

**TAKING STOCK OF REALITY,  
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR REALITY,  
AND TAKING CHARGE OF REALITY**  
A Samaritan roadmap toward  
another possible world



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José Laguna

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For Marta, Carlos, and Mònica,  
with the desire to visit together the *Museum of Poverty*.

«There is no reason why there should be poor people in the world, and I hope that one day we'll be able to create a *Museum of Poverty*, so that children will ask how poverty ever could have existed and why we accepted it for so many years»

*Muhammad Yunus,*  
*Nobel Prize Winner 2006*

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# INTRODUCTION

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«We are the first generation capable of doing away with poverty»; «another world is possible». These are some of the popular watchwords of the Global Resistance Movements (GRM)<sup>1</sup> of the last decade. Are they slogans or statements of ideals? Are they promotional claims or socio-political projects? Are they soporific mantras or calls to social dissent? To claim in all seriousness that we are the first generation capable of doing away with poverty, or that there is an alternative to the dominant neoliberal model is possible, means being ready to accept the reproaches of our children if our promises are not kept.

## **Another world is possible, how?**

All the organizations that come together under the umbrella of the GRMs –citizens’ associations, non-governmental organizations, small farmers’ organizations, ecological groups, religious communities, etc.– will need many bricks and a good blueprint for the bold undertaking of building *another possible world*. Not only must they respond to people’s needs with immediate assistance, but they also have to create an ideological roadmap along which their actions will move forward.

The proposals for the utopia of another possible world must deal not only with aid and politics, but also with epistemology, linguistics, and ethics.

In order to elaborate a suitable ideological and political proposal, the «global civil society» needs to enter into dialogue with those utopian traditions which in the course of history have profoundly changed social systems and cultural paradigms.

The utopian traditions of the past have included the Platonic republic, socialism, Marxism, anarchism, etc. In

our judgment, there are at the present time three utopian visions capable of enriching the social practices which seek to bring into being another possible world. First is the ethico-philosophical tradition of Human Rights with human dignity, as the keystone for authentic social ordering. Second is the ecological tradition which links environmental destruction and structural poverty with irresponsible consumerism. Third, and prior to these, is Christianity's prophetic tradition of compassion, with its proposal for shaping a new society out of the crucified peoples of history.

If the utopias of Human Rights and ecology fit easily within the grammars used by the GRMs, the same is not true of the Christian contribution. In accepting the Christian tradition, there is always the fear that, along with its radical proposal of neighborliness, adherence to church dogmas and institutions will also be required.

In these pages we seek to liberate the utopian potential of the gospel stories from the interpretative restraint of confessional reading. Concretely, we will study the parable of the Good Samaritan because, in addition to its being known to everyone, it has condensed within itself the essential ethical teaching and pedagogy of the Christian message. It contains a wisdom that no GRM should ignore. Turning one's back on the ideals of the Christian utopia would mean building a new social order that is vitiated from its very foundations. Christianity is the only utopian tradition which proposes to lay the foundations of history from the perspective of

a gallows. What Christianity adds to the utopia of another possible world is a place and a way: another world is possible, from the side of the victims. This means affirming that the radical otherness of reality consists of the world's impoverished peoples, over and above any other interest.<sup>2</sup>

### **A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho**

The parable of the Good Samaritan forms part of the literary and ethical patrimony of humankind. The example of the "compassionate Samaritan" overflows its original religious context and so becomes an obligatory reference point for all persons and institutions dedicated to binding up the wounds of those who in every historical epoch have been assaulted, robbed, and thrown into the gutters of the dominant social systems.

Like every metaphorical account, the parable keeps unveiling new meanings each time it is heard. Can Samaritans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learn anything new from a story that is two thousand years old? Does that account of an anonymous man who was assaulted in a tiny corner of first-century Palestine mean anything for present-day GRMs which are operating in a world without borders? Our answers will be affirmative if we manage to penetrate into the teachings that the parable conceals in its very telling.

The story of the Good Samaritan not only tells "what" we have to do with respect to our neighbor, but it also indicates "how" we are to do it. The

narration puts before us a pedagogical itinerary of charitable action; the «roadmap» it provides for the exercise of solidarity is tremendously useful for the GRMs, which are busy with the task of sketching a map of the other world that is possible, from the side of the victims.

**Taking stock, taking responsibility, taking charge**

In order to extract the teachings contained in the parable, we are going to make use of a reading guide taken from the Salvadoran martyr, Ignacio Ellacuría. In dialogue with Zubiri, his philosophical mentor, Ellacuría expands the Zubirian «sentient intelligence» toward the field of action, thus affirming three moments in the knowledge of reality: «reality is known when, besides taking stock of reality (noetic moment) and taking responsibility for reality (ethical moment), a person takes charge of reality (praxic moment)»<sup>3</sup>. These three moments can be identified perfectly in the parable of the Good Samaritan; they bring into focus the fundamental aspects of Samaritan service, namely, intelligence, compassion, and commitment.

As we will see directly, the parable does not say only that we need to pour oil and wine on the wounds of those assaulted; it also teaches that we need to know how to view reality in such a way that suffering moves us to compassion; it shows us that we need to share our mounts so as not to fall into paternalistic types of aid, and that we need to create suitable lodgings, that is, “domestic” structures committed to soli-

arity and permanence. Only so do we create an itinerary which, if we follow it, leads to a new social, economic, and political order: another world that is possible, from the side of the victims.

**Roadmap**

We illustrate below the roadmap for our itinerary. Applying the pattern of “three moments” to the text of the parable, the reader will instinctively recognize the map which will guide our reflections.

<p>A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest was going down that way. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he traveled, came where he was. When he saw him,</p>	<p>TAKING STOCK</p>
<p>he was moved with compassion, came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He set him on his own animal,</p>	<p>TAKING RESPONSIBILITY</p>
<p>and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, and gave them to the host, and said to him, «Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return». (Luke 10, 30-35)</p>	<p>TAKING CHARGE</p>

# 1. TAKING STOCK OF REALITY

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The first step toward another possible world is seeing reality as it is. This is a first, rational moment which, in the words of Jon Sobrino, demands being completely honest with what is real: it means grasping the truth of the reality and responding to it, not just as a way of overcoming ignorance and indifference, but as resistance to our innate tendency to suppress truth and give reality a wide berth.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.1. The limits of our perception

Reality does not directly dissolve the negativity of our mind. As Plato already anticipated in his myth of the cave, we perceive reality in terms of our own world of ideas. Since that time, the whole of the philosophy of science, Gestalt psychology, and the sociology of knowledge have done little more than confirm the Platonic principle: all thought presupposes a subject who thinks; the natural or social reality is perceived from the subjectivity of each individual. Furthermore, psycholinguistics shows that the limits of our perception are determined by the frontiers of our language; what we cannot name

does not exist: «I have forgotten the word I wanted to utter, and my thought, incorporeal, returns to the kingdom of shadows»<sup>5</sup>.

The Samaritan roadmap starts out with questions about the discourse which determines the way we view the world. There are stories which function as «social eye drops», helping us to make visible the reality of exclusion, but there are others which act as blinding flashes, hiding from our eyes the evidence of suffering. What are the stories which condition the priest's vision and the Samaritan's? Why is it that only the latter seems really to "see" the man who has been assaulted and left half

dead? In our own society, why is it that some persons and institutions give a wide berth with regard to suffering? Let us now enter into the play of visions proposed to us by the evangelist Luke in order to discover the epistemological keys which will allow us to draw close to reality with complete honesty.

## 1.2. Seeing they do not see

The evangelist Luke leaves no doubt about it: all the characters in the parable “see” the wounded man. Therefore we cannot invoke blindness –at least not physical blindness– to justify the failure of the religious representatives to offer the man assistance. Despite Luke’s blunt portrayal, we will maintain the hypothesis that the priest and the Levite “did not see” the assaulted man. We need only look elsewhere in this same gospel to find reasons which support our opinion. In chapter eight of Luke we read that there are persons who «see but do not see and hear but do not understand» (cfr. Lk 8,10). This is, in our view, what happens with the priest and the Levite: «seeing they do not see».

