

CROP newsletter

Comparative Research Programme On Poverty

Vol. 12, No. 4, November 2005

contents

Page 1

The Return of Religion and the Struggle against Poverty
by Sturla Stålsett

Page 2

New Book in CROP International Studies in Poverty Research Series

Page 3

Editorial by Karima Korayem

Evaluation of CLACSO/ CROP Programme

Notices

Page 4

CODESRIA/CROP Planning Workshop

New Poverty Research Projects in CROPnet

Extension of CROPnet Norway

Events 2005 - 2006

frontiers of poverty research

THE RETURN OF RELIGION AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY

It is often said that we experience a somewhat unexpected 'return of religion' in global politics in our day. The processes of secularization were not at all that universal, unilateral and irresistible as social scientists predicted thirty years ago. Well-known sociologist of religion Peter Berger, who used to be one of the most prominent spokesmen for the idea that modernization necessarily would lead to religion losing public influence, now admits he was mistaken. Our time is rather the time of de-secularization or re-sacralization of the political sphere, he claims.

Whether or not one should agree to such a complete reversal of the thesis of secularization, it is in any case clear that religion has regained political significance. This return of religion as a political factor is not least notable in poor regions of the world — many of which never experienced secularization in any considerable degree at all.

At the same time there is a renewed focus on the struggle against poverty worldwide, as the many global campaigns, initiatives and programs launched only this year show clearly. In the framework of research on poverty then this calls for a new look on religion: In what ways is it related to poverty? Under what conditions and how does it contribute to the continuation and augmentation of poverty? What are the most important religious resources in the struggle to overcome poverty, both at the level of everyday survival for poor people

themselves, and as tools in the political efforts to address the causes of poverty?

The task is multi-dimensional and calls for broad and inter-disciplinary work, from the perspectives of theology and the science of religion as well as the social sciences, economics and the humanities.

Gloria dei vivens pauper: "God's glory is the living poor". With this twist on St. Ireneus' statement (who used *homens*, human being, in stead of *pauper*, poor) El Salvador's murdered Archbishop Oscar Romero affirmed the foundational creed of Latin American liberation theology: the preferential option for the poor. It was to cost him dearly. He was originally elected to that influential position in his country and church because of his reputation for being a cautious conservative, fond of his books and loyal to the Church and the powers that be. Few months after his appointment the destiny and struggle of poor communities in the midst of the bloody civil war started to make a powerful impact on him. He underwent a radical change, a conversion to the poor that was seen as much too radical by the powerful elites. On the 24th of March 1980 he was shot dead by death-squads while celebrating Mass in a small hospital chapel. He was not the first martyr of liberation theology, but he remains one of the most inspiring and powerful witnesses of what can happen when institutional religion decisively sides with the poor and destitute.

CROP Secretariat, Nygårdsgaten 5, N-5020 Bergen, Norway

A

Post

CROP Secretariat

Ph: +47 55 58 97 39
Fax: +47 55 58 97 45
e-mail: crop@uib.no

<http://www.crop.org>

Hence, poor people in El Salvador and all over Latin America have long since declared him a Saint: 'San Romero de Las Americas'. In the Vatican, there is a slow process of sanctification underway, but the outcome of that process is still uncertain. With the present Pope, who was the Vatican's main inquisitor against liberation theologians during the 1980s and 90s, prospects are perhaps not too good for those who wish to see Romero as an official Catholic saint of our time.

So what happened to liberation theology and its commitment to the poor? It spread fast and inspired a whole generation of church workers and social workers all over Latin America, and far beyond that. It provided a creative and intellectually challenging theological rationale for a much more radical Church action in social and political affairs. It liaised with other liberative and contextual theologies around the globe – feminist theology, black theology, African theology, indigenous theologies, political theologies.... – representing arguably the most profound renewal of Christian thinking and praxis in the 21st century. But it also met harsh resistance, both internally and externally. It was criticized and actively opposed by the leadership in many churches, and it was to some degree denigrated and marginalized in the spheres of academic theology. But perhaps more importantly it met active and at times violent persecution by political and economic forces that did not at all welcome the involvement of (socially radical)

religion in the affairs of the world. Romero was by no means the only one to pay the highest price. Furthermore, under the neoliberal heyday of the 90's, the poor in Latin America did not experience the blessings of 'liberation' that liberation theologians had promoted, but rather the harsh medicine of 'liberalization' preached by Hayek, Friedman and the Chicago school.

