

Economy and humanism

ALFREDO BOSI

WHEN THE professor and dear friend Martins invited me to attend this seminar on Sociology and Hope, memory took me back to an event held in Recife in 1974. It was an SBPC roundtable discussion on a related topic: Sociology and Hope focused on millenarian Brazilian movements. One of the participants at the roundtable was our late Duglas Teixeira Monteiro, author of a thesis on the millenarian movement in a region between Santa Catarina and Paraná, whose ill-defined boundaries gave it the name of Contested. *Os errantes do novo século* (The wanderers of the new century) is the title of the thesis which was later published in book form. Another participant in the seminar was worker-priest Dominique Barbé, organizer of one of the first communities based in Osasco, Vila Yolanda, which I had the privilege of frequenting in those difficult years. However, the creator of the expression “Sociology and Hope,” Henri Desroche, a former Dominican priest and an expert on Marx, who at that time was intensely devoted to the study of messianic movements worldwide, was unable to attend the seminar.

Nearly forty years have gone by. Apparently the topic no longer arouses the same interest as at that time, when resistance movements needed to resort to utopias that oscillated between hopeful and desperate. So I start this intervention wondering about the reason for these meetings around Hope. The context is so different now! We have in Brazil a relatively effective formal representative democracy. The international economic crises started in 2008 have not yet affected the race to consumption either in the urban or the rural world. Some Human Development Indices, such as basic education and longevity, have managed to rise, though modestly. On the side of the official discourse and more than few media images we have the insistent return of the idea of Brazil as the country of the future and thus of trust, which is a strong form of hope. However, there is in the air (and certainly in the air we breathe at this University) a certain disenchantment, a disappointment in the effectiveness, not to mention the dignity, of politics, skepticism bordering on pessimism, coupled with a weariness of the endless number of theories that mushroomed between 1960 and 1970.

Furthermore, and this is alarming, there is an indifference that leads us to forsake practices that would entail, hypothetically, some significant change in the status quo. But, forgive me the agnostics, I dare to remember that theology included the despair of one’s own salvation among the most serious and unforgivable sins, those that inveigh against the Spirit... That is why I have accepted the invitation and decided to say something about one of the liveliest and most promising projects I got to know in my youth, the Economy and Humanism

movement founded by the Dominican friar Lebret. This is one of the matrices of the transition, between the 1950s and 1960s, from a shy center-wing Catholicism (that of the Western Christian democracy) to a vigorous left-wing Christianity in Brazil.

The fact that the Dominican Province of São Paulo is linked to the French Dominicans is among those happy circumstances that change the direction of an institution. From the 1930s to 1950 France was a cradle of Christian intellectuals who were against the right-wing trends that prowled the European and Latin American clergy. In the face of the Nazi occupation, these intellectuals developed a political thought that was not only anti-fascist (as is the case of the group of the *Esprit* journal founded by Emmanuel Mounier and the democratic militancy of Jacques Maritain), but overtly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, of which the Economy and Humanism movement founded by Father Lebret in the early 1940s is an example.

The genesis of Economy and Humanism cannot be understood separately from the trajectory of Father Lebret. This is not easy because he was a personality strongly magnetized for action, an extraordinarily industrious man. Celso Furtado, who had met him in the days of the founding of SUDENE, once told me: “Father Lebret was a power house.” I would add that, in addition to a power house, he was a bridge that he himself built between traditionally distant positions such as Marxism and the social doctrine of the Church.

Passionate about the ideal of justice not only between classes but between peoples, Father Lebret *cherchait son bien où il le trouvait* – looked for the good wherever he could find it, as long as the principles could guide and effective social action. I know it is not typical of the academy to accept eclecticism; hence the absence of his name in the curricula of Humanities, but that definitely was not Lebret’s aspiration: he had no intention to shine in university bibliographies, since all he wanted was to reform the capitalist society. And hope is what that project was all about! [Hope, I should say beforehand, that has nothing to do with messianism, or with millenarianism, or with utopias: what we have here is a man with both feet on the ground].

Let us walk inside that power house.

