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The Lutheran "convivial economy" as a Christian economic heterodoxy: significance, components, and proposals to the current socio-economic order[1]

ABSTRACT

Representatives of the economic heterodoxy only occasionally mention proposals of churches and religious organisations concerning the socio-economic order. Yet, churches and their doctrines are abundant sources of reflection on social and economic matters. Theologians employ their religious knowledge and pastoral experiences in developing theological conceptions of the socio-economic models. Usually, they are rather critical towards global neoliberal capitalism when pointing out its disastrous consequences for entire societies and cultures. An example is the "convivial economy", a concept developed within the Lutheran World Federation for the past eight years. Lutheran theologians use the term "economy" in a broader sense, enlarging the space of their reflection on culture, society, and environment. An essential part of this approach is migration, which is regarded as an inherent part of contemporary social reality and understood as both a challenge and an opportunity for society. The article outlines the meaning and dimensions of the convivial economy, including the topic of migration. It employs the narration of economic heterodoxy/orthodoxy to highlight a dominant Christian position towards the prevailing economic order.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global socio-economic discussion is dominated by the criticism of the neoliberal economy, on the one hand, and its defence, on the other. Many approaches are critical towards the liberal and neoliberal paradigm of the free market and suggest alternatives to the prevailing order. The economic orthodoxy of neoliberalism clashes with the economic heterodoxy models and trends. Institutionalism, feminism, post-Keynesianism, Marxism – the list of the heterodox approaches is far longer.

> Heterodox economics refers to specific economic theories and community of economists that are in various ways an alternative to mainstream economics in explaining the provisioning process, thereby making economics a contested scientific discipline (Lee 2011:5).

Nevertheless, representatives of the economic heterodoxy only occasionally mention varied proposals of churches and religious organisations concerning the economic order. However, churches and their doctrines are abundant sources of reflection on social and economic matters. Theologians and church leaders employ their religious knowledge and pastoral experiences in developing theological conceptions of socio-economic models. They are usually rather critical towards global neoliberal capitalism when pointing out its consequences for entire societies and cultures. An example is the "convivial economy", a concept developed within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for the past eight years. The Lutherans define "conviviality" simply as "the art and practice of living together" and link this definition to the thinking on socio-economic order.

Moreover, they use the term "economy" in a broader sense, enlarging the space of their reflection on culture, society, and environment. An essential part of this approach is migration, regarded as an inherent part of contemporary social reality. Migration is understood as both a challenge and an opportunity for society. The article outlines the meaning and dimensions of the convivial economy, including the topic of migration. It employs the narration of economic heterodoxy/orthodoxy to highlight a dominant Christian position towards the prevailing economic order. The text uses a literary survey and an analysis of the studies on the essence of capitalism and the Lutheran documents (of both the LWF and the Evangelical Church in Germany) on the socio-economic order.

2. ECONOMIC ORTHODOXY AND HETERODOXY: THE PERSPECTIVES OF CAPITALISM

As alluded to earlier, heterodoxy in the economy refers to the economic approaches that are different or alternative to the economic orthodoxy constituted by neoliberal globalised capitalism. The heterodox models vary widely in their opinion on capitalism and relationships between economy, culture, and social institutions. There are heterodox concepts that seek changes in capitalism without rejecting it; there are also those striving for a complete transformation of the entire socio-economic order. Both "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy" are terms employed to mark the positions in power and, as Fusfeld (2000:171) argued,

> heterodoxy often becomes orthodoxy, and orthodoxy often becomes heterodoxy, as the economy changes, as the social context of economic thoughts changes, and as ideas develop and change.

Lee (2011:3) mentions three ways of defining economic heterodoxy:

> Heterodox economics refers to economic theories and the community of economists that are in various ways an alternative to mainstream economics. However, some economists use 'heterodox' to depict dissent from the conventional theories within the mainstream, while others define heterodox in terms of dissent from the mainstream, and a third group suggests that the dividing line between heterodox and mainstream economics is fluid over time so that what once was heterodox is now mainstream and vice-versa.