Why is it that the priest and the Levite “see but do not see”? Finding the answer requires careful analysis of the text. Until now we have referred to the person on the side of the road as an “assaulted man”, a “suffering man”, a “wounded man”, and a “man half dead.” Although any one of these definitions will serve us as a general category for a “human being who suffers”, only the last expression, “man half dead”, captures the precise intention of Luke, which is to make the religious world-

view the cause of people’s blindness to the pain of others.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish legislation was quite clear about dealing with a man half dead: «Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: A priest shall not defile himself with the dead body of one of his people’» (Lv 21,2). It was prohibited for a priest to have contact with a cadaver, the only exception being close relatives. Furthermore, oral traditions extended the prohibition to contact with a dead person found in the street, and other traditions prohibited contact with non-Jews, dead or alive. The priest therefore acted properly, in accord with the dictates of his religion, but such religious precepts end up inuring people to the suffering of others. The priest sees not a human being in need of succor but a cause of impurity from which he should flee. Although rigorous interpretation would require distinctions, we can explain the temporary blindness of the Levite also in terms of religious observance.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.3. Seeing we do not see

Our own blindness is not very different from that of the priest and the Levite, although now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not so much a religious worldview that makes us steer clear of those who are suffering, lest we be made unclean by them. Nowadays what renders socially invisible all those who have been expelled from the banquet of consumption is rather a type of “neo-liberal” religion.



«Nothing is true, and nothing is false; everything depends on the color of the lenses we look through». Our looking does not reflect reality, it shapes it. Our ideological premises will allow us to see the man half dead on the side of the road, or else they will conceal from us his existence. The first task for any GRM that seeks to travel by the Samaritan roadmap is to become aware of the lenses through which it is viewing the reality of exclusion. What forms of discourse shape the symbolic universes from which the GRM “reads” reality?<sup>8</sup> When it takes a look at Ballesta Street, does it see “prostitutes” or “prostituted women”? Is the sale of pirated DVDs an “attack on intellectual property” or an attempt to create an “economy of survival”? Is the death of a Palestinian child a “war crime” or “collateral damage”?

#### 1.4. They see for us

«Don’t give to beggars. Don’t encourage panhandling». A notice of this sort (I cite from memory) formed part of a campaign by which the Community of Madrid tried to stop the practice of begging which was found –and still is found– on its commuter trains.

There is always somebody ready to think for us, to provide us with lenses for contemplating reality. Our Big Brother state saves us the effort of making decisions. When we get on a train, we are not longer obliged to discern whether we should give alms or not; we no longer have to wonder whether it is a just act or a humiliating one; there’s no need to judge whether the person who approaches us is really in need or

is making believe; we don’t have to take the risk of being fooled if our coins are transmuted into palliative cares in the form of a bottle of wine. There is nothing for us to decide; our public institutions are watching out for us: the beggar does not exist. All we have to do is keep our eyes fixed on our book and continue our trip, with the strange sensation that ghosts are passing us by.

The neo-liberal ideology which now shapes the worldviews of our western democracies tends to make victims invisible. Savage capitalism justifies the existence of poor people in the midst of superabundance, seeing them as just an inevitable maladjustment of the system, which can be resolved through welfare measures and social control policies.

The GRMs, if they don’t want to end up justifying the status quo of economic imperialism, must become masters of suspicion: they must expose all discourse which denies the reality of exclusion. Such suspicion needs to point out some of the blinders the neo-liberal order places on the eyes of model citizens with alienated consciences. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we describe here some of those blinders, along with the corresponding invisibilizing rhetoric used by the GRMs.

##### 1.4.1. *The blinder of complexity*

«Finish that plate of food! There are many children who are going hungry!». Surely more than one reader heard this as a child. Our parents established a cause-and-effect relationship between the plate of food we refused to finish and the hunger of other children. There

was a “magical” linkage for which the moral authority of our elders found unquestionable evidence: «the hunger of many people is intimately related to the profligacy of a few». Even today many of us continue to transmit this magical evidence to our sons and daughters.

Even now, long after those childhood years, I can hardly help seeing the same connection (is it far-fetched?) between, on the one hand, the long line of enthusiastic consumers who spend the whole night camping out in front of one of our great stores in order to be the first to purchase the latest electronic gadget and, on the other, the long column of famished bodies who line up before a truck of the FAO in order to beg a portion of rice.

Is it the same (childish?) connection that the first Church Fathers established between the poverty of the masses and the wealth of a few?

«Greedy is the man who is not content with owning only what he needs, and thieving is the man who takes from others what is theirs. And you, are you not greedy or thieving if you take possession of what was given to you only so that you could administer it? If we call a thief the person who takes away another’s clothes, do we have any other name for the person who doesn’t clothe the naked, even though he’s able to do so? The bread you keep for yourself belongs to the hungry. The clothes you keep in your closets belong to the naked. The shoes that rot away in your house belong to those who

go barefoot. In a word, you are offending against all whom you are in a position to help.» (Saint Basil, «Homily on the parable of the unfeeling rich man» [Lk 12])<sup>9</sup>

Neo-liberal technocrats will smile condescendingly at the fragility and simplicity of the arguments we just employed. Economic reality is much more complex than the childish evidence of a plate of soup or the stale “Marxism” of Saint Basil. The dynamism of the market economy is based on the law of supply and demand. The goods produced by some people correspond to the needs of others and allow for the movement of capital, which is essential for the functioning of the system. In a scenario where all goods were distributed equitably, the channels of communication governed by supply and demand would stop working, and the economic system would collapse. Inequality is a key piece of the capitalist machinery.

Should such economic arguments be considered insufficient, the neo-liberal gurus appeal also to the complexity of economic globalization. One need only go to the corner supermarket to find proof of the tremendous increase in the price of basic products, such as milk, eggs, bread, and rice. The causes of these increased prices are thousands of miles away: on the one hand, there is the fast-growing consumption of emerging countries like China and India, which make up 40% of the world population; on the other, there is the poor grain harvests in Australia and elsewhere as a consequence of climate change. And as

if those factors were not enough, the growing demand for bio-fuels in the developed countries means that every day we are literally burning in our vehicles more and more corn, wheat, and vegetable oil, thus increasing their prices in the food market.<sup>10</sup>

The global economic system is “super-complex”, so much so that no neophyte dares to question the oracles of the new financial shamans when they recommend that excess food stocks should be destroyed instead of redistributed. If we don’t remove the excess food from the market, they argue, the prices of those products will go down, the firms that produce them will see a decline in profits, and they will therefore be obliged to lay off workers.

Faced with the preachers and the dogmas of the new economic religion, the GRMs must respond with “the rhetoric of the obvious”, the forcefulness of the real. We don’t know whether freely distributing excess goods will collapse the market, but what is quite evident is that:

«A billion people are dying of hunger or its immediate consequences. One child less than ten years of age dies every seven seconds, and every four minutes another one becomes blind for lack of vitamin A. The world order is not only murderous, it is absurd, for it kills without necessity. Now it is no longer a question of fatalities. A child who dies of hunger today is murdered.» (Jean Ziegler)<sup>11</sup>

«A child who dies of hunger today is murdered», this is the rhetoric of the

obvious, over against the demagogy of complexity. The GRMs must not fall into the trap of absolutizing administrative language. Accounting problems should not form the preamble of any transformative action; rather they should be the consequence of such action.

We don’t know either whether hidden behind the worrisome decline of the Nikkei index in Japan and the resulting plummet of the Ixex 35 in Europe there is a strategy of outsourcing by certain multinational technology firms. These companies are always ready to practice global dumping, which in the long run destabilizes the Euro Interbank Offered Rate and pushes the weaker economies toward a process of deflation.<sup>12</sup> In the face of such complex but vacuous arguments, we must assert the rhetoric of the obvious:

The drama of humanity is that the West shows more concern for 300 million obese persons than it does for 842 million people who, according to the United Nations, are literally dying of hunger.<sup>13</sup>

The discourse of “the obvious” finds its most fitting expression in indignation. The suffering of the victims allows no space for the sterility of politically correct language. We must cry out against the perversion of a murderous system. The GRMs must help to amplify the protests of those who are excluded. And they should be protests not laments, for laments reflect misfortune and resignation, whereas protests express rebellion against injury and pain that are suffered unjustly.

#### 1.4.2. *The blinder of the absolute present*

Neo-liberalism claims to be the full, definitive world order. Those graced by the goddess Economy already live in the best of all possible worlds; they have no need to call upon another divinity. The *nouveaux riches* are comfortably installed in the condos of the end of history;<sup>14</sup> they live in a world neighborhood that displaces poverty toward the city fringes and the “peripheral” countries of the world.