Louis-Joseph Lebret was born in 1897 in a village in northern Brittany, Minihic-sur-Rance, a few kilometers from the port of Saint-Malo. This city has been, since the sixteenth century, a nest of privateers who, financially supported by the kings of France plundered the coasts of Brazil and West Indian colonies. A statue of Duguay-Trouin, who pillaged the Rio de Janeiro in the eighteenth century, stands along the walls of the historic center. When a few years ago I visited Saint-Malo to see the statue, I poured out my heart to a local: “But that man was a pirate”, to which he replied indignantly: “*Pas un pirate, monsieur, il a été un corsair du Roi*”. The city’s economy was for centuries focused on the sea: sailors and fishermen were the majority of the population. Traditional Ca-

tholicism was the rooted religion in Brittany until the early twentieth century; perhaps no other French province has so faithfully preserved the old medieval devotions. Celtic affiliation, though remote, fueled until recently separatist movements muffled initially by monarchical, then Napoleonic and finally republican centralization. Renan, who was Breton, used to say that in his homeland those who were not fishermen or sailors could only be priests or soldiers. By that he meant that purely mercantile professions were not appealing to his countrymen. But that did not prevent the slave trade from growing in the ports of Brittany, especially in the eighteenth century, and origin of the wealth of both the nobility and gentry: the illustrious example is that of the ancestors of Chateaubriand, whose ashes rest in a rock, le Grand Bé, off the bay of Saint-Malo.

Louis-Joseph Lebret was a sailor before joining the Order of Preachers in 1923. He attended the course at the Naval Academy in Saint Brieuc, reached the rank of pilot and lieutenant, fought in World War I and was early awarded the medal of the Legion of Honor for his military service as a naval officer. Certainly something was left from his youth experience: the fondness for calculation, the struggle against the risk inherent in life on the high seas, the fight against the chance of not only natural but also social adversities, the determination in the face of objectives to be met, the constant firmness of the pilot, the need to plan the trip, finally, the contact with the sailor's life. His career in the Navy was safe. But at the age of 26 Lebret left everything behind and became a Dominican priest.

In a rare personal document examining the motivations of his decision to join the family of the disciples of St. Dominic and St. Thomas Aquinas, but also of Bartholomew de Las Casas, he refers to the *attraction to the missionary's life*, one of the charisms of the Order. The sailor that he no longer was would survive, sublimated, inside the priest who wanted to preach in distant lands. From the theological studies with one of the pioneers of Thomistic renovation, Father Sertillanges, Lebret acquired the mental habit of exact definitions, of the divisions of the discourse by arguments in favor and against, an entire art of thinking and expressing, of which accuracy and brevity were the best qualities. His entire work was marked by a combination of realism, an acute observation of men and things, with the didactic tendency of St. Thomas that seeks to define and expose each concept accurately. Lebret's style is transparent.

Anyway, the new priest ordained in 1928 did not have to leave his Brittany to preach and work. Instead, his first activity as a priest was to approach the fishermen in the region of Saint-Malo and create the Association of Young Maritime Professionals under the newly founded Young Catholic Workers, a chapter of the Catholic Action. Here we touch on the seminal experience that would guide the entire trajectory of the militant Lebret: empirical knowledge of the living conditions of the fishermen of Brittany.

Lebret dove deep into examining the family and social structure of the

local fishermen. He soon realized that their poverty was being aggravated by the unfair competition of large Japanese fishing boats against the net-fishing boats of Breton fishermen. It was the industry of international capital and dimensions that caused a double damage to small-scale fishing: it went as far as eliminating their means of work while decimating the shoals of the North Sea, disregarding the breeding and spawning seasons. Thus, even the subsistence economy ended up being taken away from the poor fishermen of the region.

The fragility of the fishermen and their wives, who worked in the production of preserves, became increasingly clear. How to react? Solidarity among all, nourished by interfamily and neighborhood ties could be channeled in an institutional way. That was what Lebret did by founding the Movement of Saint-Malo. Instead of referring the fishermen to the great national labor union, the CGTU, he tried to bring them together to make up a *community of production and distribution formed by several small organizations locally and in the multi-family network*. It was a cooperative model, which differed from the corporate model in that it rejected the direct involvement of state bureaucracy. Over time, the horizontal support solution was extended to various groups of fishermen in Brittany and the Channel, until the time when a Federation was established comprising different communities but respecting their specificities. Unlike the national unions with a strictly class structure, this Federation ended up including employers, small boat owners who paid the fishermen, and producers of fish preserves. Interfamily and neighborhood relations replaced the class opposition typical of hegemonic class unionism. This unorthodox combination favored mechanisms for mutual aid in cases of crisis, unemployment, hunger and disease.

Surprisingly, the Front Populaire led by Léon Blum, of socialist inspiration, reached out to these mixed structures in 1938. The French state, being republican and secular, recognized the usefulness and trustworthiness of community entities and, in the case of Saint-Malo, of religious inspiration. However, the ideological hostility of the parliamentary majority of the time delayed the formalization of the Saint-Malo Movement. With the capitulation of France during the German invasion in 1940, power fell into the hands of Marshal Pétain and his collaborators. It was the beginning of the Vichy government. The Federation and local committees (herring, tuna, seafood committees) had to knock on the doors of the new political situation to get from it the official recognition that the Congressmen of the agonizing Third Republic had denied them.

