



One and the same world

Faith – a creative source of peace

Mohamed Sahnoun, Founder and Chair of the Caux Forum for Human Security, was the keynote speaker for a national 'prayer lunch' in the Swiss Federal Capital, Bern, presided over by the Swiss President, Pascal Couchpin.

The lunchtime event, on the theme 'Faith – a creative source of peace', was attended by some one hundred parliamentarians and staff. The organizers, who call their group 'A vision for Switzerland', wrote in their invitation: *'Humanity suffers more and more from divisions and ever-increasing polarization. A major current challenge is to build trust. What contribution can people with a personal faith commitment make to the building of the needed bridges?'*

In most cultures, when you offer someone best wishes, you pray God will bless the person with serenity, daily bread and good health. In the broadest sense these represent the conditions for true human security! Serenity being inner peace as well as peace between human beings, daily bread means fighting world poverty while good health includes protection of the environment.

The fundamentals, which would allow gradual progress towards this comprehensive programme of human security and therefore promote true and lasting peace, have long been emphasised. However expressed, the message of all the prophets, great philosophers, mystics and spiritual guides is a recall to those essential fundamentals of Love with conviction and Charity in action. They all also consider the capabilities, inhibitions and history of their different societies to show the best ways of adopting these fundamentals. We do not always listen to them. Sometimes we need the shock and trauma of first-hand experience to grasp the wisdom of their teachings.

We do not listen to them also because certain leaders, who are supposed to understand their message, have taken on the unenviable task of treating only relative and short-term issues and concentrating entirely on these - relative in space, time and sometimes morality. So they end up truncating the spiritual messages and obscuring the wide strategic objectives in favour of relative and limited objectives which they consider to be the best available.

Among the leaders are those who claim to know about theology and who often attach more importance to outward and worldly aspects of the spiritual message than to the depth of its meaning. They end up excessively attached to the outward aspects, as in the worship of the Golden Calf recounted in the holy texts, and they lead their disciples towards a dead end.

How do we learn to be more receptive and better cultivators of the grain of Love in each of us, and to think globally, in other words in terms of the strategic and universal objectives of human security, and therefore locally?

According to the American author Francis Fukuyama, people in the liberal democracies of the industrialised nations are beginning to think in terms of reciprocal interests, and consequently in these countries, and only

in these countries, we must be witnessing the end of history. He therefore believes implicitly that the great majority of underdeveloped countries are in history's firing line and that these countries will continue to clash. Hence the difficulty of thinking globally. In fact, it is as if we were living on two different planets! Still more seriously, his colleague Samuel Huntington foresees a confrontation between the different great regions of the world in the setting of what he calls the "clash of civilisations". For this, understand "clash of cultures and religions".

How to appreciate either of these analyses if one takes into account the important developments which, since the last century, have made all the world's regions very interdependent – and this due to considerable progress in technology, communication and mobility? Everywhere, these developments have profoundly affected our environment, our culture and also, it is true, our security.

We can presume that, as a rule, democracies do not fight one another. However, it has to be emphasised that of the forty conflicts recorded across the world since the end of the cold war, only two or three were classic inter-state conflicts. Today most conflicts are of an internal nature with no discernible fixed battle line.

The Third World and East Europe are certainly the most visible areas of conflict. But the industrialised countries can also be affected by crises. How to avoid the survival instinct making people from any country turn to their own tribes, ethnic groups, ghettos and extremist faiths for protection when governments are incapable of guaranteeing their security? The cultural differences are then exploited by vain and irresponsible leaders. Even recently tensions in some big city suburbs or between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, as in the Netherlands and Corsica, are reminders that when the elements of conflict come together and exacerbating factors are not held in check, crises can occur anywhere! In some countries the electoral success of political groups with a message of isolation and sometimes xenophobia reminds us that one cannot totally rely on continuing social stability. In times of economic and financial uncertainty, it only requires a relative increase in unemployment and inflation for those messages of isolation to touch sensitive chords.

This is the difficulty of liberal democracies in industrial countries intending to live in isolated fortresses aside from history.

Furthermore, the controversies we have observed recently over thorny issues like the "anti-missile shield" and naval "provocations" by Russia and the United States in the Caribbean and Black Sea, are more reminiscent of the cold war era than of a clash of civilisations. It should be remembered here that it was in the context of the cold war that the authors of September 11 had been allowed in. The enemy then was communism and the Soviet Union and it was convenient to unite with the Taliban against the common enemy.

We have to admit therefore that what we are living through today is not so much the end of history or the clash of civilisations but the fact that we are all living together in one and the same world with different levels of economic and social development but all of us affected by a deep human insecurity! At the beginning of this 21st Century we are assaulted by tensions and controversies born of badly managed globalisation.