The obstinate presence of battered individuals lying at the side of the road cannot be denied, but it *can* be disguised. Public administration spend huge amounts of money on camouflage outfits for the excluded. In the neo-liberal nations, social policies are not designed to challenge the system’s dynamics of exclusion but to justify the inevitable persistence of poverty in it. As the Basque sociologist, César Manzanos Bilbao, states cogently, «Aid policies have the very effective symbolic function of concealing poverty, but they are hardly effective at all in providing solutions, even partial ones, to the structural mechanisms that give rise to poverty».<sup>15</sup>

Faced with the demagogical discourse of the “absolute present”, the GRMs propose a rhetoric of the possible. If, as Wittgenstein says, the limits of language are the limits of the world, then the task of building another possible world requires us to change the words by which the world is named. Broadening the range of what is possible also involves broadening the limits

of what can be said (and what can be thought).<sup>16</sup>

We found in indignation the most appropriate expression against the «blinder of complexity». Now, to exorcise the circular discourse of economic liberalism, our best ally will be poetry. In the ranks of the GRMs we find poets who make use of verse to give utopia a name and to project our imagination beyond prosaic reality. As Paul Ricoeur says, «Utopia is the expression of all the potentialities of a group that find themselves repressed by the existing order of things. Utopia is exercising imagination to think of other ways of being social»<sup>17</sup>. Only our ability to imagine and to name the other possible world will make it possible us to know how and where to construct it.

«The practice of imagination is a subversive activity, not because it produces concrete, explicit actions of opposition (though it may do so), but because it considers the present provisional and refuses to absolutize it. The practice of historical imagination keeps alive the possibility of a future which is not a continuation of the present. It is the aim of every authoritarian regime to force the future to be nothing more than an unquestioning continuation of the present.»<sup>18</sup>

#### 1.4.3. *The blinder of consumerism*

The victim of the Lukan parable is stripped clean; they have left him with nothing. This detail of the story suffices to tell us that, in a modern translation of the parable, neither a banker nor a

broker would take notice of the naked, half-dead man. Their reasons for ignoring him, though, would have nothing to do with preserving ritual purity; rather, they would take no notice of him because an individual with nothing of value to offer the market simply does not exist for the world of the market.

Let's not fool ourselves. The myth of progress which feeds neo-liberal discourse does not really seek to broaden the space for justice and equality; rather, it aims to broaden the space for markets. Savage capitalism knows nothing of citizens; it only knows about consumers. In the consuming society the person who can't buy goods and services simply doesn't exist.

It is frightening to observe how the most disadvantaged classes are the ones most influenced by the seduction of advertising claims. Families become eternally indebted for the sake of buying the fanciest car, a plasma-display television, or the latest computer model. These unessential products serve as fetishes so that people can say, «I am what I have». They exemplify “imitative consumption”, which functions through comparisons: we want to have what our neighbor has; we want to have what we see on TV, something proper to the ideal social class to which we'd like to belong. Such items also indicate “successful consumption”; they communicate “personal success” through the ostentatious exhibition of expensive consumer goods.<sup>19</sup>

The dynamics of consumerism show with cruel clarity a key insight of Paolo Freire,<sup>20</sup> namely that the oppressed provide the oppressors lodging within

themselves: the victims do not fight against the system which excludes them; rather, they beg to become part of it as devoted consumers. This is a pathology that requires profound social therapies, in the form of new models of consuming and existing, which are at once alternative, possible, and attractive.

As regards consumer culture, the GRMs have a manifest mission to set an example and educate people; they have to give evidence that they are movements that promote responsible, alternative consumption –*responsible* because predatory consumption is exhausting the planet's resources, and *alternative* because consumerism is a lethal arm that can be used against any liberation movement. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the “opium of the people” is not religion; it is consumerism. When the “revolutionary utopia” of a large portion of our young people consists in earning the astronomical salaries of their sports heroes, a long shadow is cast on the prospects of another possible world.

### **1.5. Recovering the “visibilizing” stories of mutual recognition**

Up to this point we have been analyzing some of the neo-liberal accounts designed to conceal the reality of suffering; in each case we have also explained the visibilizing alternatives offered by the GRMs. Underlying both types of rhetoric we find the fecund soil of the great narratives that shape the meaning and practices of society. On the neo-liberal side, there is the myth of the contract, which justifies social organi-

zation insofar as it is centered on the defense of private interests in a hostile world, where everyone is waging war against everyone else (*bellum omnium contra omnes*).<sup>21</sup> On the side of the GRMs, there is the myth of alliance, which postulates mutual recognition as the principal force of social cohesion. According to Adela Cortina, these two myths have not held equal sway during the last two centuries: the contract myth has a clearly dominant position, much to the detriment of the alliance myth.<sup>22</sup> If we do not wish to end up living in a supermarket-world where everything and everybody has a price, there is now an urgent need for us to recover the “visibilizing” story of compassion.

For the myth of consuming, in which we are immersed, the only obligations we have toward our neighbors are those assumed by virtue of a contractual relation. Our neo-liberal society answers Cain’s question, «Am I my brother’s keeper?» (Gn 4,9), with a calm, but decisive, «No, we are not responsible for our brothers; there is no legal contract which obliges us to help them». As a result of the horror of the Nazi persecution, the Jewish philosophers Max Horkheimer and Zygmunt Bauman coincide in their laconic affirmation of the non-existence of ethical responsibility toward our neighbors: «There is no logically conclusive reasoning for why I should not hate, if that does not cause me any social disadvantage» (Horkheimer)<sup>23</sup>; «Let’s be frank, there is no ‘good reason’ for us to be our brothers’ keepers, or to be concerned about others, or to be moral; and in a society oriented toward utility,

people who are poor, suffering, and useless cannot count on finding rational proofs of their right to happiness» (Bauman).

Confronted with the neo-liberal *Leviathan*, which remorselessly devours the weakest members of the system, the GRMs must make an effort to reinforce the stories of compassion that bind human beings together on the basis of their radical equality: «flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood». In the words of Adela Cortina:

«Life in its fullness, which runs through the veins of human beings, is an immense conscientious objection to the quantification of reality; it is an amendment to the percentages, a continual disobedience to the forecasts, a definitive option for that which has value and on which it is senseless to put a price.

There is therefore an *ob-ligation* [Latin: something that binds a person] that is deeper than duty, despite the unfortunate fact that nowadays we have been educated in the culture of duty. There is an “ob-ligation” that arises when we discover that we are *bound* to one another and are therefore mutually “bound together”, so that other people are for us “flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood”. Consequently, our life cannot be a good life unless we share with them tenderness and consolation, hope and meaning.

It is the discovery of this *mysterious bonding* that leads us to share that which can neither be demanded of us as a right nor imposed on us as a

duty, because it enters onto the broad road of *gratuitousness*.»<sup>24</sup>

To reinforce the bonds of mutual recognition, the GRMs appeal to religious and humanistic traditions which make their stories of compassion available to society; these narratives are profoundly opposed to the system. Stories of solidarity with the impoverished and concern for their welfare are present in the DNA of all the religions, and they voice a radical critique right at the heart of our opulent, fratricidal society. While the dominant neo-liberal discourse views illegal immigrants as invaders of our coastlines, the compassionate story will see in them brothers and sisters seeking a better future for the children. These two types of rhetoric are irreconcilable, and their practical consequences cause inevitable conflict: on one side, the official pursuit and persecution of “illegals”, and on the other, the civil disobedience of those who give shelter to their sisters and brothers.

### 1.6. Seeing, understanding, acting

To end this first moment of our study, taking stock of reality, we return to the beginning of the parable in order to recover a detail that we have so far neglected. We know that the initial protagonist was left half-dead and stripped of his belongings. But we, as readers of the parable, are privy to information unknown to those who came upon his prostrate body: we know that the half-dead man was assaulted by bandits, who robbed him of everything. That is to say, we know that he is a victim. For the Samaritan this detail is not of conse-

quence, since he responds to suffering, no matter what its origin, but for the GRMs it is of vital importance.

The GRMs begin from their perception of a world full of conflict. There exist victims because there are bandits who assault and rob them; some people are oppressed because others oppress them; many people are excluded and marginalized because social structures exclude and marginalize them.