Here the issue is controversial. Lebret's attitude in the early 1940s was pragmatic. Government recognition was necessary, so he requested it and obtained it. Then, with the first group, reinforced by JoC, came lay groups, which in turn reinforced the Federation. Lebret saw the scope of his empirical research on the living conditions of fishermen in the Channel and the North Atlantic widen. The seeds of the Economy and Humanism thought were already deeply planted there. It remains to understand the initial meeting between Lebret and

his former fellow workers from his Navy years, many of whom trusted Pétain's patriotism but were suspicious of his entourage (to which they always attributed the evils of the ill-fated collaboration with the Germans).

Undoubtedly happier than the meeting was the non-meeting process: Hitler (tolerated by many Vichy ministers) soon was seen by Lebret as a racist, arrogant and barbaric nationalist. In the specific area of relations between the Saint-Malo Movement and the ruling bureaucracy, the Dominican priest soon realized the high degree of authoritarianism and centralism used by the government to deal with the newly established Federations: leaders began to be appointed from the top down, frontally contradicting the ideal of having them elected by the communities. Strictly speaking, the very notion of community ended up being simultaneously used, abused and misrepresented by Vichy's State-centered corporatism. The fact is that starting from 1943 separation was imposed with no return. Father Lebret then turned to the great project of his life: the Economy and Humanism movement: a theory, a research center, a journal.

A theory in progress: human economy

A theory that combines economics and politics can originate from academic studies, readings of classics, statistical formulas or abstract speculation. This is what happens when experts in microeconomics set out to convert their curves and equations into political decisions. But it can also be born from a one-on-one with the problems of a group, a class, an unfair, unbalanced structure. In the case of Father Lebret's Human Economy doctrine, the experience of fishing exploitation by a foreign industry at the expense of local workers gave him concrete knowledge of the injustice of a *system* that was not limited to the problems of a particular region. This imbalance had to be considered in a broad, structural manner. The search for a comprehensive model led to the study of Marxism, seen as a robust macroeconomic thought that not only *analyzed* system data (as classical political economics had already done), but also *denounced* them in the name of justice and equality among men.

From the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s Lebret studied Marxism seriously, going directly to the sources and also using the writings of Lenin. His marginal notes to the French translation of *The Capital* are numerous and sometimes enthusiastic. He recognized that in a language different from his, it brought him close to Marx and Engels' analyses of capitalist exploitation. Lenin's imperialism theory strongly impressed him, in that it corrected the social asymmetries of capitalist formations in international terms: exploiting nations and exploited nations.

The so-called social Catholicism of the nineteenth century, which had begun with Lamennais and Ozanam, already deplored the exploitation and oppression of workers, but lacked the identification of a key point, the *surplus value*, which explained inequality in a structural manner and connected it to

the concept of capitalist accumulation, which is so rich in developments. Lebreton incorporated this concept to his theory, which seemed essential to him, but did not attribute it to any political party, i.e., did not accept the corollary of class struggle as the assumption of a working policy. In other words, he understood the fundamentals of capitalist exploitation so well described by Marx and Engels, but did not assimilate their political party proposal. Incidentally, this attitude would be explicit in the Manifesto founding the Movement: Human Economy would not be one more party.

He took a different path. Instead of mass struggle led by a workers' vanguard, Lebreton proposed the consolidation of grassroots communities able to sustain each other, identify their basic needs and demand that they be met: by the companies (via profit-sharing and, ultimately, co-management), and by the State through labor laws and distributive mechanisms of national income.

A reformist path that should always start from the awareness of the wronged and oppressed. This assumption, combined with a distrust of the centralizing State, came to him from his frustrating experience in the years of the Vichy regime. Communities would be constrained if they depended on the orders of the State apparatus. But there was also a basic component with some surprisingly anarchic hues that can be recognized when one reads certain flattering observations to Kropotkin's work contained in his later studies. (Incidentally, in Mounier's personalism there are laudatory references to Bakunin).

This partial use of Marxism was a theoretical intuition that allowed Father Lebreton to build the framework of his Human Economy, but as it was merely tangential it cost him his separation from the main theoretical mind of the group: Father Henri Desroche who, contrary to him, strode to a broad and deep incorporation of the dialectical method. The publication of his book, *The Meaning of Marxism*, in 1949, was a challenge that the Church could not or did not know how to meet, and that would lead him to stray from the movement. Henri Desroche considered Marxism a "humanist prophetism" that should be closely integrated into the Christian conception of society. Later, when he had already left the Order, we see him as the founder of Sociology and Hope, to which I referred at the beginning of this intervention.