In this period, liberation theology also met powerful competition from charismatic movements and Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. These churches have spread at a remarkable speed in Latin America and all over the globe. By moderate estimates, 1 in 8 Christians is today a Pentecostal. Other statistics operate with much higher figures, some even claim that there are now more than 500 million all over the globe. Not bad for a religious current that emerged only one hundred years ago.

The growth of the Pentecostal churches in Latin America has been particularly strong among the poorest. That makes it relevant to look back at another important event celebrating a centennial these days, namely the publication of Max Weber's groundbreaking study on the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904-1905). Today it is relevant to pursue a similar line of investigation. What is the interrelationship, if any, between neoliberal economics and neo-Pentecostal religiosity? This too, turns out to be an ambiguous picture. On the one hand, these churches represent an economization of religion by putting the offering of money

and the cult of wealth, health and prosperity as blessings and proofs of salvation in the midst of their religious practice. Church members become customers. Churches are organized as transnational companies. Their media-transmitted evangelistic campaigns speak the commercial language of up-to-date marketing methods fluently. In this way this religiosity shows a close affinity to the pseudo-religious attitude to market forces and economic 'laws' inherent in neoliberal economics.

On the other hand, these churches seem in paradoxical ways also to offer a feeling of hope and encouragement to people struggling to survive in the rather hostile conditions that the prevalent economic system offers them. The attractiveness of many of these churches, particularly to the poor and lower middle classes should not be too easily discarded.

There is no doubt that religion is relevant in the study of poverty – its causes and ways to overcome it. Today the primary challenge is to engage in inter-religious and inter-disciplinary work in order to explore religious resources that foster poor people's sense of dignity and self-worth in midst of hardships. In this sense, the example of San Romero and the ethos of liberation theology would still be relevant, perhaps taking new and unexpected forms.

References

Berger, P. L. (1999) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Stålsett, S. and Leirvik, O. (eds.) (2004) *The Power of Faith in Global Politics*, Oslo: Novus.

Stålsett, S. and Leirvik, O. (eds.) (forthcoming 2006) *Spirits of Globalisation. The Growth of Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Age*, London: SCM Press.

Dr. theol. **Sturla J. Stålsett** is presently Guest Researcher at Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), at the University of Oslo, Norway. The last four years he has been leading a research program on 'Religion in a Globalised Age: Transfers and Transformations, Integration and Resistance' (RIGA) at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. E-mail: s.j.stalsett@teologi.uio.no

NEW BOOK IN CROP INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN POVERTY RESEARCH SERIES:

Indigenous Peoples and Poverty - An International Perspective

The book has been edited by **Robyn Eversole** (RMIT University, Australia), **John-Andrew McNeish** (Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, Norway) and **Alberto Cimadamore** (CLACSO & University of Buenos Aires, Argentina).

The book brings together two key concerns in development policy - the urgent need for poverty reduction and the situation of indigenous peoples in both developing and industrialised countries. It analyses patterns of indigenous disadvantage worldwide and explores some difficult questions, including the right balance between autonomy and participation, the tensions underlying 'pro-poor' and 'inclusionary' development policies, and the new spaces that such policies may provide for indigenous peoples to advance their demands.

The rich collection of country case studies illustrates that both differences and commonalities must be recognised in any realistic study of indigenous poverty. The experiences of diverse indigenous peoples provide valuable practical insights for development organisations and indigenous peoples themselves.

For ordering information contact **Zed Books**, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK, Tel: +44-(0)207-837-4014, Fax: +44-(0)207-833-3960, Web: <http://www.zedbooks.co.uk>

editorial

Prof. **Karima Korayem**, Al Azhar
University, Egypt, E-mail: nile@link.net
Member of CROP Scientific Committee

POVERTY ERADICATION IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES: DREAM OR REALITY?

In 2000 the members of the United Nations announced the Millennium Development Goals. One of the declared targets is the reduction of poverty in 2015 to half its level in the benchmark year, 1990, by providing international financial and technical support to third world countries. To achieve this goal two essential preconditions are necessary to be acknowledged by both governments and ruling elites in the third world countries.

The first precondition is to place the eradication of poverty at the same high priority level as other important national targets. This implies changing the perception of the ruling elites to see and accept poverty as a problem of underdevelopment rather than a condemnation of their so far unsatisfactory economic performance. Such a shift will reduce the political sensitivity of this issue, and make poverty reduction a feasible target.

