

Change of paradigm face to Crises: new relevance of Father Lebret's Intuitions and the tradition of Economy and Humanism (EH)

Who was Father Lebret (1897-1966)?

He was born in Brittany, France on 26 June 1897 from a family of peasants and mariners. He started a marine apprenticeship in 1915 and entered in Naval School in 1916 (time of First World War) to become a Naval Officer. From 1921 to 1922, he was traffic manager in the Port of Beirut, Lebanon.

Then he changed his mind, left the Navy and entered in the Dominican Order. At this time, the spiritual, philosophical, theological training in the Dominican Province of Lyon was located in a place called Rijckhold near to Maastricht (Netherlands). At the beginning of this century the religious orders were forbidden in France. Louis-Joseph judged these studies too much theoretical and abstract and did not finish them, for he went ill. In 1929, he was sent by his superiors in the country of his birth, Saint Malo. Down there, he began to visit the families of fishermen and took evidence of their miserable poverty. This is the beginning of what is called in the French social history, the movement of Saint Malo.

From 1930-1939, raised from the people in Brittany coasts a multiform movement. Lebret threw in the struggle against entrepreneurs of industrial fishing a Union movement of small craftsmen, with the syndicate of Ernest Lamort, a fisherman. The price of fish was not enough for making the end meets for small fishermen's families. Lebret launched inquiries to understand the market of fishes, procedures in Justice for defend the right of the exploited fishermen, conference for informing the opinion on this social problem, lobbyism for changing laws on fishing activities. A spiritual movement was also launch with the "Youth Christian Seamen" on the model of "Youth Christian Workers", recently created by Abbé Cardjin in Belgium and North France.

In 1938, with some companions of Saint Malo Movement, Lebret began to think about a more general movement to renew spiritually and technically a demoralized France (failure of the Popular Front in 1936, moral crisis of politic and military elites, economic stagnation) and to renew it with a profound reform around the theme of Economy and Humanism. He was very much aware by his own experience how important was the economic causality (against a too moralistic approach of the Catholics) and humanism (against the totalitarian trend of Communists and Nazis).

Association EH was set up in September 1941 in Marseilles and a theoretical and methodological thinking was shaped during the years of Occupation of France by Nazis.

After the war, numerous teams inspired by Lebreton and EH participate to surveys, inquiries, studies and team-work on rebuilding the cities destroyed by the war and modernizing a French economy not diversified enough and still too concentrated around Paris. It helps to build a French doctrine on renewal of city planning and more autonomy for territories. The contribution of Father Lebreton was based on a very genuine methodological approach: comparison on data drawn on maps, figures and diagrams. The value of this contribution was recognized by the official scientific research in France (CNRS) and Lebreton became an official Master in research and was consulted by the political authorities.

From 1947 to his death in 1966 in Paris, Lebreton became an international consultant on economic strategy called by many Presidents and Prime Ministers around the Third World: Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Chile, Vietnam, Senegal, Lebanon. We have many testimonies of his intense and numerous activities. One of the most significant was his participation in the Council Vatican II. Under Pius XII, he was denounced in Rome by some episcopate in Latin America as a communist, because he promoted agrarian reforms, but he got friendship with Cardinal Montini who, after his election as Paul VI, invited him to write for him what became "Populorum Progressio" (The Development of the people). This encyclical was published in 1967, one year after his death.

What should be the new paradigm inspired by Lebreton and more than sixty years of Economy and Humanism experience to facing the present great crises of capitalism?

Let's try to elaborate around vision and action

Vision

I propose to build a new paradigm around three couple of terms to put in tension: Humanism versus Individualism, Solidarity versus Competition, Universalism versus Globalization.

Humanism versus Individualism

The western civilization had promoted the individual subject with his own consciousness and his particular vision of Good. The *homo oeconomicus* is

guided by own individual interest and he is the only judge of the Good, putting a particular judgment on a very general reality. So, the general interest is supposed to be the sum of these individual interests. In this vision, the common good does not really exist. Nevertheless the discovery of individual subject, apart of communities which may be oppressive, is a progress to develop personal thinking, consciousness and interiority.

For Lebrét, the human person is rooted in a past and builds his future in relation with a family and different kind of communities (education, religious, cultural, political). The humane person is inspired by his traditions and is raised with the belonging to different groups inside a territory where tend to be developed relations and actions. This is the base for a development with a humane integrity and solidarity with others.

The human person is the measure and the end of socioeconomic change. Through concrete, organized actions will be built up new structures for a better collective life. The movement is guided by a concept of differentiated needs: the fundamental needs bound to humanity; food, clothes, roof, health, education, religion. These needs are altogether material and spiritual. To promote the satisfaction of these kinds of goods for everybody is building a society with equilibrium. Others needs concern comfort and culture. Longing for comfort is multiplying material goods, as it is in a consumer society. It is legitimate to improve his own material situation, but with strong limits, because so many people are today lacking of essential goods. The disordered consumption builds a society of progress, but with very serious disequilibrium. A society where the basics wants are satisfied and uses her resources for art, culture and spirituality is a society really civilized.