Thus, mainstream economy is a counterpoint of reference, and nowadays, by this is meant neoliberal capitalism. Capitalism itself is defined differently, depending on the analytical and historical perspective. Most of the research points out the 16th century as the beginning of capitalism, considering the rise of a global banking system and the new meaning of money. Schumpeter (2006:78) stressed this change:

> The development of the law and practice of negotiable paper and of created deposits is the best indication we have for dating the rise of capitalism.

This historical perspective corresponds with the observation of Ingham (2008, 53), who distinguished three key components of contemporary capitalism: the monetary system of production of bank-credit money, market exchange, and private enterprise production of commodities. Of course, all of them are interdependent.

Furthermore, the emergence of capitalism occurred in the wake of a balance between the early modern state and capitalist bourgeoisie, the process that Max Weber called "memorable alliance" (Ingham 2008:58). Until the present, this historical alliance constitutes an institutional and ideological space of capitalism. Ingham (2008:58) concludes that

> capitalism is characterised by two independent sources of power – the state's legitimised sources of force and the private ownership and control of economic sources (capital).

This brief historical and analytical description of capitalism gives one a glimpse of the nature of neoliberal orthodoxy. The neoliberal approach invokes Adam Smith's idea of the market as a self-regulating mechanism, on the one hand, and as an instrument of social integration, on the other. Self-interest and competition are understood as natural factors of the famous invisible hand of the market as natural regulation of economic life. The fundamental tenets of Smithian philosophy are a cornerstone of economic thinking that has dominated global relations since the 1980s. It has brought about deregulation of financial markets and privatisation of production, reducing the state's influences on the economy. Yet its influences have reached far beyond the economy; another driving force of thinking in terms of social Darwinism has emerged when justifying both, selfishness in social relationships, growing inequalities in society, and ferocious social competition; it has also converged with and advanced consumption in culture, promoting a kind of cultural dumping and thereby destroying social relations (Leywa 2009:365). While combining with accelerating globalisation, neoliberal orthodoxy has built a system often named turbo-capitalism (as proposed by Luttwak) or casino-capitalism (Ulrich Beck). Both labels indicate the scale of economic activities that overwhelmed culture, society, politics, and the endless risk that has become an inherent and approved component of socio-economic order.

3. THE CHRISTIAN CRITICISM OF THE NEOLIBERAL ECONOMY

Christian churches give a strong, seldom heard voice of criticism of neoliberal orthodoxy. The self-values of turbo-capitalism such as unconstrained profit, ferocious competition, and conspicuous wealth seem to be at odds with Christianity. Yet Christians are not unanimous in their thinking on neoliberal economy, and there are many differences across denominations, theological movements, continents, and specific churches. A good example is the Lausanne Movement, an organisation gathering Evangelicals from all over the world, of which members are divided in their approach to the role of state and social institutions in regulations of economic activities – the Evangelicals

from the USA are far more willing to minimalise the power of the state than the Evangelical communities from Europe and South America (Tizon 2014:175). On the other hand, some theological circles seem to be the strongest critics of capitalism, even as being close to the Marxist position. For instance, Duchrow (2011:69-70), leader of the Radicalising Reformation movement, links capitalism with fascism, claiming that both have caused the death of millions of people. Both fascism and capitalism affirm effectiveness and strength; impose mechanical ways of thinking; fight with their ideological alternatives, and contend with individuals' reflexive attitudes. Both are a manifestation of totalitarianism. Duchrow argues that capitalism, while regarding economic growth as a primary objective, exploits entire societies as a tool to achieve its abstractive goals. Moreover, he admits that the totalitarianism of capitalism is even more latent, as it relies on an internal logic of profit (*Geldlogik*). This may explain the passive attitude of societies facing growing social inequalities.

Duchrow's tenets are close to liberation theology and on the margins of the theological mainstream. However, the official words of different churches, interconfessional and ecumenical organisations also express critical approaches to neoliberal economic orthodoxy and capitalism. Even though their criticism is of a different nature, the teaching of the vast majority of Christian churches warns against the consequences of uncritical acceptance of the neoliberal economic order. Suffice it to mention Pope Francis' (2013) observations on the economy of exclusion and idolatry of money contained in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The joy of the Gospel"), for instance, in point 55 of the text:

> One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Exod. 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose.