Not all social analysts are in agreement with the structural conflict posited by the GRMs. In our affluent society, such analysts claim, there are no “victims” but only “culpable individuals”, who have not been able to find their place in a world of abundant opportunities. We have here a disparity of vision not unlike the one that existed between the God of the Hebrews and Pharaoh Ramses II, as described in the book of Exodus:

«It happened in the course of those many days, that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the children of Israel, and God understood what was happening.» (Ex 2, 23-25)

Seeing is not the same as understanding what is seen. In the story of Exodus, God beheld the Israelites and «understood what was happening». The eyes of the pharaoh, like those of our bankers, saw a different reality: after all,

even though the children of Israel worked from dawn to dusk, they were assured of having food to eat. We should not forget that the Israelites were not so unhappy with their lot in Egypt that they later failed to complain to Moses, «Would that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we ate our fill of bread». This is clear evidence of how the victims themselves fail to recognize their oppressed condition. But God understood what was happening: these poor people were slaves. And because God understood what was happening, he determined to liberate them.

Concealed behind many instances of political paralysis is ignorance –at times culpable– of what is plainly there to be seen. Bogus contracts? Slave wages? Inhumane working conditions? ... But don't they all get paid a wage at month's end? After all, nobody forces them to work in an illegal sweatshop... Such pharaonic discourse displays itself readily in times of crisis like our own. Today more than ever we need alert sentries, who “see, understand, and act”, especially when the oppressed people themselves submit to their servitude without protest.

### 1.7. Roadmap. Summary

We have seen that “taking stock of reality” is not an easy task. As the citation from Jon Sobrino at the beginning of this section suggested, we have an innate tendency to suppress truth and give reality a wide berth. In the chart below we summarize in schematic form some of the strategies and tasks that the GRMs are putting into practice, precisely to counter the temptation to keep their distance those who are being assaulted, stripped naked, and left half-dead.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Honesty about what is real.</li> <li>– Removing the neo-liberal “blind-ers”.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rhetoric of the evident (indignation) vs. the demagogy of complexity.</li> <li>• The rhetoric of the possible (poetry) vs. the absolute present.</li> </ul> </li> <li>– The pedagogy of consuming vs. the invisibility of non-consumers.</li> <li>– “Visibilizing” stories of mutual recognition.</li> <li>– Seeing, understanding, acting.</li> </ul>	TAKING STOCK
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## 2. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR REALITY

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On July 31<sup>th</sup>, in the summer of 2006, all the mass media gave prominent coverage to a hundred or so bathers who had come to the assistance of 88 sub-Saharan Africans who landed at La Tejita beach on the island of Tenerife. Even though surprised by the sudden appearance of the illegal immigrants, the tourists helped them get off their boat, sat them down in the sand, gave them towels and dry clothing, and fed them with their own food. When reporters asked the inventive Samaritans why they had responded so, they could only offer an instinctive reaction: «How could we not help them? What else could we have done?» And the plain fact is that, except for cases of pathology, human beings respond to the suffering of others with compassion.

### 2.1. What else could we have done?

When we finally take full stock of reality, when no blinders are preventing us from seeing the suffering of others, then our immediate reaction is one of mercy.<sup>25</sup>

Samaritan mercy cannot be reduced to a simple feeling of empathy; it also includes action taken to alleviate the suffering of others, and it involves the risk of sharing in the others' fate. In little more than a line of text, Luke the evangelist combines a multitude of actions:

the Samaritan feels compassion, draws close, bandages the wounded man, mounts him on his own beast, transports him to the inn, and cares for him.

Feeling compassion, drawing close, bandaging, mounting, transporting, caring... of such deeds is woven the fabric of action which defines Samaritan assistance and which distinguishes it from purely rhetorical proposals, from "assistentialist" models, and from disembodied structural aids. These verbs represent for the GRMs their greatest challenges, and also some of their great-

est difficulties, in their mission of giving credibility to their striving for another possible world, from the side of the victims.

## 2.2. Feeling compassion

At the sight of the man half-dead, the Samaritan feels compassion. The Greek term (*esplanchnisthē*) chosen by Luke to express the Samaritan's distress at the sight of suffering means "to embrace viscerally", from one's own entrails, the feelings or the situation of the other.

We should not confusion compassion with pity.<sup>26</sup> Compassion shares in the suffering of the other: it "suffers with" [*com-patior* in Latin]. Pity participates in the distress of compassion, but from the existential distance of one who know himself to be far removed from the situation of the suffering person.

Compassion breaks down any asymmetries that may exist in the relation between helper and helped. Both those who feel compassion and those for whom compassion is felt know themselves to be equally vulnerable. Compassion expects reciprocity: «Today for me, tomorrow for you». The person who feels pity never expects to be in the situation of the one who is pitied; the relationship is asymmetrical. The person to be helped is beaten, stripped, and left half-dead—he is purely in need. Pity helps others out of a sense of pure gift; it gives freely what the other needs. Such asymmetry give evidence of structural inequality, which can be eased only by alms, and alms can be a means for helping, but always in one direction.

Neo-liberal society is rich in pity and poor in compassion; it is moved to collect donations during great humanitarian crises; it is very effective in organizing solidarity bake sales and tele-marathons and in sending its professionals to the scene of the latest tragedy.

We don't want to indulge in cynical or demagogic criticism. There are certainly situations which require immediate, concrete aid, and collecting donations for them is an imperative duty. What the GRMs censure is the short-sighted, numbing aspect of pity. Compassion, properly understood, asks about the structural disorders that lie behind every calamity. In the face of the devastation produced by an earthquake, it is absurd to look for people to blame, but it is still necessary to ask why a 7.3-degree quake in Haiti (January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010) killed 250,000 persons, while a few days later in Chile an earthquake 50 times stronger claimed "only" 711 victims. Why is it that with natural catastrophes the number of dead is usually inversely proportional to the per capita GNP? Or we could ask about the tragedy of infant mortality: why do more than six million children die every year as the result of completely preventable diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia? The GRMs place themselves at the side of the victims, and from there they interpret the internal drama of history in terms of injustice, inequality, and oppression.

Compassion can also be abused, such as when suffering is made into a television spectacle. With some exceptions, when TV networks pay attention

to the fringes of society, they concentrate on the morbid aspects, the “freakish” personalities, or the facile tear-jerking moments. They spend no time analyzing the structural causes which sustain marginalization. In our society of spectacle and sensation, other people’s misfortunes entertain and amuse; only rarely to they makes us more conscious and sensitive. Luis Aran-guren explains this phenomenon well:

«We have experienced years of solidarity converted into media spectacle that favors the interests of the large TV networks and the companies which sign up for this new business at the last minute. Natural tragedies especially have been a rich source for promoting an easy-chair type of participation in solidarity; such participation takes little effort, and what is worse, it promotes a culture of self-satisfaction: “How nice it is that I can show solidarity without affecting my own well-being and quality of life”.

This is the style of convocation of the great causes that move people to compassion without reflection, to generosity without confronting the relations between North and South, to tears for those who are at the bottom, far removed from my comfortable existence.»<sup>27</sup>

Making a spectacle of suffering neutralizes it and conceals it behind the sanitary protection of a screen. Furthermore, it raises society’s threshold of sensitivity to pain, so that “ever greater doses of tragedy” are required to move us to real feeling. The GRMs should

strive to prevent our society’s “levels of compassion” from falling to inhuman depths. What «Richter degree of misfortune» is necessary to provoke a spiritual earthquake within us?

### 2.3. Drawing close

Catching sight of the man half-dead, the priest and the Levite keep their distance; the Samaritan draws close. These two divergent itineraries will determine not only the fate of the victim, but also that of the travelers. The first two, by refusing to help, reveal their inhumanity in the interest of keeping themselves pure. The Samaritan is an example of humanity, even at the risk of become impure.

If we listen to the parable with the ears of a law-observant Jew, then the priest and the Levite did what they should have done, keeping their distance in order to avoid impurity, while the Samaritan did what was to be expected of the sinner that he was: he made himself impure. We should not forget that in the context and the time of the parable, the Samaritan was considered the prototype of apostasy and treason.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of this section, I envisaged that certain Samaritan actions would cause problems for not a few of the people working with the GRMs, and this is one of such problem: drawing close to the point of becoming impure. There are many associations, NGOs, and collectives of global resistance that dedicate themselves to curing wounds and applying bandages; far fewer are those that are willing to risk “their good

name” in order to help out the pariahs of our world.

The Samaritan roadmap involves “getting dirty”; it requires taking the side of the least and the last, risking the loss of grant money, and possibly having your name listed in the records of the security forces. Most certainly, it involves becoming impure in the eyes of the official state “religion”.