Lebreton and his work with the Ministry of Reconstruction in the immediate postwar period

From its inception the Economy and Humanism Movement was conceived as a researchers' training center. The main objective was to detect the basic needs of urban neighborhoods and districts through systematic observations and interviews. A survey, which partly followed the instructions of the Le Play school and partly conformed to local conditions. Teams were set up in several cities starting from the working-class suburbs of Lyon, where the accommodation problem was crucial.

Immediately after the Liberation in 1945, the Ministry of Reconstruction

and Urbanism commissioned to the Economy and Humanism teams a series of surveys on the precarious state of housing in locations where bombings had been more violent: Le Bret undertook to guide the work in four cities: Lyon, Saint Etienne, Nantes and Marseille. The port of Le Havre, perhaps the most damaged, also housed a Human Economy group. The survey expanded in order to detect food shortages in the Parisian basin. Grenoble, an important industrial center, had one of the most active teams. In some cases data were gathered to enable an assessment of the current situation. The municipal level was particularly contemplated. Le Bret became an expert, and as such was admitted to one of the sections of the CNRS, which gave him a university degree status that he in fact had never requested.

**Le Bret's first visit to Brazil in 1947.
The course on Human Economy taught
at the Free School of Political Sciences**

At that time, thanks to his friendship with father Romeu Dale, a Dominican priest stationed at the Convent of Perdizes, Le Bret was invited to come to São Paulo to talk about Human Economy. He was offered the auditorium of the Free School of Political Science. Unlike the guiding texts of the militants, which he hitherto had published, the subject of the courses taught back then were systematically doctrinarian.¹

Le Bret divided the course into three parts.

The first addresses the history of the economic and political doctrines that the Movement needed to dialogue with: Marxism, first, with long quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin; Kropotkin's anarchism, with the warm accolades we have referred to; the corporatism of the Portuguese New State (Estado Novo); the Italian fascism; the racist dictatorship of National Socialism; the Soviet statism under Stalin. It is an extremely informed didactic scenario.

The second part is an attempt to coordinate texts by precursors of Human Economy ideas, starting from the Church Priests who followed after the first Christian communities. The audience now is comprised of intellectuals, mostly Christians, but also some agnostics and supporters of the Left linked to the University of São Paulo.

Finally, the third, strictly theoretical part, deals with the fundamentals of Human Economy, *an economy focused on the basic needs of human beings in society*, and opposed to both the pure market game and the steely planning by the State. It was the third way, then advocated by the European leaders of the emerging Christian democracy; they said it but didn't do it, because pressed by the Cold War and electoral confrontation with the communists, they ended up in the arms of the industrial and financial capital.

The concrete man of Le Bret's thought is neither the *homo economicus* nor the pure political animal, icons of liberal capitalism and of the Machiavellianism of the reasons of State. He is the live and responsible center of multiple rela-

tionships: with family, friends, neighborhood, city, country, school, profession, church, press, union, club, party; finally, all socializing instances that give him identity support and receive his labor or his interest.

In the long and well reasoned speech in which Lebreton presents the Human Economy theory, one can point out the close relationship he establishes between the needs of the man-in-community and the goods that meet those needs. Unique is his dialogue with the Viennese marginalism, which he became acquainted with through Perroux, a former assistant of Schumpeter. Marginalism presupposes the existence of a subjective decision in the choice of merchandise, which seems to be a very useful or enjoyable good to the buyer. This unconditional freedom of the subject can lead to an economic perversion both with regard to the rampant quest for luxuries (consumerism) and to the search for money as the supreme good - the *chrematistics*, contested by Aristotle and St. Thomas when it slips into greed and accumulation of money, which ultimately becomes the end rather than the means of the economic operation.

St. Thomas' *fair price* theory turns back its pages as a correction of the market trends of profit for profit. Lebreton took from the same source the ideal of the *common good*, which he puts ahead of the asocial use of property rights.

In face of the risk of abuse, which is effective to the extent that financial capitalism appropriates the whole economy, Father Lebreton found valid support not only in Saint Thomas but in Marx himself. In *The Capital* the value is considered in terms of human labor included in the merchandise. In other words, the goods that meet basic human needs have a real objectivity, *they are labor and raw material* and do not depend structurally on whimsical subjective evaluations. Capitalism, it is true, excites the fantasies and whims of consumers by creating false needs, goods that are not authentic goods, but mere marketing lures. But only true goods and their respective needs should be part of a Human Economy program.

Lebreton proposes a classification of basic human needs which, if unmet generate personal and collective unhappiness. Scheming.