Generally speaking, the text of exhortation leaves no doubt that the Bishop of Rome is a determined opponent of the neoliberal economic order.

The mainstream of the ecumenical movement, headed by the World Council of Churches (WCC), makes even more harsh utterances than those of the Pope. Nevertheless, for decades, the largest ecumenical organisation has been a strong agent of a more just social order and thereby an advocate of transformation of the prevalent economic model. This ecumenical criticism started to develop for good in 1983 at the General Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver, at the launch of the programme "Justice, Peace and Integrity

of Creation" (JPIC). The programme had two crucial assumptions: first, the rejection of the idea of political, economic, and technological progress as the main factor of social development (or rather disintegration), and secondly, the emphasis that justice, peace, and integrity of creation are integrated and striving for them must be formulated in one social strategy (WCC 1983:131).

The idea of JPIC became the background of further initiatives of the WCC. The programme "Alternative globalisation addressing people and earth" was most relevant, launched during the WCC's General Assembly in Harare in 1998 and continued in the ensuing assemblies in Porto Alegre and Pusan. Theologians from Geneva clearly emphasised that globalising economy, driven by the neoliberal philosophy of unfettered market, caused increasing poverty, ecological catastrophes, as well as social and political injustices in many places of the world (WCC 1990:2). They strived for a critical reinterpretation of capitalism, mainly by rejecting the dogma of its apparent "naturality" and of economic growth as an autotelic value. The neoliberal socio-economic approach was even directly named "the economy of death", the disorder destroying society, culture, and environment. Instead, the WCC proposed an "economy of life", a counter idea that would drive a profound transformation of social reality. The preamble to the declaration of the "economy of life" appears as one of the most critical utterances of the Genevan organisation:

> This call to action comes in a time of dire necessity. People and the Earth are in peril due to the over-consumption of some, growing inequalities as evidenced in the persistent poverty of many in contrast to the extravagant wealth of a few, and intertwined global financial, socio-economic, ecological and climate crises … life in the global community as we know it today will come to an end if we fail to confront the sins of egotism, callous disregard and greed which lie at the root of these crises … An Economy of Life is not only possible, it is in the making – and God's justice lies at its very foundation! (Mshana & Peralta 2010:1).

4. AN OUTLINE OF THE CONVIVIAL ECONOMY

As mentioned earlier, the programmes of the ecumenical movement have become a source of inspiration for many churches and religious organisations in their social and economic teaching. One of them is the idea of "convivial economy" of the LWF.

An introductory remark suffices when examining the convivial economy: it is rather a socio-economic and ethical approach regarding economic order and economic activities as part of social life. Such shift in emphasis is a hallmark of many economic heterodoxies: the economy must be regarded as a social institution, thereby, a part of social reality and not the reverse.

The convivial economy does not offer a "pure" economic model using, for instance, econometrics to assess and forecast the most efficient economic actions. Instead, the convivial economy employs the term "economy" in a much broader sense, being closer to the Greek etymology of *oíkovouía* (*oíκος* – house, and *voμος* – law, rule); thus, the primordial meaning of the word referred to the art of managing a household.

The etymology of "convivial economy" is also a pure economic matter. *Conviviality* derives from the Spanish word *convivencia* (English, *coexistence*, *life together*) and the LWF theologians define it as "the art and practice of living together" (LWF 2017a:3; 2014:4). Thus, the Lutheran approach emphasises social relations based on the etymological starting point. Conviviality may be regarded as an attitude of active social involvement in a growing social and cultural diversity; therefore, it is about going beyond classes, race, culture, religion, and gender.

The etymology of "conviviality" relates with the diaconal engagement (LWF 2014:20). Varied experience from the diaconal work helped list three main components of the convivial attitude: vocation, dignity, and justice (LWF 2014:15; Addy 2019). Having observed growing systemic contradictions of the prevalent economic model, LWF theologians addressed conviviality to the sphere of economy and labour. The dignity of the human person, his/her vocation to contribute to social life, and finally, justice as the key principle of every relationship creates a background of the convivial economy as the model contrary to the neoliberal approach. If the latter causes a defragmentation of society and expels increasing numbers of individuals and groups on the margins of social life, the former aims to reintegrate parts of social reality.