Many GRMs run the risk of drawing close to those who are suffering and taking sides against the bandits, the priests, and the Levites. There are many persons who become incriminated and blacklisted for getting involved in causes which have “bad press”. As we saw above, we live in an epoch in which acts as innocent as hospitality can become criminal. We live in times in which we have to decide between “keeping our distance” and “drawing close” –and so complicating our lives.

### *2.3.1. From wounded healer to wounded healer*

Drawing close, to the point of becoming impure, involves a profound grasp of the “symmetrical” relations of compassion, as we saw in the previous epigraph. The helper, by making himself impure, realizes that he is of the same clay as the person helped and is thus able to establish a relation of wounded healer to wounded healer. It is an egalitarian relationship, which allows the wounded person to emerge strengthened in his dignity. Multitudinous are the well-intentioned aid programs that set up their field hospitals on top of the dignity of the victims!

There are too many actions aimed at solving other people’s needs, but there are very few which take the rich potentialities of the other people into account. Drawing close to others solely on the basis of their needs dehumanizes those giving aid and dishonors those receiving it.

### *2.3.2. Hospitality versus colonization*

In this world we can travel in just two directions, against others or toward them:

«As diverse as the offers of the travel agencies may seem to us, and as varied and colorful as the maps they show us may be, in this world we can travel in two directions: either against others or toward them.

[...] Traveling toward others or against them *is a decision* on which depends not only the life of thousands of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans, but also our own dignity as civilized human beings, which means to say, the very survival of the planet: its roses, its birds, its laws, and its people.»<sup>29</sup>

We can draw close to reality in two diametrically opposed ways; we can try to transform it in one of two manners: either as a colonizer or as a guest. Colonizers export their conception and their way of life wherever they go. Convinced that their model is the ideal for everybody, they try to drag others toward themselves. Never will they entertain suggestions that they moderate their levels of consuming and of wealth. By contrast, guests dialogue with the

culture of which they are a part; they value other people's ways of understanding life, and they refuse to absolutize their own model of progress.

There are NGOs working in development which function with the colonizing model; they help people out, but like snails, they carry their northern paraphernalia with them wherever they go. GRMs need to opt rather for the guest model if they want to avoid promoting false social transformations. The other possible world, from the side of the victims, cannot consist in universalizing the western neo-liberal model. The other possible world does not come about by having the "developing" countries climb aboard a train driven by the engine of economic progress, a progress conceived so narrowly that the supreme model becomes mindless consumption by the masses.

Good guests know how to keep silence; they adapt their customs to the uses of the hosts; they value and are grateful for what other people have to offer them. And grounded in the fundamental norms of hospitality, they travel together toward a common horizon.

## **2.4. Bandaging**

The Samaritan cures the wounded man, using the techniques of his time: he applies oil and wine to the wounds and bandages them. The oil and the wine were well-known remedies. Oil served to cure, wine to disinfect. We are witnessing the culmination of the "helping moment" of the Samaritan roadmap.

We would do well to rid ourselves, once and for all, of the false arguments which put aid and promotion in opposition. We all know the hackneyed tale of the fisherman and the fishing rod, which usually concludes with the moral that it is better to teach people to fish than just to give them fish, but we need to add to that tale a footnote: there are times for giving people fish and other times for teaching them to fish. We should also observe that it is quite as unjust to try to teach people to fish in a situation in which every morsel of food is a matter of life or death, as it is to donate fish to people who through neglect or idleness refuse to use their fishing rods.

The opposite of dependency-producing neo-liberalism, which gives people fish without being concerned about teaching them to fish, is the political demagogy of some GRMs, which questions every act of aid no matter what the circumstances. Meanwhile the same organizations plan long-term strategic actions which do nothing to alleviate the immediate concrete suffering of people. The Samaritan roadmap teaches us to respect the different moments and to weigh the balance between "giving aid" and "changing structures".

## **2.5. Putting the wounded one on our own mount**

Some exegetes make us aware of the profound symbolic value which is hidden behind the Samaritan's simple act of putting the man on his own mount. According to K. E. Bailey, the

Samaritan leads the animal to the inn, just as a servant would lead his master. Even today in the oriental world, the distinction between the mounted person and the one leading the animal is very pronounced.<sup>30</sup>

Striving to make another world possible, from the side of the victims, means placing ourselves at their service, getting off our mount, and assuming a humble role in the midst of them. The victims are the ones who should be determining our ways of life, our ways of consuming, our politics. To that end, we have to begin to hear what they are saying and thinking: what are their hopes? why do they struggle? what are they keeping quiet? what do they fear?

It is not easy to hear the voices of the victims. Most of the time we submerge them with romantic, tranquilizing discourses which make poverty out to be an idyllic place of spontaneous solidarity. At other times our deafness to the voices of the excluded ones is dictated by a neo-liberal ideology which, as we have seen, renders the reality of exclusion invisible and muffles the protests of the impoverished.

The GRMs which have taken seriously the mission of *making another world possible, from the side of the victims*, are ready to enter into their logic and to share in their fate. This commitment involves a path of self-

exclusion that not all GRMs can or want to travel. When armed conflicts rage and embassies advise tourists and aid workers to leave a country, there always arise a few exceptional beings, who decide to stay in order to share the destiny of the poor, no matter what it may be. Many GRMs have been remiss with regards to generous actions like *showing compassion, drawing close, and binding up*, but fewer still are the movements and persons that reach the final action of the Samaritan path: *sharing one's mount*.

## 2.6. Roadmap. Summary

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Suffering-with.</li> <li>– Abolishing asymmetries between helper and helped.</li> <li>– Not perverting compassion (no pity, no spectacle).</li> <li>– Drawing close, to the point of become impure.</li> <li>– Assuming the risks and consequences of commitment.</li> <li>– Being guests vs. colonizers.</li> <li>– Finding the right balance between “providing assistance” and “changing structures”.</li> <li>– Letting our selves be “led” by the victims.</li> </ul>	CARGAR
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## 3. TAKING CHARGE OF REALITY

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The parable ends with the Samaritan paying the innkeeper to take care of the wounded man, which is the culmination of his “integral” care of the victim: the bandits had robbed the man, and now the Samaritan is paying for him; they had left him half-dead, and now the Samaritan cares for him and has him cared for; everyone else had kept their distance, but now the Samaritan promises to return.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1. The political and structural moment

After the moment of “assistance”, discussed in the earlier part, we wish to enter now into structural or political concerns. To put it more graphically, we want to move from the urgent matter of binding up wounds to the imperative need to build hospitals and seek financing for their running. Of course, since we are dealing with GRMs, we should not assume that their alternative ways of creating another possible world will culminate in some magnificent “hospital-inn”, managed by a foundation. Rather than build a huge medical center, the GRMs would do better to promote the creation of a network of local, mutually connected walk-in clinics, which use native alternative medicine like oil and wine to cure people’s ailments.

Except for particular instances, like the green parties, the GRMs do not ambition to seek power in the political domain. Of course, they want to have some influence in “the public realm”, but they want to do so on the basis of their own concerns. Older models like the trade unions, which bring together the collective demands of working-class people under the union banner, are giving way to the heterogeneous fusions found in some GRMs, where individuals from different social classes have similar goals and interests and so unite together. Moreover, in contrast to the exclusive militancy of former times, nowadays a single person can belong –and in fact does belong– to a variety of GRMs. Such multiply-affiliated persons do many things: they may invest their savings in ethical bank funds, or

participate as activists in writing letters for the liberation of political prisoners, or pay dues to an association that fights for the preservation of marine biodiversity, or take part in a demonstration against the prison at Guantanamo, or work as volunteers in shelters for homeless persons. Such “domestic” types of social militancy do not necessarily translate into affiliation to traditional political parties. As Chaime Marcuelli states quite forcefully, «our primary public space is not just the mendacious political arena of the professionals who currently make up the party-ocracy; it is space created for us by the mass media, the social networks of participation, and our own shopping cart»<sup>32</sup>.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the great utopia of another possible world will be formed by weaving together millions of “small” utopias which are already underway. Our “networking society”<sup>33</sup> is the new planetary subject of the alternative world. «Many small people, in small places, doing small things, can change the world» (Eduardo Galeano).

In what follows we will examine some of the “already possible inns” where the GRMs are already responding to the need to create a world that is just and decent for everybody.