In our monotheist cultures we habitually look for a precise demon. Today's demon is to be found in fear and uncertainty about the future. It is in the new waves of fundamentalism which exploit cultural and religious differences. It is in the sterility of political ideologies which offer no alternative. The demon is also in the degradation of the environment. It is in the weapons of destruction we foolishly pile up and deploy, often illegally, around the world. It is in an international commercial system whose rates of exchange are fundamentally unfair. And lastly it is in our own self-sufficiency and lack of solidarity. We spend 14 times more on arms than on aid to one another.

As we seriously evaluate these new demons and the many challenges, we should also be preparing to exploit the new possibilities of the planet.

All governments and civil societies should work together on a new model of world co-operation which could help humanity avoid the multiplication of conflicts, transcend contradictions – often caused by circumstance

– and allow peace to take root in the world. That can only happen effectively if we are more widely and deeply imbued with the message of Love passed down by our spiritual guides. Because to conquer these demons faith is also needed! Faith is actually a creative source of peace.

Faith reminds us that we cannot go on being only concerned with what is relative and looking for short-term compromises on the international stage. It reminds us that we must realise we are literally all in the same boat and must together, really together, establish our safe haven amid storms and the dark clouds heralding further storms. In the context of internationalisation, a genuine deep faith should surely lead to true reconciliation between cultures and religions and so to better mobilising for peace!

Diversity should not be a handicap, quite the reverse. As the President of the Confederation, H.E. Mr Pascal Couchepin, said at the St Gallen Symposium on May 15 this year: “Diversity of cultural values represents an asset. We must preserve this diversity all the more since it is through diversity that innovation and competing ideas feed and implement each other...” Switzerland is a marvellous example of the benefit of this asset and is well placed to set an example!

As interdependence increases across the planet, the pertinence and possibilities of the United Nations Charter turn out in spite of everything to be important. By joining the United Nations, Switzerland has given a very strong signal in this direction. Now we must interpret, through actions based on genuine faith, the commitments of the preamble, the aims and principles of the Charter and the terms of the important Conventions adopted in recent years, like the Geneva conventions. Now that new prospects are offered to the international community, a real comprehensive preventive strategy has become possible. This is the message emphasised by the Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, which I had the honour to co-chair and which advocated the concept of Responsibility to Protect. This preventive strategy implies adapting present structures to respond to this great mission of promoting real human security. It actually means envisaging the launch of real comprehensive “Marshall Plans” in several countries, or even whole regions of the world, to promote good governance, lay the foundations of durable development and implant a culture of peace. It would cost much less than the huge military interventions engaged upon in a dangerous policy of reaction which ends in having a disastrous effect on the populations we think we can save. We see it in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A global preventive step of this sort should today find wide support among the populations of developed countries. It is through our elected political and social representatives that these populations can be informed and persuaded of the necessity of showing greater solidarity. It is in this great Civil Society that we must look for the potential of new action, inspiration and a capacity to mobilise made possible in today’s world. These human resources must be wisely put to use.

My experience in Somalia and elsewhere allowed me to realise that the United Nations have much to learn from this Civil Society which can attract managers who are motivated and ready to take risks, running humanitarian operations or development projects like the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is to be hoped that one day we shall see people who are motivated entering the United Nations and all levels of political, national and international responsibility in the way one enters the priesthood.

Finally it must be said again what an important role religious leaders can play in creating better understanding of the concerns of vulnerable populations and in educating public opinion in favour of genuine and profound human solidarity. Religious leaders can use the calming streams of their prayers and mediation to irrigate the sometimes tense relations between cultures and faiths, and to soothe wounded memories. They should above all ensure that those who preach hatred and violence are never allowed to make religion their pretext.

So it is true Charity, no longer directed only in a relative way but beyond that to the whole of Humanity.

Our common role is to reflect and dialogue on the ways of promoting this synergy. We then become pilgrims called to encourage and help one another on our journey. It is the only real hope for whole sections of humanity if we are to avoid further genocides like that in Rwanda, or other forms of human tragedy. It is perhaps

the only hope of seeing more serenity in the world, less poverty and better protection of our environment. Humanity will not be able to economise on this change which begins in each of us with a personal challenge, an apprenticeship in listening and a constantly renewed faith. The Caux Forum for Human Security aims to reflect on the means of creating this synergy.

Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun

Mohamed Sahnoun is President of *Initiatives of Change International*. He served as Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity and the League of Arab States and as Algeria's Ambassador to the United States, France, Germany and Morocco. He was a Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has represented the UN in various capacities since 1992. Among his assignments were Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Somalia and in the Great Lakes. He served on the International Council of the Earth Charter Initiative and on the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Bruntland Commission) and remains a strong advocate of sustainable development. He is a member of the boards of the University for Peace, the International Crisis Group and Interpeace.