The second precondition is to bring about a better understanding of the dynamics of poverty. It is important to understand the factors underlying the transfer of poverty from one generation to the next. That will enable governments to act at an early stage with appropriate policy measures which will reduce the probability of poverty being inherited. Studies on the dynamics of poverty in the third world countries are quite rare and need to be encouraged. The production of poverty is governed by what may be called a poverty multiplier which makes the transfer of poverty take place at a multiplicative rate. For example, failing to root out poverty of a family with five children will result in poverty being transferred to five families with 35 members in the next generation when the children have grown up and formed their own families. However, the poverty multiplier works in both directions. If more than half of the families in a given population are moved above the poverty line in one shot or over a short period of time, the impact of the poverty multiplier will be a net reduction of poverty. Hence, poverty can be reduced if governments launch a comprehensive and direct attack instead of trying to reduce it gradually over a longer period of time. To reach this goal, more resources must be allocated to poverty eradication and governments and other organisations working to reduce poverty in third world countries must coordinate their efforts to increase the efficiency of the use of resources mobilised towards this end.

THE CLACSO/CROP PROGRAMME:

"A PARTICULAR AND INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION"

The Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA) has published an evaluation of CROP's main partner in Latin America, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO). In the report the CLACSO/CROP Program on Poverty Research was also assessed. The experts (Rodrigo Arocena, University of the Republic, Uruguay; Eric Hershberg, Columbia University and Rosemary Thorp, University of Oxford) found the CLACSO/CROP program to be "A particular and interesting example of North-South cooperation."

The assessment highlights the CLACSO/CROP program's successful work with building of research capacity in the region. It "provides research grants, organizes workshops (two a year) and the publication of books from those workshops and fellowships. It also contributes to both OSAL [Latin American Social Observatory] and the virtual campus".

The crucial element of focusing on workshops – a long time strategy cultivated by CROP – receives special praise. According to the report "Several researchers we interviewed highlighted the value... and the experience of attending such workshops was cited as enormously enlightening from junior fellows who have taken part in the program." With respect to the outcome of the workshops the experts comment that "The workshops and the high quality collected volumes they produce bring Latin American researchers on poverty into a dialogue with one another in a way that would otherwise not occur." Further they observe that the public meetings usually organized at the end of the academic workshops "in a number of instances has been a fruitful dialogue between researchers, advocacy groups and decision-makers."

A crucial factor with respect to poverty research the report states that "it is worth noting that the CLACSO/CROP program... provides a mechanism for incorporating work being done by progressive economists as well as economic sociologists and political economists."

Another positive aspect of the program is that it has contributed "to strengthen both South-South and North-South linkages." In the judgment of the evaluators, the joint venture "provides CLACSO-affiliated researchers access to a global network of researchers on poverty, while infusing that network with insights derived from theoretical and empirical research on poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean."

The team of experts finalizes their observations of the CLACSO-CROP program by concluding that "our assessment of the CLACSO/CROP program is that it clearly merits continuation and even expansion".

The report, *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO): an Evaluation*, is published by the Department for Research Co-operation as a part of *Sida Evaluations*, and can be found at http://www.sida.se/content/1/c6/04/27/51/Utv05-23_SIDA4912en.pdf on Internet.

LECTURE ON POVERTY AND RELIGION

Dr. **Fatima Lamishi Adamu** of the Department of Sociology at the Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University in Sokoto, Nigeria, visited the CROP Secretariat in November.

As part of her visit she held a lecture at the University of Bergen on *Religious Revivalism and the Dynamics of Poverty in Nigeria*, focussing on which impact the growing religious revivalism has on public policy in Nigeria.

HUMAN CAPABILITY APPROACH CONFERENCE

The first Latin American and Caribbean Conference on the Human Capability Approach is being organized at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, July 3-4, 2006.

For more information, and call for papers, contact pedroa.flores@uia.mx by E-mail or visit <http://www.uia.mx/investigacion/iidses/hca> on Internet.

EXTENSION OF CROPNET NORWAY

In 1999 CROP was appointed by the Norwegian Research Council to act as a national node for poverty research in Norway directed towards the South.

The initial period ran until 2005, and CROP is pleased to announce that the Research Council has decided to extend the period until 2007.