Solidarity versus competition

The market with the free supply and demand is a good mechanism for the kind of goods which are product in indeterminate quantity and may be divided between them, but a public regulation is necessary for some which are in limited quantity (soil, oil, raw materials) and for them which are destroyed when someone appropriate them for himself (climate, historical monuments, natural resources like beautiful landscape). For immaterial and spiritual goods (knowledge, love, spirituality) there are multiplying when they are shared, so, in principle, they must be free and managed according a public law.

A development with solidarity is busy with the economic growth for improving the welfare of the population of his own country, but he does not ignore the wants of other countries in less better position and avoid damaging their own

development. As you know, it is not always the case with the relations between USA, Europe and the poorest countries of the globe.

A development with solidarity works for a fair income determination inside the country, but also abroad in helping to build a more consistent international organization and a better governance of the world.

Universalism versus globalization

It is spoken everywhere of globalization. By this term, it is meant that all the goods and services around the world are mobile, liquid and exchangeable through money. We have seen that it is false for not reproducible goods and those which cannot be shared. So, the financial globalization has to be limited for those kinds of goods and it is the responsibility of a world governance to be busy on these kinds of problems: climate change, natural resources, safeguards of species, and treasures of humane history.

Globalization is not universalism: too many inequities, inequalities, violence come from the present state of the world to speak easily of a universalistic world. But it is the only realistic way to have a future. Our humanity is really universal in his foundation, although we are more and more aware of extraordinary differences which exist between us: sex, age, wealth, culture, belongings, and histories. But our humanity is the only thing we have really in common.

We know now that the main threat for our future is the behavior of our fellows' men: foolish undertakings of autocratic leaders, terrorist's acts of desperate people, neglect by men at different level of responsibilities. We know also that our best hope is the confidence we may have in our fellow's men for helping us if we are in trial, despair, illness, and difficulties of ordinary life, and so on. We have to cultivate our own humanity, to better it day to day, to have confidence to others, to undertake for improving things together.

Action

On territory

A territory is difficult to define, because it is a mix of three things.

First of all, it is the product of an administrative cutting out of a nation or it is in itself a nation. Generally speaking, it is determined by the political organization and it is inherited from the past. On this point of view, the territory is a product of the present authorities and the people are indulged in a passive attitude.

Second, the territory is a space of life with various activities: space for trade (shops for products of everyday life, schools for children, health's centers, churches or mosques). Considered as whole, the territory is a system of transport, a trading zone, and an expression of a particular way of life.

Third, the territory should be considered as an actor, with his own peculiar history, but with opening with the world history. How it may become an actor inside a large movement of globalization with opening to universal? Thanks to his actors, one particular territory may become a part of a humane world in an opening to universal: for instance, entrepreneur whom production is integrated in a worldly market, but succeeding to have nevertheless a space of autonomy and weaving to the local business. A cultural or artistic movement could express the own genius and creativity and be in relation with others territories and other countries. Many initiatives let know their particular history and involve others in a dialogue which may be a source of inspiration?

To become a territory-actor supposes numerous actions and relations. This could be made with an inquiry for knowing the diversified realities of the common country. It is very important to involve valuable people: it means people with professional experience, people of culture and art, people coming from abroad with other culture and experience and to mix them with people with grass-roots experience. Men and women of profound humane experience may play the role of mediator. It is important to blend people of different social level but concerned by a common good. Considering his own interest is regular, only if it is made in the perspective of a collective action: discussing difficulties to challenge and trying to solve problems. So histories and memories work together with propositions and projects to build a vision of a common future.

On development

Lebret gave the priority to the geographical or regional over the specialized functionality (which is the dominant point of view of technocracy). He emphasized the analysis of territorial unit of limited dimensions using field research in the ground (enquête participation by Robert Caillot and ascent development by Paul Houée).

He used to distinguish three levels of operation:

The elementary unit, the basic needs: the municipal district or local district in rural areas, the urban boroughs, the quarter of a great city, all space on a humane scale. People can meet easily; knowing one another and having a certain idea of the overall structure, because they belong to it. It is the better place for

cooperative action between elite and ordinary people. There may be initiated a kind of a pedagogy of participation.

The sub-region is a complex of elementary units focused around a node or center of attraction that is better equipped with all kind of services. Its dimensions varied according to the importance of the pole or node, the geographical terrain and the means of communication.

The region or the territory, defined as I did, actor of his own development is a complex of sub-regions weaved together by several important towns or by a metropolis. It is the normal unit of development in relation with the national plan, down to top. A permanent planning organization equipped with specialists and working in relation to the smaller planning offices of the sub-regions can know a larger region and all his structures sufficiently well and follow his evolution. At the center of the nation, it must be prepared and adapted a worthy plan of development, keeping in mind the needs raised by those at the bottom of the hierarchy and the necessary direction from the top. It is the locus of arbitrage between divergent interests inside and outside territories.

The process of development involved in upward movement; it goes from the basis building blocks of the local areas right up to the national and the world level, passing through territories and nations. But this has to be done not violently and but wisely according to the rhythms which respect the rhythms of humanity as it develops. Le Bret called this process: a concrete dynamic development.

So, I propose some thinking as a base for our discussion.

Hugues Puel
Dominican, economist