### 3.2. Other ways of life are possible

“Univocal thought” produces a “univocal” lifestyle, devoid of variety and ambiguity. As we’ve seen already, the capitalist myth of unlimited progress promotes models of development and ways of life that are based on consump-

tion. For the creation of another possible world, it is not enough merely to question the neoliberal model; we also need “domestic” alternatives which, like termites, gnaw away at the wall of a welfare state that really benefits only “a select few”. Those who seek to reduce the GRMs to the ranks of the anti-system enthusiasts are mistaken. The GRMs are not just “anti”, they are also “pro”. They don’t just protest, they also propose. The GRMs demand that the state provide people with at least the minimal universalizable essentials of justice, even as they propose viable options for lives that are “felicitating”, that is, productive of happiness. (The philosopher Adela Cortina created the word *felicitante* to refer to life-giving projects that generate happiness.)

Capitalist “happiness” depends on economic success; everything else –work, family life, leisure, personal growth–are subordinated to that end. As an alternative to this purely economic ideal, the GRMs present other models of “happiness-producing” lives. Development of personal talents, care of family, and enjoyment of free time are some of the large stones with which the GRMs fill the vessel of existence. After the stones are in place, the spaces between them can then to be filled with the sand of labor, monetary expectations, professional careers, and formative courses. Those working in the GRMs are people who have decided to sit quietly and enjoy themselves, like the man in the story of Anthony de Mello:

«The rich industrialist from the North was horrified when he saw a



fisherman from the South leaning peacefully against his boat, smoking a pipe.

–Why haven’t you gone out to fish?  
–the industrialist asked him.

–Because I’ve fished enough today  
–the man answered.

–And why don’t you fish for more than you need? –the industrialist insisted.

–And why should I do that? –the fisherman asked in turn.

–You’d earn more money –was the reply.

–That way you could get a motor for your boat. Then you could go to deeper waters and get bigger Catches. Then you’d earn enough to buy some nylon nets, which would help you to catch even more fish and earn more money. Soon you’d have enough to own two boats... and maybe even a fleet of boats. Then you would be rich, like me.

–And what would I do then? –asked the fisherman.

–Well, you could take it easy and enjoy life –answered the industrialist.

–And what do you think I’m doing at this very moment? –asked the fisherman, quite satisfied with his lot in life.»<sup>34</sup>

The “slow” movement<sup>35</sup> practiced by some GRMs proposes a pace of life which is the very opposite of stress-inducing exertion oriented toward economic success. Heading up this movement is the Society for the Deceleration

of Time, which proposes to extend “slowness” to many spheres of activity, such as meals, labor, and leisure. Instead of doing everything more quickly, people discover that infusing slowness into their lives makes everything –meals, relationships, work, learning, leisure– more pleasant and meaningful.

We also find in different GRMs alternative ways of life that stress austerity and solidarity. For example, some religious congregations orient their communities toward “felicitating” lifestyles, even as they seek to interweave their lives and their labors with the demands made by the GRMs for the creation of an alternative world order. We’re unable in this short essay to undertake an evaluation of the efforts of these religious bodies within the believing community, but if they do not wish to be relegated to the ranks of those who are thought to be fleeing from society, then they must make a greater effort to help society understand the meaning of what they are doing. Toward this end, they must create communities which are truly countercultural and are recognized as such by their modest lifestyle, their warm hospitality, and their readiness to share with people in need.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.3. Other information is possible

The imposing technological advances of recent times allow for a fluidity of communication which places us in a new cultural paradigm. The fourth power, formerly in the hands of a few oligarchic corporations, has now been democratized. In order to know what’s hap-

pening in the world, the GRMs are no longer limited to the news and commentaries presented by the traditional mass media; now they also have access to an unlimited network of citizen reporters and analysts. The citizenry ceases to be a merely passive consumer of official visions and discourses and becomes instead a generator of information and opinion. Previously only the giant media corporations had the economic ability to maintain “special correspondents” in all corners of the planet; today, with just a click of the mouse, “internauts” have access to the opinion of ordinary citizens right on the scene, people who are ready to tell us about how the last car-bomb destroyed their house in Kabul or how the vast profits produced by the World Cup matches in South Africa have done nothing to transform the misery of the refugees living in the nearby city of Musina. As regards reporting and analysis of reality, the traditional mass media have lost their predominant position. Now, over against the “official” reports and interpretations, the GRMs are producing their own symbolic constructions.

This “other possible” information is by no means a negligible source of power. The legendary convocation of March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, was clear proof of the power of a networked society. On that date, one day before general elections in Spain put José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in power, thousands of citizens came together in a day of reflection, and they manifested their indignation in front of the Popular Party headquarters on Genoa Street. It was an extraordinary act of civil disobedience, coordinated through

text messages, e-mails, and social networks.

They should stop their conspiracies. The March 13<sup>th</sup> demonstration was the responsibility of all of us who encouraged, convoked, and supported civil disobedience during the day-long session of electoral reflection. Let nobody be deceived. We have no desire to become arrogant protagonists. Those of us writing this book did the same as many other citizens have done: during the last four years, a whole legislative term, we protested against unjust decrees, “educational” reforms, and lies as thick as the fuel leaked from the tanker *Prestige* or the blood spilled to keep control of Iraqi oil. Our computers and mobile phones became networked; they were on-line. In that way we could organize, almost without realizing it, networks of confidence in which we carried on debates, quite apart from and often against the parties and the conventional media. In the most recent demonstrations against the war, we undertook to convoke ourselves, without waiting for others to do so in our name, without requesting permissions or agreeing on protest routes. And on March 13<sup>th</sup>, thinking that we would be alone, we discovered once again that we were a great multitude. That multitude exceeded all of us, in number, in power, in disobedience.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the discourses associated with concrete actions like the ones we just described, we must mention the various convocations of the World Social Forum which in the last decade have been bringing together GRMs to meet in different countries (Brazil, India, Venezuela, Kenya, Mexi-

co). These Forums have provided the people's organizations a space for encounter, reflection, exchange, and making demands; they have above all contributed to the creation of symbolic alternatives for another possible world.

### **3.4. Another way of consuming is possible**

The multinational Nestlé should be worried. Greenpeace has begun a campaign against its *Kit Kat* candy snack.<sup>38</sup> According to the ecological movement, that product and others produced by Nestlé use palm oil provided by the Sinar Mas group, «a company that continues to expand its palm oil plantations after cutting down vast tropical jungles and burning extensive stretches of peat bog». The ecologists also claim that the activities of Sinar Mas create grave social problems, accelerate detrimental change, and destroy the habitat of the already threatened orangutan populations. The debate has been engaged, the sales of *Kit Kat* have plummeted, and the Nestlé directors are planning their counter-strategy. The GRMs are fully conscious of the power that resides with the consumer, and as in this case, they know how to use it to exercise influence on the companies. This is a power exercised by the GRMs in order to transform society and not just to respond to people's immediate needs. Behind the boycott against Nestlé are "serious social problems" such as the "destruction of the habitat of the orangutans". As we have been insisting all along, these ethical horizons of social responsibility and environmental protection are the

ones which define the type of consuming defended by the GRMs.

The GRMs are not satisfied with simple proposals of sustainable consuming, for these frequently do little more than reproduce and aggravate social inequalities. Nor do the GRMs fall into the trap of reducing citizen participation to simple acts of consuming. Citizens make their purchases, but they are also concerned about deforestation in Amazonia, the number of school drop-outs in their own nation, and the lack of sports facilities in their neighborhood. The alternative ways of consuming proposed by the GRMs are an extension of the "cutback" model that many of their collectives have already put into practice.<sup>39</sup> It is not enough just to moderate consumption; we have to reduce it.

«Living with less is a physical requirement that will be imposed on us by limited material resources. Living well with less, and in conditions of justice and equality, is a path which must be pointed out as desirable; it must be made to appeal to large numbers of people, who will then be able to resist, make demands, and press for change. This new vision will allow for the establishment of alternatives, the recovery of what is of value, and the exploration of new paths which allow people to live in social harmony and to relate peacefully with the planet. Many persons on every continent are already doing it.»<sup>40</sup>

We need to challenge the false neoliberal myth which divinizes consuming as the magical solution to social

problems. I write these lines in the context of the greatest financial crisis we have suffered since the Great Depression of 1929: many countries are heavily indebted, the welfare state is collapsing, and 20% of the Spanish population is unemployed. In the face of this desolate panorama, the absurd advice of politicians of every ilk is this: «We need to consume more and more so that the economy doesn't become paralyzed». I have not heard a single world leader talk about moderation, austerity, saving, or doing without. If the “administrators” of the world refuse to say it, then let us say it and practice it ourselves: we have to consume less, much less. We have to promote a universalizable kind of consuming, that is, one which allows everybody in the world to consume in like manner. It is a question of living more simply, so that others can simply live. We believe that, as John Stuart Mill wrote in 1848, «the best situation for human nature is the one in which, while nobody is poor, neither does anyone desire to be richer»<sup>41</sup>.