To read more about CROPnet Norway see CROP's Annual Report at <http://www.crop.org>

NEW POVERTY RESEARCH PROJECTS IN CROPNET

Members of the CROP network of poverty researchers (CROPnet) submit information about their on-going research. The following projects are the latest additions to the CROP database:

Africa:

- Child Trafficking in West Africa
- Development of Systems for Poverty Monitoring in Malawi

Asia/Oceania:

- Poverty amongst the Israeli Arab-Bedouin Population

Latin and Central America:

- Social Protection for the Poorest
- Democracies in Central America in the Postwar Period: Policy, Poverty and Inequality in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua

Europe:

- European Poverty Policy
- Poverty in Urban Russia
- Priority Research Agenda on Poverty and Health
- Social Security in Low-income Countries: Impact on Poverty Reduction and Affordability

Contact the CROP Secretariat if further information is wanted about the projects listed.

SEASONS GREETINGS



We wish all our contributors,
supporters and friends
a peaceful and happy
New Year 2006

LIST OF CROP EVENTS 2005 - 2006

November 2005

23-25: *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Context of Discrimination of Ethnic-Racial Groups: The Latin American Case.* CROP and CLACSO workshop to be held in Cali, Colombia, in co-operation with CIDSE, School of Social and Economic Sciences, Universidad del Valle, Colombia.

February 2006

20-24: *The Politics of Poverty Production.* Session organised by CROP and CLACSO at the International Forum on the Social Science-Policy Nexus, hosted by UNESCO/MOST and the Government of Argentina, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Papers for the session by invitation only. The Forum was originally scheduled to be held in September 2005.

April 2006

21-22: *Poverty in the Light of the Informal Economy.* Workshop organised by CROP and the Economic and Social Council, Portugal (CES), in Lisbon, Portugal.

November 2006

Religion as an Ethical Imperative for Poverty Eradication and Social Justice (preliminary title). Workshop organised by CLACSO and CROP. Venue and dates to be decided.

CROP IN BRIEF

CROP is a world-wide network of researchers and experts on poverty. The aim of CROP is to establish an arena for interdisciplinary and comparative research on poverty in developed and developing countries. CROP organises regional workshops, symposia and international conferences, promotes joint research projects and publications, links poverty researchers and disseminates information about poverty research, on a non-profit basis.

The CROP webpage is found at <http://www.crop.org>. The site holds general information about CROP, news about past and ongoing activities, as well as the latest CROP newsletter.

CROP has developed a database on poverty researchers (CROPnet), and documentation of ongoing research. If you wish to have your name listed in CROPnet, visit the CROP webpage at <http://www.crop.org/cropnet/register.cfm> and complete the online questionnaire.

SECRETARIAT STAFF:

Else Øyen, Scientific Director of CROP
Kirsti Thesen Sælen, Co-ordinator
Hans Egil Offerdal, Latin American Co-ordinator
Inge Erling Tesdal, Executive Officer

CODESRIA/CROP PLANNING WORKSHOP

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and CROP have agreed to start a collaboration programme aimed at strengthening poverty research in Africa. The programme will be modelled on the already existing co-operation programme between CLACSO and CROP in Latin America and the Caribbean, but tailored to meet the special needs of African poverty research.

As a first step in defining the contents of the collaboration programme a planning workshop on *Comparative Poverties in Africa: Towards an Agenda for Research and Policy Dialogue* was organised by CODESRIA in Dakar, Senegal, 21 – 22 October. A group of distinguished poverty researchers from several African countries had been invited together with leading representatives from CODESRIA and CROP to participate in this two-day brain-storming session to discuss priority issues and strategies for developing new directions of poverty research in the region. Based on the

framework outlined in the *Programme Announcement* issued by CODESRIA, nine papers had been commissioned to present central themes in African poverty research for discussion at the workshop.

The outcome of the workshop was twofold:

- 1) There was a general agreement on the importance of *mapping* already existing African research on poverty and its different faces, as well as raising awareness of the need for cross-cutting research based on comparative methodologies.
- 2) The plans for an institutionalised collaboration programme between CODESRIA and CROP was generally applauded, with special emphasis on the need to create stipend programmes in poverty research, organise scientific workshops, especially in the poorest countries in the region, and facilitate international dissemination of research results through a broad publication programme.

For additional information about the workshop see the CROP webpage.