Therefore, the convivial economy is a counterproposal for economic idolatry overwhelming contemporary reality. As the authors of this approach notice, it is about making the objectives of the economic activities – profit and effectiveness – measures to improve human and social well-being, not the reverse. The well-being itself must not be understood in terms of sheer comfort, changing one's life in a quest for permanent consumption.

If properly comprehended and applied, the economic model helps develop a human potential for the common good of society and the earth. Thus, the sphere of work must not be an area of destroying competition or a field where a job is the privilege of a few; a place of economic activity must not simply be a quest for profit justifying injustice and dishonesty; economic actors must not view human beings as merely a measure on the way to economic success (EKD 2015:49). Observations of contemporary signs of crisis such as the growing economic inequalities, increasing unemployment, both technological and structural, further commodification of work and earthly resources,

to mention only a few, all of them confirm the warnings listed above. As counter model for contemporary economic orthodoxy, the convivial economy proposes a view of the economy through vocation, dignity, and justice. All these categories might employ a theological significance when adopting it to the economic and social fields.

Of course, vocation is meant broadly rather than merely a position in the organisation of the church. Instead, it reflects the social teaching of the Lutheran Reformation and refers to the calling of each member of the Christian society to partake in the tasks given by God. In Luther's thought, when truly and honestly performed, every human profession is the way of true Christian life and an answer to God for His gracious gift of salvation (EKD 2015:6). Consequently, the vocation might be understood through the lenses of Weber's theory: as a factor of one's position in a stratified social system and the function in the division of labour.

Both the theological view of Luther and the sociological view of Weber help comprehend the goals of the convivial economy. Thus, the term "vocation" refers to the idea that each man/woman has his/her function in social life according to his/her skills and abilities. The perspective of the prevalent economic approach reduces this integral meaning. On the one hand, vocation is linked merely with paid work; on the other hand, many people are being deprived of their workplaces, due to the continuing financialisation of work. The logic of the globalised market economy pushes entire groups out on the margins of employment. In many countries, especially young people are doomed to precarious work conditions, and the future of societies appears unstable, resulting in gloom. Concurrently, the market economy includes the forms of human activities that have been out of the logic of profit and competition. Moreover, the vast majority of social policy systems aim to regulate as many human actions as possible. This is the basic outline of the sphere of work in Europe nowadays (LWF 2017a:6).

From this starting point, the LWF (2017b:5) lists three categories in the field of human actions:

> Employment (with or without an employment contract, or as self-employed); work (needed for our common life but not paid for); and activity (contributing to personal and social life but not essential for survival needs, such as leisure pursuits).

Obviously, this list brings to mind Hannah Arendt's distinction of the forms of activities fundamental to the human condition, of the *vita activa* (labour, work, action). Although the categories distinguished by the Lutheran theologians do not point out class differences, they do highlight a hallmark of the current socio-economic order.

This order commercialises and regulates the vast majority of human activities, with destructive consequences for social relations and human well-being. A place of human existence free from state and market power is dramatically shrinking. Our livelihood and our well-being depend on the decisions of politicians and often random forces of the globalised markets. We are forced to endless competition in growing sectors of social realities and to a tacit acceptance of a dominant way of thinking. It makes human life less happy, less free, and less healthy.

Thus, the convivial economy is about making the human sphere of work less individualistic and focusing on more goals than merely profit and effectiveness. As the LWF theologians argue, in the convivial economy,

> Work would be recognised as important for the health of society, and the pressure to turn work into employment would be diminished. Employment would be organised within a framework which ensured a living wage (or would supplement an already adequate basic income). No one must work excessive hours or under bad conditions simply to survive. Activity would be enhanced because time would be released for reciprocal activities, culture, and work, on which a convivial society could be based (LWF 2017a:5).

It is obvious that the demands of the convivial economy call to retreat from the economisation of human reality, of the dominant way of thinking, assuming that the entire reality relies on the logic of profit, egoistic self-interest, and competition.

