

Expanded abstract

Co-management and cooperativism in christian thought. Case studies of different forms of participation

Objectives

The purpose of this article is to analyze and compare different models of participation in businesses and economic organizations, closely linked to Christian values. It aims to study how it is possible to highlight people's participation in economic activities in service of entrepreneurial development, the common good, and social justice, on one hand, and to analyze how Christian thought and the social doctrine of the Catholic Church can contribute to this, on the other.

In an increasingly globalized world and economy, where laboral precariousness and social inequalities are becoming more evident, it is urgent to discover new business paradigms and economic models.

Methodology

The methodology focuses mainly on a contrasted and comparative analysis of four emblematic experiences of participation modalities, founded on Christian values, based on the study of documentary sources (articles, books, historical documents, encyclicals, etc.). These are four case studies conducted in different historical and geographical contexts.

The selection criteria for the four experiences considered their representativeness regarding different modalities of participation aligned with Christian thought, thus allowing the study of diverse and plural cases, while also drawing from various historical moments and geographical locations.

Results

The results of the comparative study are reflected through the description of the substantive elements that characterize the modalities of participation:

- *Guaraní Reductions.* An unprecedented experience carried out under the leadership of Jesuit missionaries in South America, this model was based on the development of a community economy sustained by the collective labor of the indigenous people. Although the Jesuits exercised a tutelary regime over the indigenous population, with strong paternalistic elements, it is also true that the Guaraní had the option to elect the authorities of the settlements and actively participated in the planning of economic activities.

- *German Co-management Law of 1951*. This represents a major milestone in the regulation of parity bodies in European enterprises, which took place at the dawn of West Germany and also witnessed a “renaissance” of Christianity. The law allowed the creation of parity systems in the supervisory boards (Aufsichtsrat) of key industrial companies in the country. The mobilization of Christian activists, in political parties and unions, was crucial for this.
- *Mondragón Cooperative Group*. Emerging in the mid-20th century, driven in Guipúzcoa (Spain) by priest José María Arizmendiarieta. Workers participate in decisions (“one worker, one vote”) as well as in the profits of the companies. Today, Mondragón is one of the leading cooperative experiences worldwide.
- *Economy of Communion (EdC)*. Promoted by the Catholic Focolare Movement, it constitutes a more current proposal and experience of corporate identity and culture. It is based on the “culture of giving,” and participatory management is also one of its most noteworthy aspects. It is a transversal model applicable to all economic activities and legal forms of companies, promoting profit-sharing in three directions: business growth, aid to disadvantaged social groups, and the dissemination of the culture of the economy of communion.

Conclusions

The main conclusions of the article, based on the comparative study of the four cases, are as follows:

- *Values rooted in Christian ethics*: The experiences consistently demonstrate evangelical principles, such as the dignity of people and work, social justice, and the commitment to more supportive economic structures.
- *Participation is an ethical commitment, not instrumental*: Cooperativism and co-management promote personal and professional development and help companies become ethical organizations committed to social justice.
- *Plurality of models to work toward a more humane and supportive economy*: Communal economy, legally regulated co-management, cooperative ownership, cultural transformation of companies, etc., are diverse mechanisms to advance economic development and achieve the common good.
- *Innovative responses to historical challenges*: The Reductions helped defend the legitimate rights of indigenous peoples against colonial exploitation; the 1951 Co-management Law contributed to socio-labor stability in the delicate postwar context; Mondragón significantly supported territorial economic development; and finally, Economy of Communion (EdC) presents itself as a business alternative to a global economic system focused solely on profit.