There are personal needs and collective needs

Among personal needs we have initially the *irreducible* or *incompressible* needs. Not meeting them engenders weakening and, ultimately, death. Lebreton lists them: (1) a sufficient amount of food in calories, proteins, carbs and lipids; (2) work and leisure attire; (3) intimate garments capable of maintaining the body heat in periods of cold and humidity; (4) healthy protective housing with no promiscuity; (5) basic furniture; (6) essential household amenities such as water, light, heat. This item also includes external amenities such as proximity to services, including pharmacies and neighborhood doctors; (7) regular work; (8) cultural life, basic education, reading, historical, political and religious knowledge, in short, education.

Another class of personal needs is called *dignity needs*. This includes space

to entertain friends, and Lebreton went as far as proposing a 15-square meters area to ensure citizens minimum psychic and social comfort. Deepening the item of cultural needs, Lebreton believes that mastering an art and the ability to understand a piece of literary work are also items in the list of dignity needs.

The category of “tertiary” personal needs is related to endurance (“besoins of *dépassement*”). Human beings can and should be able to develop to the fullest their intellectual and moral capacities. By so doing they raise the value level of the civilization to which they belong. To do so they must be given enough time to think, study, meditate, contemplate, create works of art and pray, all of which is hindered by excessive raw or bureaucratic work and the sting of material care.

At one point in his list of needs Lebreton focuses on a phenomenon that we know to be current, looking at our consumer society. Speaking of *comfort* goods, or *facility*, points to the benefits of the techniques, but neglects how these needs become to be stimulated or even created by the market. Learning to separate in one’s own budget what is superfluous from what is essential (which may be strictly cultural) is a step towards adjusting to the spirit of a Human Economy.

Collective needs

In these needs it is necessary to distinguish *means of production* and *consumer goods*.

Lebreton starts with a critical remark: “Capitalist production is not established on the basis of real needs, but on the basis of problematic market needs.” Problematic here means questionable, in that sometimes they depend on the mad rush towards maximum profit. Given this distortion, “a certain regulation is necessary, through direct or indirect intervention of power, as light as possible, but firm. Chance could not ensure it.” This difficult combination of national production planning and market initiatives is formulated in Lebreton always with a focus on the basic collective needs of each population and, where possible, of each regional community. The foreign market is not everything: relying on it and on its pricing game can be risky for an exporting nation. “We must always take into account the possibilities of the domestic market.” And the Dominican reminds his Brazilian listeners what happened with coffee in the early 1930s ...

One should not forget that the tradition of the social doctrine of the Church since the mid nineteenth century had advocated an ethical and political correction of the sheer and tough capitalist liberalism. In this horizon of values, Economy and Humanism anticipates the recent counter-ideological criticism of the *religion of productivity*, whose deleterious effects on the physical and mental health of workers are widely known. For those familiar with the factory journals of Simone Weil (who died in 1943) and her utter rejection of the fetishism of production for the sake production, this position of moral and religious origin, so severe towards capitalism and the Soviet statism of the time, is somehow meaningful.

Thus, Lebreton’s theory approaches Marx’s criticism of the individualism

of the classic liberals, but remains ideally within a community model, which to many seemed utopian in view of the free market society then prevailing all over the world, except in the Soviet Union. To limit the unreasonable quest for superfluous items or curb financial speculation there was only, then, the statist solution of the Soviet policy. By straying from it, which was believed to be totalitarian and therefore inhuman, all that was left was an ethical inspiration. Today we are aware of the very few chances of that.

Lebret and the Brazilian experience

Lebret's discourse was consistent with his community project, but strayed, for that very reason, from the orientation (or disorientation) that Western societies were pursuing after the war. Industrialization at any cost, golden years of international capitalism, cold war, arms race and nuclear threat, distance between the first and third worlds, breakdown of the rural world, pathological urbanization, mass migrations; in a word, the unfolding of a modernity increasingly attracted and fascinated by material progress. Despite all that, Lebret proposed a humanizing social action. In the texts he wrote during the 1950s and 1960s he established the distinction – which today is consensual but back then was not yet widespread - between *economic growth* and *human scale development*.

Following the time of reconstruction, France closed in on itself, as well as the other capitalist nations that had fought in the war. What would be the French Christian Democrat movement ended up limited to the Popular Republican Movement (MRP), of Gaullist trend and aligned with the U.S. policy without special interest in the Third World.

Meanwhile, the condition of the French colonies deteriorated, and the army and the nationalist right clung to the possession of Algeria and Indochina. But the trip to Brazil would open Lebret's eyes to the existence of another reality: poverty experienced in a territory rich with potentialities and endowed with a people who had inherited neither the religious barriers of old Europe nor the violent racial prejudice of the United States, where the segregation and lynching of blacks were still making headlines. A tolerant, flexible population, open to hope and to the future. And, above all, a population that ignored xenophobia and any project to dominate other peoples.



Photo – Courtesy of Prof. Dr. Celso Monteiro Lamparelli

Father Louis-Joseph Lebet (1897-1966) at Congonhas airport in São Paulo, 1959.