Vocation refers to the sphere of work. The second keyword in considering the convivial economy is justice. The LWF theologians do not examine this notion in theological or philosophical terms; rather, they use it to describe contemporary economic inequalities. They seem to refer to one of the dominant polemics in the current poverty studies taking place between two counter positions: those who are claiming that the politics of economic growth causes gradual mitigation of the global poverty and those who argue that a decrease in poverty is merely a statistical aspect, poorly reflecting reality.

In terms of politics and economics, justice is thus discussed as a self-value of the global social policy systems. The financialisation of the economy, global growth of economic inequality, economic crises with their destructive consequences (especially the financial crisis of 2008) can be regarded as the consequences of a lack of justice (LWF 2017a:7; see also EKD 2009). The authors of the convivial economy's programme argue that the various effects of neoliberal orthodoxy are too often treated as coming from personal greed or personal morality, without taking seriously into account the deplorable results of liberalisation and deregulation of markets. The way they present justice

puts them on the side of devoted critics of neoliberal orthodoxy. Therefore, the convivial economy corresponds with many other approaches in the ecumenical movement.

Human dignity is the final listed keyword. As in the previous instance, the LWF theologians examine human dignity through the lenses of current economic upheavals. They argue that the prevailing economic model drives socio-economic tendencies that seriously impair social order and daily human well-being. They mention four detailed examples.

First, it is an expectation of fast and continuous profit; this means making decisions about investment or disinvestment based on the short-term rate of return. Such a maximisation of profit often comes at the expense of either the wage earners or the allocation to the research and development sector or system of social politics.

Secondly, economic transformations driven by the neoliberal orthodoxy result in the privatisation (and, one might say, commodification) of many public services and the rifts in social security systems. This economic shift manifests even in the language used in public services: their recipients are now customers rather than citizens; moreover, public institutions work partly as commercial enterprises (LWF 2017a:8). This leads to a poorer quality of public services such as housing, care services, health, and education offered to less wealthy people and, in general, to growing economic precariousness and instability of a vast number of families, communities, and individuals.

Thirdly, it is the restructuring of income maintenance systems, especially aid systems for potential excluded groups such as the unemployed, the disabled, or the ill, etc. Unlike previous social insurance concepts of support, the current prevalent model requires an objective assessment of one's eligibility. This often means that public institutions and agencies employ profit's logic, leading to a stigmatisation of social aid recipients.

Fourthly, economic orthodoxy makes people more vulnerable to the consequences of large-scale structural economic changes in the daily life of workers and consumers. The costs of financial crises, relocations, or privatisation are shifted to the citizens. Of particular importance for daily life are tendencies in the sphere of work, as the employed market economy measures continuously lead to its economisation. In this instance, Beck's (2014:107) remark that people are called to find "biographical solutions to systemic contradictions" is relevant. As the LWF theologians argue,

> in all these cases human dignity, which is an essential attribute of each person is denied and undermined and the attitudes in society become harsher to those on the margins (LWF 2017a:9).

In order to protect human dignity, the convivial economy makes several proposals for tackling the gloomy consequences of the current upheavals in the socio-economic order.

First, it suggests serious discussion on a universal mechanism of the basic citizen income (LWF 2017a:9). Obviously, the idea of the basic income has appeared in many circles and been tested in several countries (Switzerland, Finland); however, the LWF theologians appeal to the opinions of many faith-based organisations and religious think-tanks (LWF 2017b:7). The basic income would protect individuals and families, especially the most vulnerable, from the rapid rifts in the economy; it would give people "the floor", preventing poverty and providing the background for a more stable and balanced family life.

Secondly, the convivial economy includes the proposals referring to education, especially to lifetime learning. Sufficient educational politics is crucial, especially when facing fast changes in employment regulations and job offers (LWF 2017a:10; see also EKD 2016). Education must not be reduced to the training for work or skills for employment; rather, it must be a "learning for the whole of life"; it should develop the instruments and abilities for metacognition.

Thirdly, as the LWF theologians argue, health and welfare services must not be regarded in terms of profit, but as an entitlement, especially for the most vulnerable members of society (LWF 2017a:9) .

