

Reinhard Cardinal Marx

Foreword

Today we are facing the demanding challenge of globalised goods-, labour- and financial markets as well as an economisation of all spheres of life. Religious communities, too, are not able to fully elude this process of a “economisation of life worlds” (J. Habermas), but they are able to critically reflect on this process and actively shape it; perhaps, where it is necessary, also with a prophetic resistance when there are aberrations and fundamentally wrong positions. First and foremost, they have to emphasize and demand again and again that labour, economy and profit are not ends in themselves, but rather means to serve the well-being of all people. They are means to a fulfilled life. The centre is the human person with his or her dignity, but also responsibility. Since economics is a social science, it is about human agency under the conditions of shortage. Without an ethical perspective, without an orientation towards values, this is impossible

The prophetic religions, the religions of revelation, do not consider the field of economy to be a space free of ethics: Already in the Torah and the prophets of Israel a criticism of social and economic deficiencies based on God's justice can be encountered and not only regarding the people of Israel but already with a universal perspective. Calling for a work-free day in the week, the Shabbat, was in itself revolutionary and has to be defended again and again today. The prophets were also early aware of the close connection between justice and peace between humans and peoples (cf. Ps 85, 11). Jesu's teachings contain criticism of the pure pursuit of profit and too much wealth (cf. Mt 6, 24; Lk 6, 34; Lk 16, 13), because these could destroy the proper relationship with God and between people. Islam, emerged in an environment shaped by trade, has principally a positive approach towards the economic dimension and even towards wealth, but decisively criticises excesses, aberrations and injustices in the social and economic life of these times.

The prophets focus especially on the poor, the weak like widows and orphans, the losers in social and economic events and thus become their advocates because God himself solidarizes with the weak and poor. Judaism, Christianity and Islam demand almsgiving: a mandatory social contribution is actually one of Islam's five pillars of religious practice. However, it is about more than mere charity: the Bible and the Koran focus on “justice”, meaning acting according to community that has its model in God himself. Thus, justice became one of the fundamental pillars of Christian social teaching that evolved from the 19th century onwards as an answer to the social question. Christian social teaching

is not only concerned with individual agency but also with changes in social, economic, legal and political structures. It is here where I see common challenges and tasks for the religions. The model of a social and at the same time ecologically sustainable market economy could be a comprehensive concept for all religions that is surely to be respelled anew repeatedly. The religions could each contribute their own valuable accents, thus enriching one another. Active advocacy for worker's rights, fair pay, equal opportunities for participation and education, the fight against exploitation, corruption, usury, the waste of resources and destruction of the environment have to be mutual concerns, not only at a national, but also on a global level. Concerning welfare, the religious communities could perhaps cooperate more than they have done so far. Globally, especially regarding climate justice, we are speaking of an orientation towards the "global common good", i.e. the life of all people, indeed the whole creation.

For the benefit of all people, Judaism, Christianity and Islam want to and should provide a critical yet constructive contribution to a positive development of the actually existing national and global economic order, but in doing so they have to set a good example themselves. At the same instance, they will always remind us that a perfectly just and peaceful order on earth always remains an ideal to strive for, and whose fulfilment has an eschatological quantity.

May this collection of essays on economic and social ethics from the perspective of the three abrahamic religions be a contribution that initiates the necessary reflexions and discussions needed and encourages concrete action.

I want to thank the editorial team and the contributors for the important impulse and the commitment to explore and present the mutual contribution of the religions to the central questions of our time.

Reinhard Cardinal Marx,
Archbishop of Munich and Freising