Pastor's Corner for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, by Fr. Isaac J. Fernandes, SJ

16th February 2025

In the wake of President Trump's withdrawal of funding to any program that is not aligned with his America First agenda, many reactions on social media in Africa have pointed out that it is high time that African countries learn to fend for themselves. The funding that USAID formerly provided in many African countries for the purchase of critical medications such as ARVs served to mask the failure of many African governments to provide affordable healthcare for their citizens. It is time, clamour certain pundits on social media, that African governments step up to the plate and prove there are worthy of the trust that people have placed in them by starting to provide the essential services to their citizens hitherto assured by NGOs and foreign governments.

There is certainly a lot of truth to this view and citizens must certainly learn to start holding their governments accountable for the delivery of essential services. In one sense, these reactions on social media are right to highlight a certain complacency that has settled in our minds when we expect American tax-payer dollars to solve the health crises of our African continent. However, there is something distressing when the correction of this complacency takes the form of a slogan "Zambia first" or "South Africa first," in imitation of President Trump's "America first."

In many different countries we are witnessing a rejection of the values of the liberal left that espouses a vision of humanity as gathered into one global village. The universalism of this vision that first found its purchase in the League of Nations and later in the United Nations is coming under increasing attack as countries withdraw into their shells and are increasing seduced by the far right's nationalistic agenda. America's withdrawal from the WHO and the Parish climate agreement threatens the cohesion of the global order. While we can certainly criticize the global order and point to many weaknesses in the running of the global order under the hegemony of the most powerful nations on earth, our Christian hope should not permit us to give up on the dream that the global order represents.

This dream is God's dream to gather humanity and indeed the whole of creation into one united family (cf. 2 Cor. 15: 20-28). While we must recognize that all human attempts at creating a global human community of justice and solidarity will be flawed and partial at best, we need to remain committed to these attempts in order to ensure the common good of all humanity and indeed of all creation. Our fates are bound together inextricably such that no one nation can ensure the good of its citizens without reference to the actions and priorities of the other nations on earth. This truth of this assertion became nowhere clearer than when we faced the COVID pandemic, which makes America's withdrawal from institutions that ensure this common good, like the WHO and the Paris Climate Agreement so reprehensible. If these actions of America should lead to a more widespread exodus of nations from a commitment to the common good of humanity and our planet in order to give priority instead to their own national interests, we will have indeed regressed as a human race. As Christians we must refuse to be seduced by such nationalism and remain committed to building a just and humane global order.