5. MIGRATION IN THE CONVIVIAL ECONOMY

Justice, vocation, and dignity are the three components of the convivial economy and, simultaneously, the keywords in its description. The LWF theologians explain the significance of this approach, by distinguishing five critical areas of the current socio-economic order, where conviviality would heal the growing structures of injustice and poverty: work and welfare, debt, migration, corruption and transparency, creation, and environment. It is worthwhile to stress that the theologians deal with this list by appealing to the experience of Lutheran faith-based organisations working in different contexts.

Migration is the crucial dimension of the current socio-economic upheavals; it is both their cause and effect. It is obviously not a new issue; in fact, human history is migration history. Nevertheless, globalisation, technological and communication progress, as well as current political conflicts set a new context for contemporary migration patterns. Moreover, when considering a specific European context, important push factors stem from the political integration

within the European Union (EU). Social mobility (horizontal) is thereby a right established and guaranteed by law and a basic entitlement of EU citizens.

It is a truism that migration changes society in almost every aspect: economic, political, cultural, religious, etc. The convivial economy, when approaching the European background, considers this wide range of perspectives:

> These various dimensions of migration, mobility and being an asylum seeker or refugee have meant that local communities, towns and cities are becoming more diverse (LWF 2017a:18, 19).

From this point on, the LWF theologians draw a sociological portrait of the present phases of migration in Europe and its consequences.

In the first phase of migration, they pay attention to the economic migration within the member states of the EU, and to the ambiguous results of this right. On the one hand, younger or highly skilled people are free to seek better work and education conditions; free mobility affords many qualified workers an opportunity to improve their personal economic situation. The migration of a skilled and qualified workforce boosts economic growth in the pull countries and helps sort out the results of demographic processes, particularly the ageing of societies. On the other hand, this free mobility of workers has, at times, disastrous consequences for the emigration countries within the EU: the growing number of Euro orphans, the disintegration of families and "a disruption of normal family norms", as well as the brain drain effect that hinders economic development in many countries, thereby destroying social cohesion. A different matter is criminal human traffic:

> [T]here are many who come to the western countries organised by so-called gang masters to do very low paid or seasonal jobs, and often the living and working conditions are extremely exploitative (LWF 2017a:19).

The second phase of migration is the question of refugees and asylum seekers. In the European context, this aspect seems to have more serious consequences and constitutes the most crucial problem for many European countries; they face an increasing conflict of values, cultural patterns, and as a consequence, an increase in social disintegration. Societies in the immigration countries must learn the differences between various waves of migration, and the mechanisms of constituting groups and communities of the migrants within the host country, as, for instance, the causes of radicalising of younger generations of immigrants and refugees. This question links with the distinction between integration and assimilation: the former has to create a context where people can live together without becoming "separated or

segregated", whereas the latter assumes that "the immigrants and refugees should assimilate themselves to local culture", which is, as the LWF theologians argue, more or less an impossible goal (LWF 2017a:20).

The convivial economy is about the positive patterns of integration; about learning to cross the boundaries of prejudices and stereotypes, and about daily building new relationships and solidarities. The alternative is a high wall between continents and regions.

6. CONCLUSION

As alluded to earlier, the Lutheran proposal of a convivial economy is not a sheer economic model, especially when applying the prevailing meaning of economy. Yet, it becomes more relevant when recalling the primary etymology of "economy" as the art of managing the household. In this way, the convivial economy joins the rising stream of alternatives to the current prevalent economic order. Most of them argue that the economy requires changes – in terms of purposes and values – and that leaving matters as they are, would lead to disastrous consequences, especially in the face of uncontrolled technological progress. However, this stream is not homogenous; alternative voices reverberate from different ideological positions, being sometimes at odds with one another.

The convivial economy is based on theological foundations. The keywords (vocation, justice, and human dignity) around which it is organised cannot be considered without reference to their biblical and theological basis. Hence, it is a socio-economic alternative reflecting the Christian faith, mindset, and diaconal experiences of theologians and church leaders who are its authors. It is, therefore, universal. When grounded in the European context, it may be examined and applied as a source of inspiration in socio-economic transformations worldwide. Ultimately, it may be a theological answer to addressing the moral indifferentism of neoliberal capitalism.

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