Lebret found here a half traditional half modern society, in which the meaning of the word community did not sound like a medieval reminiscence. A society that coexisted with neighboring islands of solidarity both in rural areas and in the poor outskirts of the cities that were beginning to swell with migration. It was possible to go in the slums and shantytowns, talk with the locals and hear from them their needs and feel the warmth of their generosity. Brazil gave the Human Economy a boost. And a new perspective.

But the year was 1947. The Cold War was affecting us. The communism-anti-communism cleavage had settled in the federal government, in the entourage of President Dutra, who had been elected by a Vargas coalition, but was in practice an ideological ally of aggressively anti-communist groups. In January 1948 the Marshal legitimized the suspension of the political rights of the members of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), who had been democratically elected in 1946. When he heard of that violation of parliamentary immunity, Father Lebret said in reproach: "It is always dangerous for a State that calls itself republican to make anti-democratic decisions. Those who do not do everything possible to facilitate the rise of the people are not worthy of condemning communism. The only way to beat communism is by overcoming it."

That was enough for the Order to decide that it was more prudent to take him back to France. He would only return to Brazil in 1952 thanks to the efforts of Josué de Castro and D. Hélder Câmara. But before he left, he had already planted the seed of Economy and Humanism by founding a branch in São Paulo, known as SAGMAC, whose first project was a survey of housing conditions in the state capital. His humanizing concept of housing problems is still remembered today as pioneer by researchers on the urbanization of São Paulo.²

One can say that his sojourn in Brazil gave rise to a script that was peculiar to Lebret around the *development-underdevelopment* duo, the true axis of what was conventionally called "Catholic Third-Worldism", which was very active in the 1950s and 1960s. After publishing in France Josué de Castro's *The Geography of Hunger* and later becoming better acquainted with ECLAC in Santiago (where he met Prebisch, Eduardo Frei and Jacques Chonchol, later on a minister in the Allende government), Lebret focused his efforts on studying living conditions in underdeveloped countries, an adjective that then became into vogue. Perhaps his attentive readings of Lenin on the imperialist stage of capitalism had remained in his memory when he started to defend the thesis of systemic exploitation of poor countries by rich countries.

It is meaningful that this third-worldist drifting of Economy and Humanism severed his ties with the French Christian-Democrats while paving the way for his alliance with the Christian-Democrats in Brazil, Uruguay and Chile. Brazilian Catholicism was starting its progressive path in the 1950s, under the intellectual leadership of Alceu Amoroso Lima and the political leadership of André Franco Montoro, Lebret's collaborator from the start, while French Ca-

tholicism (Swiss, Belgian and Dutch) strayed towards the center and, in the face of communism, to a clear center-right position...

SAGMAC's field surveys in Brazil

SAGMAC is the acronym for Society of Graphic and Mechanographic Analysis Applied to Social Complexes. It was a field survey laboratory, whose project resumed, under different conditions, the work of Economy and Humanism with the French Ministry of Reconstruction. The technical name of the program in French was "*Aménagement du territoire*", i.e., organization of the urban space. In France that space had been destroyed by war. In Brazil, and particularly in large cities, *the living place of the poor was the mirror of underdevelopment*: precarious accommodations, lack of sanitation, absence of minimum decent living conditions for the human being. São Paulo, said Lebret once, is not a city, it is a camp. The slums were beginning to emerge and the tenements of migrants gave Brás and Bexiga a face of squalid decay.

In his first visit to Brazil in 1947, Lebret led a survey on the types of housing found in various districts of São Paulo. The results of the survey showed that many of São Paulo's neighborhoods had a high percentage of extremely poor dwellings, many of them in such a precarious state that not even a reform could save them.

When he visited São Paulo again in 1952, at the invitation of Governor Lucas Nogueira Garcez, Lebret boosted SAGMAC. His first relevant work was to detect the development potential of the State of São Paulo, which resulted in a report now kept in the National Archives of France. According to an excellent researcher of Lebret, Denis Pelletier, the report proposed "a new regional distribution, a revitalization of municipalities, warned about the dangers of an urban sprawl and called for a reform of land structures".³

A second, larger-scale survey, examined the living conditions in 64 municipalities included in the Paraná-Uruguay basin, with emphasis on the situation of rural populations. It was published in 1954.

A third survey was conducted in 1953 on the living conditions in the rural areas of Paraná.