Along with the consumer power that is part of global citizenship, the GRMs are generating within themselves “domestic” economic practices which, while not proposed as alternative structures to capitalism, nevertheless demonstrate with deeds the possibility and effectiveness of other kinds of economic relations. Accordingly, we find ecologically responsible consumer cooperatives, in which groups of citizens have direct contact with agro-ecological farmers whose products are high in quality, reasonably priced, and free of chemicals and pesticides (or of hor-

mones and cruel treatment in the case of animals).<sup>42</sup> Although less established than just trade and consumer cooperatives, there also exist “bartering” arrangements, where the participants exchange goods and services (mainly the latter) without the mediation of cash. Time banks and BookCrossing are two good examples of barter that we find flourishing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.5. Other ways of exchanging knowledge and culture are possible**

Would you like to learn to play the guitar? Do you need to know how to fix a faucet? Do you have some difficulty with a computer program?... By entering into the appropriate forum on the Internet, you will find millions of persons in all parts of the world who are ready to lend you a hand. They do so without charging anything, just for the pleasure of helping people and sharing their knowledge. These exchange relationships reveal the deep conviction of many folks that knowledge and culture are common possessions which should not be privatized. They are Fundamental Rights that need to be protected. The GRMs are vocal in their defense of the second and third generations of Human Rights, that is, not only political, but also economic, social, and cultural rights.

In the year 2000 the Bolivian government passed a law which placed the waters of the Tunari River under the management of a company called *Aguas del Tunari*, a subsidiary of the transnational corporations Bechtel, Edison,

and Abengoa. According to the provisions of the concession, the local population had to obtain a license simply to collect rainwater! For the GRMs, the privatization of cultural goods is a pretension that is quite as absurd and unjust as this act of forbidding people to gather rainwater. There are certain types of human knowledge that must be removed from the logic of the market, because they form part of the common heritage of humankind and should be accessible to everybody without charge. That was the understanding of the Colombian pathologist Manuel Patarroyo when he donated to the World Health Organization the patent of his vaccine against malaria: «Knowledge should serve the welfare of all, not private interests». That is also the inspiration behind the movement which promotes the free use and distribution of computer software, and it is what motivates those intellectuals and artists who distribute their works under “copyleft” licenses. Such practices keep in check the pharmaceutical and cultural industries and all the other corporations which have sadly forgotten that health and culture should be the possessions of everybody, and not merely commodities that are marketed to those who can afford to purchase them.

### **3.6. Another spirituality is possible**

If by spirituality we understand the ability of every human being to respond to reality with “ultimacy”,<sup>43</sup> then the GRMs are profoundly spiritual because, as we have been insisting, they “read”

and interact with reality on the basis of the ultimate horizons of social responsibility and ecological sustainability. Caring for other human beings and preserving the environment are the identifying marks of the “spirituality” of the GRMs, a spirituality which is shaped for the most part outside the institutionalized religions.

The social concern which mobilized the energies of the New Social Movements of the last century is greatly amplified as it becomes more integrated into the ecological horizon of the GRMs of the new millennium. This process can be seen clearly in the intellectual itinerary of a writer like Leonardo Boff. This theologian’s works have evolved over the years, from advocating the preferential option for the poor, to stressing the importance of integrating social justice into closer communion with Mother Earth:

«Today we find ourselves in a new phase of humanity. All of us –peoples, societies, cultures, religions– are returning to our common home, the Earth. By exchanging with one another our experiences and values, we all become enriched and we complete one another mutually.

[...] We will still keep laughing and crying and learning. We will learn especially how to wed Heaven and Earth, that is, how to combine the ordinary with the surprising; the opaque immanence of the days with the radiant transcendence of the spirit; the full freedom of life with death, symbolized as union with those who went before us; the dis-

crete happiness of this world with the great promise of eternity.

And at the end, we will have discovered a thousand reasons for living more and living better, for dwelling all together as one big family, in our same Common Village, beautiful and generous, the planet Earth.»<sup>44</sup>

The invocation of spirituality is not coming only from the religious sectors; fields like psychology and education are drawing close to the spiritual traditions in order to drink from their sources. Writers like the psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo propose a recovery of spirituality as a counterweight to “capitalist” academic learning, which tends to be mere accumulation of knowledge. Naranjo’s recommendation that “spiritual practices” be included in the academic curriculum is extremely suggestive.<sup>45</sup>

The recovery of eastern contemplative traditions and the revaluation of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim forms of mysticism give clear evidence of the powerful presence of spirituality in the milieu of the GRMs. The institutionalized religions are integrated into this spiritual syncretism as one option among many, each contributing its contemplative tradition without seeking confessional allegiances—if the “churches” want to play a significant role in the network of the GRMs, they must renounce any form of proselytism. Besides the “socialization” of their mystical traditions, the principal contribution which the great religions can make to the birth of another possible world, from the side of victims, is their joint affirmation of an ethics of compassion.

All religions have traditionally flourished precisely as the compassionate dimension of human existence, well expressed in their precepts of justice, charity, and solidarity with all creatures that suffer subjection and oppression.<sup>46</sup>

Getting to the roots of social problems from one’s own personal roots is the ultimate basis of the spirituality proposed by GRMs for the creation of another possible world. In the words of the poet García Lorca: «In order for hunger to disappear, a spiritual revolution is needed».

### 3.7. Roadmap. Summary

With this third moment, “taking charge of reality”, we reach the end of our roadmap. This journey of ours has served as a crucible for discerning good Samaritan practices.

Another world is indeed possible because Samaritan GRMs already exist, in the form of persons, institutions, and collectives which do not keep their distance from the reality of suffering. These Samaritan GRMs even now are building secure lodgings where people’s pain can be assuaged and where everyone can live happily.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Domestic” utopias.</li> <li>– Lives that produce happiness.</li> <li>– Alternative readings of reality.</li> <li>– Cutting back economically.</li> <li>– Not making either knowledge or culture into merchandise.</li> <li>– Recovering spirituality as contemplation and compassion.</li> </ul>	<p>TAKING CHARGE</p>
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## APPENDIX: "LETTING REALITY TAKE CHARGE ON US"

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From a believing perspective, the Samaritan journey transcends its sociopolitical dimensions and become inscribed in a history of salvation which find its ultimate meaning and destiny in the cross and the Crucified One.

Samaritan believers do not fall into the temptation of considering themselves "saviors" of the assaulted man lying by the roadside. Rather, in their commitment to taking stock of the reality of the crucified peoples, in their taking responsibility for removing them from the cross, and in their taking the risk of being nailed to the same cross, they realize that they are coming to share in a hope that is not theirs. This is what Jon Sobrino adds as a fourth moment in our journey: «Letting reality take charge of us».<sup>47</sup> What it means, according to Sobrino, is that the crucified peoples take charge of us: they give us new eyes for seeing, new hands for working, strong backs for bearing burdens, and most of all, hope. There are no scientific arguments which are able to verify the truth of this affirmation; we can only appeal to the experience of faith, which proclaims: that is how it is.

In the daily struggle for the construction of another possible world, Samaritan believers remove their shoes in the roadside gutters, because they realize that there they are walking on sacred ground; there the God of life reveals himself as Savior, in the destiny of his chosen ones: the crucified peoples of history.

