†† DAVID JOHN KALKE
ARCHBISHOP AND PRIMATE / THEOLOGIAN
THE ECUMENICAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

ABOUT VENEZUELA, BUT NOT ABOUT VENEZUELA

"*…Yet in another way, what I am writing to you, and what is being carried out in our lives as it was in His, is a new commandment; because the night is over and the real light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his/her brother/sister is still in the dark…"*

I John 2:8-9.[1]

This episcopal reflection is about Venezuela, but it is not about Venezuela. Latin America's first theologian of liberation, Father Miguel Hidalgo, "called on us to use the tools for political, economic and social analysis in our theological response to the world in which we live."[2] More than ever clergy and laity alike must engage in analysis in order to formulate responses to events that will either take us back in history – more outside military intervention and the establishment of military dictatorships – or will move us forward in history to establish a Latin American identity free from external domination.

Recent events in the world of globalization-in-demise, have seen the so-called liberal model being usurped with the use of so-called democracy and legal interventions to serve a powerful elite and to exclude an ever growing number of persons living in abject poverty. From the USA to Brazil to Argentina to Paraguay to Peru and certainly Europe, politics at the service of Capital have been subverted to confuse us. As in the late 1930's and early 1940's, when Capital and politics wedded, the basis for fascism was created.

Archbishop Carlos Duarte Costa – excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1942, for his criticism of the Vatican's alliance with Mussolini and Hitler – warned us: "Capitalism, provoking this tremendous crisis, appropriates for itself the elements of nature, reducing all to private property, and thereby beginning its own downfall.

"The objective of economic activities is to satisfy needs and wants with the results of said activities. This right to have at one´s disposition constitutes the essence of the legitimate right of ownership in its juridic form, the power of revindication.

[1] The opening paragraph from the 2014 Ecumenical Catholic Church (ECC) Statement on PEACE AND WAR IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

[2] PEACE AND WAR IN THE 21ST CENTURY, 2014, ECC page 3.

"Here arises a third nature economic right, which is the right of absolute ownership over the fruits of labor."[3]

What was true for Brazil during fascism in the 1940's, is also true for today as we look at Venezuela. Let us not be fooled. The struggle in Venezuela is not about democracy! With what credibility do the USA, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Peru and Ecuador have to talk about democracy and "free elections?" Bought elections are not free elections, as we see with the billions of dollars from corporations and outside forces impacting the public vote. Removal of candidates and presidents through legal proceedings violates democratic principles, as we saw in Brazil. The swinging pendulum of "democratic" rule from the right to the left – like in Chile – doesn't represent a strong democracy. The current president of Chile condemns Venezuela for being a dictatorship, while he supported the dictatorship in Chile from 1973 – 1990. It shows divisions within the ruling class. And the analysis could go on.

Back to Venezuela. The crisis is not about a struggle for democracy. It is a struggle about, to cite Duarte, about "the right of the absolute ownership over the fruits of labor" which includes the ownership of natural resources. And that would begin with the discussion of oil, access to refinery technology and control of the markets.

In Venezuela people are suffering. There are international boycotts making the arrival of foods and medicine difficult. Products of technology enabling the refining of petroleum have been blocked. Venezuela's economy has not stabilized because of these external and internal challenges. If there is an invasion, more people will suffer, with a deeper and greater crisis to unfold. It is not the position of the Ecumenical Catholic Church to take a position in a very complicated situation. We join with Mexico and Uruguay in calling for dialogue with a firm denunciation of exterior military interventions against the Venezuelan government and military, which are united.

We call for discernment and rational analysis, based in international law and respect for the sovereignty of nations. As a church we support the "Lay State" – separation of church and state – seeking to be a prophet voice lifting up the needs of the poor and exploited as they are served by priests in the Order of Melquisedec, who Blessed Abraham to

[3] MANIFIESTO TO THE NATIONS, pp. 11-12. Archbishop Carlos Duarte Costa, 1945, Sao Paulo, Brasil. The Apostolic Succession of the Episcopal Leadership of the Ecumenical Catholic Church, since its founding in 1987, comes through Archbishop Carlos Duarte Costa.

celebrate with Bread and Wine, not human sacrifice, and to proclaim Peace and Justice.

The following points are lifted up for consideration and reflection.

- International Law calls for the respect of sovereign nations. Law calls for dialogue and negotiation, not pre-emptive military strikes or invasions against national leaders who are marginalized by some on the international plane. The Ecumenical Catholic Church calls on all parties to engage in constructive dialogues with the appropriate United Nations and OEA bodies. Religious institutions – including the Vatican – do not have the skill sets or credibility to carry out such conversations. The churches – more often than not united with the opposition (recent events in Nicaragua) – are not equal political partners in such conversations and should not be engaged. Respected nations like Mexico and Uruguay have offered to lead such a dialogue and their offers should be accepted.
  "My Kingdom is not of this world."
- Basic tenets of international law – not the usual practices of the countries of the north – call for respect of sovereign nations, for their constitutions and governance and for their internal electoral practices.
  "Justice"
- Boycotts imposed by the northern countries cannot be part of the solution and must be ended. Targeting medical and food supplies in a suffering nation only hurts the poor and is inhumane treatment of the citizens of Venezuela. Nations of the North need to end the use of humanitarian aid as a weapon for mass destruction and suffering.
  "*jubilee year*
- A coalition of nations with deplorable human rights records, including the United States of North America, has little credibility in raising human rights violations inside of Venezuela. Human rights issues need to be resolved internally, with the respect for law and the equivalent of a Truth Commission to be established to hold those accountable responsible before international standards and Venezuelan law.
  "Know the Truth and the Truth will make you free"
- Migration of the citizens of Venezuela will not stop with a military intervention. It will only increase. The sending of food and medical supplies will improve the quality of life of the citizens in Venezuela and will greatly reduce the perceived need to migrate. Immigrant communities of people from Venezuela living in Miami, Mexico City, Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia and other nations are

not the voice the Venezuelan people, just as the exile community of Iraq was not the voice of the people of Iraq. Their sufferings need to be addressed, but they cannot be conceived of as a legitimate political voice. They are being used to beat the drums of war and intervention.

James 1:27: Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

There are many signs of the times in Latin America that are disconcerting as new-right wing governments emerge with sophisticated language and legal tactics that are twisted to support the rich and outside interests. As globalization is challenged and weakened new nationalistic and illegal tactics emerge. Venezuela – sitting on the world's largest oil reserves – is a case study of this new "world dis-order." The Ecumenical Catholic Church calls on citizens of the world to bring an end to economic and military intervention that are disruptive to the natural development of governments that respect sovereignty and national development with the control of its natural resources.

No to military and economic intervention in Venezuela!

Yes, to a diplomatic and democratic solution respecting Venezuelan sovereignty!

Yes, to the care of the Venezuelan people in the diaspora linked to foreign intervention and pressure!

Yes, to the resumption of food and medical supplies for the people of Venezuela!