The fourth survey, conducted between 1952 and 1955, addressed the industrial development conditions in Pernambuco and the Northeast. Meeting with D. Hélder Câmara, who later founded the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) helped by Father Lebret's advice. The survey results were promising from the point of view of widening the purposes of Economy and Humanism. Alongside industrial development, Lebret and his close collaborators, such as the engineer Baltar, identified the need for a land reform policy that favored the subsistence sector and avoided a rural exodus, because of the urban swelling that was already evident in Recife. Here, Economy and Humanism took the lead from ECLAC and strategically prevented the diffusion of a discourse geared solely to enhancing industrial growth. Consistent with the recognition of

an iniquitous land structure, Lebret was convinced that State intervention was essential at the time of implementing the reform.

SAGMAC continued in São Paulo its mission to learn in order to reform. In 1955 mayor Toledo Piza asked the institution to conduct a survey on urban development in the city of São Paulo. Once the work was completed, the report titled *Estrutura urbana da aglomeração paulistana* (Urban structure of the São Paulo agglomeration) was published. In 1959, when Carvalho Pinto was elected the new State governor, it was a disciple of Lebret, the former leader of the Catholic University Youth movement, Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, who coordinated the government Action Plan. Economy and Humanism had reached the state executive level.

When João Goulart took office as president of Brazil (due to Quadros' resignation in August 1961), another direct collaborator of Lebret, the architect Francisco Whitaker Ferreira, was appointed planning director at the Agrarian Reform Superintendency. But the military coup of 1964 struck and scattered Lebret's best collaborators in Brazil.

**The global dissemination of Economy and Humanism.
A non-economicist theory of development is born.
Attention to the Third World**

In the 1950s Lebret spread his theory through South America. In Uruguay relations with the Christian Democracy were on good terms and the same was happening in Chile, where Raul Prebisch's ECLAC warmly welcomed him. Partisan resistance frustrated his meetings in Peru and Colombia. Lebret also traveled to Africa (Senegal and Rwanda), to the Arab world (Lebanon) and the Far East (Vietnam). He used to say he had visited 60 countries (see preface to *Suicide or Survival of the West*). His object of study and action became known by two closely linked names – development and Third World.

It was only in 1956 that the term “development” appeared in Jean Romoëuf's Dictionary of Economic Sciences. The expression *Tiers Monde* was coined in 1952 by the demographer Alfred Sauvy, an active collaborator of Economy and Humanism. The Bandung meeting of the 77 non-aligned countries, i.e., the Third World, took place in 1955. Anyway, it was in the 1950s that both expressions - Underdevelopment and Third World - began to intertwine. Lebret refers to the collective work organized by Georges Balandier, *Le Tiers Monde. Sousdéveloppement et développement* (Paris: Puf, 1956) as a beacon.

The irradiation of Economy and Humanism is confirmed by Lebret's presence in international organizations: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Economic Council (1954) and the United Nations Conference on the application of sciences and techniques in the interest of poorly developed regions (1962), which Lebret attended as head of the Holy See delegation. At that time he was already considered an international expert on the subject of development applied to underdeveloped nations. He had already created a training

center for specialists in development, IRFED (Paris, 1958), now on lay ground, though always driven by the Christian ideals of solidarity.

Lebret's relations with the Vatican strengthened after the Council. His long-time personal friendship with Montini, later Pope Paul VI, and the solicitous mediation of D. Helder gave him the opportunity to participate in the Council in the capacity of "*peritus*". Much of the Church's international transition to socializing and third-worldist positions can be attributed to his interventions and the support of Latin American and African bishops. Confident in Lebret's discernment, Paul VI delegated him the task of writing the text of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, which would only be enacted in 1967.

Father Louis-Joseph Lebret died on July 26, 1966.

Notes

- 1 L'Économie Humaine. Cours donné à l'École libre des Sciences Sociales et Politiques de São Paulo par le R. P. Lebret, dominicain. Directeur d'Économie et Humanisme". School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo, 1947. [I thank the Dominican School of Theology of São Paulo for the kind donation of copies of the typescripts of the Course in question].
- 2 See Francisco Whitaker Ferreira. "Dans le sillage of Lebret au Brésil" (in Paul Huée, *Un éveilleur d'humanité. Louis -Joseph Lebret*, Paris: Ed. De l'Atelier, 1997 p.134-48). Celso Lamparelli, "Louis-Joseph Lebret e a pesquisa regional urbana no Brasil" (in: Espaço e Debates, São Paulo, v.XIV, n.17, 1994). Maria Cristina da Silva Leme, "A pesquisa pioneira de Lebret sobre as condições de habitação em São Paulo" (in: Espaço e Debates, São Paulo, v.XIV, n.45, Jan.-June 2004).
- 3 Denis Pelletier, *Economie et humanisme*. De l'utopie communautaire au combat pour le Tiers-Monde (1941-1966), Paris: Cerf, 1996.