1. The Global Resistance Movements –there are authors who prefer to speak of “networks” rather of “movements”– are the logical evolution of what were called New Social Movements (NSM) toward the end of the last century. The rejection of the neoliberal model that characterized the New Social Movements has now evolved toward a transnational perspective, within the context of a global market economy. See María José FARIÑAS, «Las asimetrías de la globalización y los movimientos de resistencia global», in Juan José TAMAYO (ed.), *El cristianismo ante los grandes desafíos de nuestro tiempo*. Universidad de Valladolid, 2004.
2. Jon SOBRINO, *El principio misericordia*, El Salvador, UCA Editores, 1993<sup>2</sup>, p. 62.
3. See I. ELLACURÍA, *Hacia una fundamentación filosófica del método teológico latinoamericano*, El Salvador, UCA 322-323 (1975), p. 149.
4. Jon SOBRINO, «Espiritualidad y seguimiento de Jesús», in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación*, vol. II, Madrid, Trotta 1994<sup>2</sup>, p. 453.
5. From a poem by O. MANDELSTAM, in Lev S. VYGOTSKY, *Pensamiento y lenguaje*, Buenos Aires, La Pléyade, 1987, p. 159.
6. Not all scholars share the thesis of ritual impurity as the reason for the behavior of the priest and the Levite (see, for example, José Antonio PAGOLA, *Jesús. Aproximación histórica*, Madrid, PPC, 2007, p. 140). Some exegetes, like K. E. Bailey, hold that Luke’s aim is to criticize the legalistic religious conceptions which cause the priest and the Levite to stay clear of the half-dead man.
7. Strictly speaking, the Levites were “lower clergy” who did not have the same ritual obligation to keep themselves pure. They were require to observe ritual purity only on the days of their service and not perpetually, as was the case for priests. (See Mario Sergio BRIGLIA, *Misterio de misericordia: El Buen Samaritano (Lucas 10,25-37)*, ([http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/fichero\\_articulo?codigo=2707936&orden=0](http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/fichero_articulo?codigo=2707936&orden=0)).
8. P. BERGER and Th. LUCKMANN, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Penguin books, 1991.
9. Text from the anthology (with commentary) of José Ignacio GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *Vicarios de Cristo. Los pobres en la teología y espiritualidad cristianas*, Madrid, Trotta, 1991, p. 19.
10. See José A. HERNÁNDEZ DE TORO, «Subida del precio de los alimentos: amenaza y oportunidad» en *Revista IO*, n.º 11, September 2008. Electronic version at: <http://www.intermonoxfam.org/cms/HTML/espanol/1862/RevistaIO11cast.pdf>
11. Jean Ziegler, formerly UN special rapporteur for the Right to Food. Taken from his speech before heads of state during the fifth session of the Human Rights Council, held June 11-18, 2007, in Geneva.
12. Readers should not worry if they do not understand the sentences they just read, because they make no sense at all. They are a comical recreation of the incomprehensible language with which we are bombarded daily by newspapers, radio, and television.
13. Jacques Diouf, president of the FAO. Taken from his speech at the summit in Rome in June 2002.
14. Francis FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Avon, 1993. Fukuyama proclaims the end of history, not because the world has reached any real goal of fulfillment, but because there remain no alternatives to the present world order.
15. César MANZANOS BILBAO, *La construcción social de la pobreza. Principios que sustentan su percepción*, Ekintza Zuzena, n.º 18. ([http://www.nodo50.org/ekintza/article.php?id\\_articulo=243](http://www.nodo50.org/ekintza/article.php?id_articulo=243)).
16. Andrés GARCÍA INDA and Carmen MARCUELLO SERVÓS, *Conceptos para pensar el siglo XXI*, Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata, 2008, p. 7.
17. Paul RICOEUR, *From Text to Action*, Northwestern University Press, 1991.
18. Rubem ALVES, *Hijos del mañana*, Salamanca, Sígueme, 1975.
19. Adela CORTINA and Ignasi CARRERAS, *Consumo... luego existo* [I consume... therefore I am],



- Barcelona, Cristianisme i Justícia, Quaderns 123. Electronic version: <http://www.fespinal.com/espinal/lilib/es123.pdf>.
20. «The great problem is how oppressed people, being doubly inauthentic beings who ‘lodge’ the oppressor within themselves, will be able to participate in the elaboration of the pedagogy for liberation. Only to the extent that they realize that they themselves are ‘providing lodging’ to the oppressor will they be able to contribute to the construction of pedagogy that frees them. It is impossible for them to do this as long as they are living in a kind of duality, where being means appearing, and appearing means resembling the oppressor.» Paulo FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum, 2000.
  21. Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, Yale University Press, 2007.
  22. Adela CORTINA, *Alianza y Contrato. Política, ética y religión*, Madrid, Trotta, 2005<sup>2</sup>, p. 21.
  23. Max HORKHEIMER, *Anhelo de justicia, teoría crítica y religión*, Madrid, Trotta, 2000, p. 93.
  24. Adela CORTINA, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
  25. Jon SOBRINO, «Espiritualidad y seguimiento de Jesús» in Ignacio ELLACURÍA and Jon SOBRINO, *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación*, vol. II, Madrid, Trotta, 1994<sup>2</sup>, p. 454.
  26. To understand better the difference between “compassion” and “pity”, see Juan Antonio GUERRERO and Daniel IZUZQUIZA, *Vidas que sobran. Los excluidos de un mundo en quiebra*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2003, p. 64-76 (1. *La ayuda y la compasión*).
  27. Luis ARANGUREN GONZALO, «Participación», in Andrés GARCÍA INDA and Carmen MARCUELLO SERVÓS (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 194.
  28. See Mario Sergio BRIGLIA, *op. cit.*, p. 173-175.
  29. Santiago ALBA RICO, from the prologue of Gabriele del Grande, *Mamadú va a morir. El exterminio de inmigrantes en el Mediterráneo*, Madrid, Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo, 1982.
  30. See Mario Sergio BRIGLIA, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
  31. Mario Sergio BRIGLIA, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
  32. Chaime MARCUELLO SERVÓS, «La (re)construcción de la cosa pública» in Andrés GARCÍA INDA and Carmen MARCUELLO SERVÓS (coords.), *op. cit.*, p. 182-183.
  33. See Manuel CASTELLS, *La Sociedad red: una visión global*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2006.
  34. Anthony DE MELLO, *El canto del pájaro* [The Song of the Bird], Santander, Sal Terrae, 1982<sup>30</sup>.
  35. See Carl HONRÉ, *El elogio de la lentitud* [In praise of slowness], Barcelona, RBA, 2007. To learn more about the “slow” movement, visit the website: [http://www.aat.org.ar/Slow\\_mundial.htm](http://www.aat.org.ar/Slow_mundial.htm)
  36. José Antonio GARCÍA, *En el mundo desde Dios. Vida religiosa y resistencia cultural*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1989, p. 156.
  37. Victor F. SAMPEDRO BLANCO, «La red del 13-M. A modo de prefacio», in Victor F. SAMPEDRO BLANCO (ed.), *13-M. Multitudes on line*, Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata, 2005, p. 11.
  38. Campaign details at: <http://www.greenpeace.org/espana/campaigns/bosques/kit-kat-take-action-2>.
  39. See Carlos TAIBO, *En defensa del decrecimiento. Sobre capitalismo, crisis y barbarie*, Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata, 2009.
  40. Yayo HERRERO, «Objeciones al desarrollo: una mirada crítica al concepto de progreso» in *Revista Pueblos*, no. 36, March 2009 (<http://www.revistapueblos.org/spip.php?article1577>).
  41. John STUART MILL, *Principios de economía política con alguna de sus aplicaciones a la filosofía social*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2006, p. 641.
  42. For more information: <http://www.ecologiablog.com/post/607/cooperativas-de-consumo-ecologico>
  43. Jon SOBRINO, «Espiritualidad y seguimiento de Jesús» in *op. cit.*, p. 452.
  44. Leonardo BOFF, *Casamento entre o céu e a terra*, Rio de Janeiro, Salamandra, 2001, p. 9.
  45. Claudio NARANJO, «Cambiar la educación para cambiar el mundo» [Change education to change the world] in [http://www.claudionaranjo.net/pdf\\_files/education/cambiar\\_la\\_educacion\\_ch\\_4\\_spanish.pdf](http://www.claudionaranjo.net/pdf_files/education/cambiar_la_educacion_ch_4_spanish.pdf).
  46. Carlos MENDOZA ÁLVAREZ, «Fe, filosofía y ciencias. Por una arquitectura del conocimiento» (<http://www.uia.mx/humanismocristiano/filosofycien.html>).
  47. See Jons SOBRINO, «El pueblo crucificado y la civilización de la pobreza (el “hacerse cargo de la realidad” de Ignacio Ellacuría)» in *Fuera de los pobres no hay salvación. Pequeños ensayos utópicos-proféticos*, Madrid, Trotta, 2007, p. 26.