region has carried on what had originally been planned, thus:

Where the protection of the environment is concerned – the environment being space belonging to everyone – one cannot speak of protection without first being clear what exactly is being protected, because nowadays environments are “protected”, in the sense of being created for those with the money. Traditional communities are invaded by “ecotourism”. The fishermen are prevented from using their nets since nets get in the way of sport fishing. If there is life yet in our waters it is thanks to our artisanal fishermen.

In the various States of the Federation one notes the following achievements:

- The organizing of workshops on fisheries and the environment;
- appointment of expert committees and the enacting of some basic rules governing fisheries and the conservation of specified aquatic ecosystems (cf. Lagoons Forums (*Fórum das Lagoas*) in Ríó Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina;
- a considerable number of regulatory orders have been drafted, and some of them approved, for fisheries in specified catchment areas, lakes and lagoons, and for maritime regions;
- small-scale projects for purchasing boats and gear under the budgets of the States concerned;
- access for fishermen to PRONAF, a federal project providing financial help for family farming;
- access for fishermen to the People’s Bank (even so, the people will be unable to manage the price covered by the loans in question);
- literacy courses, in Ríó Grande do Sul, for members of fisher communities – a project of this particular state.

It is gratifying to note that today in São Paulo state, thanks to the excellent work done by the President of the Fishermen’s Federation, Tsuneo Okida, many young persons are taking up fishing as their vocational occupation. Those entering this trade in the last four years are the majority, to judge by the latest statistics. There has been an increase in school attendance, some 85% at basic (from 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades), while some have gone on to the secondary level. Fishermen’s incomes, too, have improved. Results such as these are in contrast with the data for working people nationwide, and are the result of organization and the high level of competence of the fishermen’s leaders in this State, leaders that have a voice in the respective, regional and municipal councils.

**There are countless natural obstacles and other difficulties needing to be overcome, viz:**

- political operators who fail to pass on information on current projects of interest to fishermen;

- uncontrolled tourism, in the interests of which communities and their fish resources have been destroyed, for the gratification of those with money, whose pleasure is paramount;
- the clash between the poor, who are aware of their rights, and a society that wants them out of the way;
- decline in fish stocks due to depredation, hydroelectric schemes, pollution, etc.;
- predatory fishing by industrial fisheries – pair trawlers that trawl even up to the beach; mullet ringnetting about 400 metres from shore; use of live bait consisting of juvenile of fish; fishing upstream of fish nurseries; trawling in estuaries, etc.;
- sport fishing with live bait used on barbed appliances and cast into the water and then dispersed, some 90% of the fish dying of injuries or due to other causes.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

- The artisanal fisherman's activity is extractive and yields basic foods of the highest quality for his own people, any surplus being bartered or sold;
- the artisanal fisherman is a born environmentalist and is the repository of wise lore and values that far exceed the requirements of his trade. Many a time other groups with conflicting interests make use of – abuse, even – this lore that he has acquired over many generations, only to dispossess the vocational fishermen, with utter contempt for their survival, as being people of no importance and without any value;
- the artisanal fisherman has ever taken care to manage the fish species he catches and respected the flora and fauna as part of his very life, by desisting at the breeding times of the various species and using appropriate gear.

Thirty years ago, research workers seeking to understand the socio-economic and cultural situation of population groups engaging in fishing, began by noting considerable similarities with the cultures of, and the difficulties encountered by, artisanal fishermen in other parts of the world; but they went on to express pessimism regarding the future for those whose work was on the seas.

The Pastorate, nevertheless, opted for developing legally recognized organizations for vocational fishermen – doubtless thanks to the prescience of Padre Alfredo Schnüettgen – and now, after these thirty years, one sees that where there are workers of the Pastorate for Fishermen, the fishermen themselves and their families are once again demonstrating their belief in the future of their trade.

It must be pointed out that, even though the matter is not of direct concern here, life aboard industrial fishing boats is one of great hardship for fishermen, and there is no guarantee of their survival once they cease to be able to work aboard ship. To make life even more difficult for these employees of the fishing companies, family, wife, children and parents when the breadwinner is out of work remain without support – this in Santa Catarina or in the outer areas of São Vicente. The fishermen themselves spend a long time at sea – a week or two weeks – and, aboard the modern vessels, two months. Whoever can will look for another kind of work and leave fishing, or go back to the artisanal type.

At the start of his mission Jesus chose a community of fishermen from the Sea of Galilee, and found men and women capable of setting his new Kingdom in train. Today, too, the strength of organisation among artisanal fishermen derives from their communities and their leaders who find strength from their faith in God and his Word.

The culture of fishermen's communities is part and parcel of this activity. In many places communities found themselves being deprived of their pitch on the shore and their working premises, and both their families and their religion and their normal social contracts began to languish. This problem, nowadays, is something the communities and their leadership are aware of, and they are organizing themselves on the basis of their activity, of their associations and of their respective localities.

The quality of artisanal fishermen's contribution to the conservation of the environment and governance of human activities has been fully dealt with earlier. Other sectors of the population must come to appreciate this fisherfolk culture and its peculiar characteristic, instead of continuing to hold the poor in contempt. This applies to the Church, too. The Church needs to have a clearer understanding of the fishing communities and their families, and assign pastoral workers capable of entering into dialogue with them and so develop a pastoral activity like the one the Gospels describe as being that of Jesus of Nazareth, who went *and dwelt among them*.

It is likewise important that the Church should avoid conforming to the neo-liberalist culture (if "culture" it can be called, because what *destroys* does not merit the name!) and be able to make a positive appreciation of the culture of our poor people. Being poor is not the end of everything: a human situation capable of developing a high degree of creativity and openness to one's neighbour. It will not become tainted with consumerism if ever it ceases to be held in contempt, as it is today over all the world.

Our duty is to combat poverty and hunger by striving to secure living conditions worthy of humanity as a whole and by educating people to a culture of solidarity.

In order to set pastoral activities in the right direction to and train up our future pastoral workers, it is a matter of urgency that we undergo conversion from conforming to the world with its riches and its competition and so place our faith in a Church of the Poor, which was the great ideal of Pope John XXIII, of happy memory.

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