Addendum

Some proposals included in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of March 26, 1967, and consistent with the principles of Economy and Humanism:

a) Civilizations are born, develop and die. But humanity is advancing along the path of history (Hegel, §17)

b) Social dimension of property *vs.* abuse of personal accumulation of wealth. Participation of public authorities in conflict resolution. §23 - *If there should arise a conflict "between acquired private rights and primary community exigencies", it is the responsibility of public authorities "to look for a solution, with the active participation of individuals and social groups.* Within the same spirit it proposes the participation of public authorities to correct the anarchy of the international money market (§26).

c) Expropriation required for the common good against selfish speculation and transfers abroad of capital for *personal* advantage alone. §23. "*The world is giv-*

en to all, and not only to the rich.” St. Ambrose. “You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his.” “The common good demands expropriation” (§24).

d) Welcome of emigrants by rich peoples. (§69)

e) Agrarian reform to correct the distortions of oligarchic ownership of land. Oligarchies, on one side; pauperized masses on the other (§9). Export monoculture is the result of colonial economy. [Anticipation of ECLAC hypothesis of “competitive disadvantages” between nations reduced to exporting tropical products and nations importing these goods and exporting industrial or high-tech products.] §§7 and 8.

f) The absolute right to private property, contained in all liberal codes, when separated from the corresponding social obligations leads to the “dictatorship of liberal capitalism”. In 1931, Pius XI, spoke of “the international imperialism of money” at the *Quadragesimo Anno* (§26).

g) Ambivalence of the concept of development. §34 (*At the service of man*).

“Every program, made to increase production, has, in the last analysis, no other raison d’être than the service of man. Such programs should reduce inequalities, fight discriminations, free man from various types of servitude and enable him to be the instrument of his own material betterment, of his moral progress and of his spiritual growth. To speak of development, is in effect to show as much concern for social progress as for economic growth. It is not sufficient to increase overall wealth for it to be distributed equitably. In other words, the growth of productive forces is not sufficient to ensure social development.

h) Ambivalence of work (§28). Labor as a human invention and imprint on the matter completes the work of creation.

i) “Experienced in common, it welds hearts; by performing it men see themselves as brothers” (Chenu, *Théologie du Travail*, Paris: Seuil, 1955). But there is the risk of dehumanizing the worker if he becomes an alienated servant of the machine, without his intelligent participation.

j) Reform or Revolution (§31). The revolutionary uprising will be legitimate to overthrow long-standing tyranny that would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and to the common good. The alternative is to undertake in-depth reforms.

k) Establishment of a World Fund to be made up of part of the money spent on arms, to relieve the most destitute of this world. (§ 51)

l) The help that rich countries should give to the poor will involve no interference in their political life (§54). “As sovereign states they have the right to conduct their own affairs, to decide on their policies and to move freely towards the kind of society they choose.”

Father Lebret's Precepts in *Princípios para Ação* (Principles for Action) (2.ed. São Paulo: Edições SAL, 1952).

"You have to approach a problem by its object, in the broadest sense of the word, 'that it is?' (Foch)."

"Nothing but submission to the object."

Nothing but ambition towards the good."

"Disappear before the work that will be undertaken, and which has the good as its goal."

What counts is the work to be done. Therefore, no one will waste time with oneself or disturb others with his presence; and those who see us live, disinterested and ardent, will become our friends."

Abstract – This article aims to rebuild the history of the *Economy and Humanism* movement, whose founder and theorist was the French Dominican friar Joseph-Louis Lebret. Working initially with sailors and fishermen in his hometown, the Breton port of Saint-Malo, he became aware of capitalist exploitation as represented by the large fishing boats that competed with the communal, small-scale fishing of the region. By studying the work of Marx, Lebret incorporated into Christian social doctrine the notion of surplus value: hence his criticism of liberal economics. "Human economy" begins with needs of the worker, not the profit calculations of the businessman. The survey teams of the *Economy and Humanism* movement studied living conditions in the poor neighborhoods of French cities after World War II. Coming to Brazil, Lebret guided similar surveys in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Recife, preparing researchers to work with local governments. He visited 60 countries in the Third World. By indication of Dom Helder Câmara, Paul VI appointed him to the role of expert in social development issues at the Second Vatican council. Shortly before his death in 1966, he helped to pen the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

Keywords: Human economics, Development, Joseph-Louis Lebret.

Alfredo Bosi is a professor of Brazilian Literature at the University of São Paulo and member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. He has published, among other works, *História concisa da literatura brasileira*; *O ser e o tempo da poesia*; *Céu, inferno, dialética da colonização*; *Machado de Assis: o enigma do olhar*; *Literatura e resistência*; *Brás Cubas em três versões*; and *Ideologia e contraideologia*. He is the editor of the *Estudos Avançados* journal. @ – abosi@usp.br

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