

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS THAT HUMANITY NEEDS TO ADOPT TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

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Introduction

It is increasingly recognized that unless man changes, the world will not change. That means that man's conscience must change. And that, in turn, requires a fundamental change in the education of children. That education has to begin in the home, continue in kindergartens and nursery schools, and elementary schools. We must inculcate children new ethical and spiritual values that emphasize peace, social justice, solidarity, and frugality. In the long run, the survival of humanity and the planet may well depend on the success of that project. If we fail, humanity and the planet may suffer terrible consequences. The four big challenges that humanity must meet are: building a culture of peace; eradicating extreme poverty; ending nuclear proliferation; and dealing effectively with global warming.

The values of the heart and of the soul, must replace those of the pocket book. We must ask ourselves Isaiah Berlin's rhetorical question: What does liberty mean for an Ethiopian starving to death? Nothing more than the liberty to starve to death. We must stop behaving, as if economic growth is infinite, when we live on a small and finite planet. States and markets (multinational corporations) dominate neo-liberal globalisation. International organisations – such as, WTO, IMF and the World Bank -- serve the interests of the state and the market. But the so-called free market has transmogrified into market fundamentalism – even, in some countries, market Stalinism, as Naomi Klein has brilliantly contended in a recent, remarkable article in Rolling Stone. Tomorrow, much of the world's power – based on wealth – will be concentrated in the hands of a few thousand people – the billionaires, whose main purpose is to amass even more wealth and power, and the preservation and promotion of their enormous privileges.

There remains one big hope: civil society, the activist segment of which, CSOs, and NGOs, work for peace and social justice. The eradication of extreme poverty is the most urgent goal of the CSOs and the NGOs. At the bottom of the social pyramid are about one billion people who are extremely poor. As it has been repeated ad nauseam, four million people die each year from hunger, malnutrition, and preventable diseases. That must cease. Building a culture of peace is essential. The world risks a global nuclear confrontation, if we don't. And the planet will suffer irreparable damage if we don't take stringent measures to protect it.

The Warnings

In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the three characters of the play make it clear from the beginning that they believe, essentially, that life is absurd: they don't know what is going on, and what will happen next. Today, the powers that be of this world know perfectly well what is going on, and what will happen next. But they suffer from a terrible disease which may be called Wishful Thinking. That is so because they let their desires and ambitions supersede their intelligence – not to mention, wisdom. They are like the proverbial monkey who covers his eyes, ears and mouth with his hands, because he doesn't want to see and to hear, and won't say anything that could endanger his desires and ambitions.

And yet, the warnings are there. I will mention only three recent ones: the sub-prime crisis, the cyclone that hit Myanmar, and the earthquake that devastated China. The sub-prime crisis showed clearly the incredible greed of those who were involved in it – the owners and managers of hedge funds, private equity funds, big banks, and their assorted henchmen. The cyclone that hit Myanmar showed that the military rulers of that country – who knew that a devastating cyclone was on the way, the Indian government informed them -- did nothing to warn the people because, presumably, they did not want to cause panic, and endanger their hold on power. If that's true, they are guilty of a grave crime against humanity. In China, the collapse of a hundred thousand schools, which were badly built, shows the inevitable corruption that neo-liberal globalisation entailed in that country.

It could well be that these three catastrophes – one man-made, two natural – are just the tip of the iceberg, and that those of the future will be much worse. Today, the dividing line between man-made and natural catastrophes has blurred. What may seem a natural catastrophe is often caused by men.

The Conundrum

Humanity is guilty, for greed rules the world. Financial capitalism, which took over from industrial capitalism, is not only largely unproductive, or sterile, it is evil as well, because all it really cares about is making huge amounts money. And the concentration of

these huge amounts of money – tens of billions of dollars -- in the hands of a few thousand people has a corrupting influence on everything. Especially, and including, politics. And the fact that words don't mean anymore what they are supposed to mean.

In the so-called democratic countries – not to mention dictatorships in which they are fake undertakings -- elections are held regularly. But what do they really real mean? Does anything that really counts change because of the results of the elections? Let's take the American presidential election. What will really change, even if Barack Obama is elected president? Perhaps a more multilateral approach in diplomacy, and a lower inclination to launch 'preventive' wars. Admittedly, it is not nothing. But about the bigger issues that really count: Can he change anything about American imperialism? Or global financial capitalism? Can he tell Americans that consumer society is wrong and that they have to tighten their belts for the good of Humanity? I am not holding my breath.

A second example is that of human rights. Everyone – including the UN, multinationals, governments, and civil society -- speak, ad infinitum, of human rights. But the reality on the ground is that -- except in a few countries, the Scandinavian countries come to mind – they barely exist. Possibly 90 per cent of the world's population lives under regimes that do not respect human rights. Many are dictatorships. But the formidable propaganda machine that is the mainstream media perpetuates the fiction that progress is being made on human rights.

The truth is that we have not invented anything. It is still the good old panem et circenses (bread and circus games) of the Romans. The 'bread' part is solved in the rich countries, and partly in the 'emerging' countries, but not in the poor countries. As for the 'circus games' part, these days, it is provided by big sports and show business events. And the gladiators of yore have been replaced by the 'stars' of sports, show business, politics, and the media.

Conclusion

The present situation can be compared to the Titanic sailing on the icy waters of the Atlantic. The iceberg is out there. It is getting closer. It is dark, the fog is thick and the visibility, bad. For Humanity not suffer the same fate as the Titanic, man needs to change. His conscience must change. And that, in turn, requires a fundamental change in the education of children. The new ethical and spiritual values that emphasize peace, social justice, solidarity and frugality must be inculcated early.

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