



A statement delivered by

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on

**“ETHICS AND VALUES TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000”**

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Address of Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo SDB to the  
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Ethics and values towards the year 2000

*Honorable Chairman and Respected guests and beloved participants,*

History is the affair of men, implied in the possibility of progress on the technical-structural plane and in the promotion on the ethical plane, be it personal or communal in nature. Such History comes always as man's capacity to respond to the challenges that society imposes on him. These challenges are situations which are the consequences and synthesis of events and of tendencies coming from various cultures. Today we have a crisis-situation that is unpublished. It is not only the end of a millennium that we are living as generation at the threshold. It is instead the drifting of everything in a world that is passing. And this is not taking place, as in the passing of other civilization, in a gradual way, but rather as a violent shaking of the whole structure of the hierarchy of values. We no longer deal with the crisis of this or that value, as it always happened in great historical dramas. Here we deal with the tendency of starting a crisis and sometimes with the tendency to deny the very importance of values.

Hans Jonas, a German Philosopher of our times, synthesized this drama of our times in this way: I tremble before this situation; today the peak of man's power Co-exists and coincides with the peak of values' emptiness (irrelevance) and the summit of Science's capacity coincides with the summit of wisdom's capacity".

Weak thinking is rampant; it subtly produces relativism and confirms that nothing is permanent, that no value is strong and rooted. It is the victory of the idea that has its point of departure from the sense to the being.

We breathe the air of nothingness. From here, the privileged place given to subjectivity is given to subjectivism. This is translated to the concrete attitude of arbitrariness in the area of life-relationships, be it personal, national or international.

## **1. From the challenges facing the values to the challenge of cultivating values**

In this panorama of unpublished crisis of values, we have three great challenges before our historical conscience.

The first one is the economic challenge. It is obvious in the disparity between North and South, that is, the race of our planet to two opposite directions and the widening gap between the world of opulence and the world of misery.

The second one is the ecological challenge, which results from the indiscreet exploitation of nature that has as its dominant motive of the craving to produce without solving the secondary polluting effects through means that would require further costs. On one hand, there is the tendency to maximize the profit while on the other hand, the tendency is to minimize the cost of production. Maximizing of profit and minimizing of cost of production form the parameter to which the system of Neo-capitalism bases itself in the behavioral structure.

The third one is the challenge of information. The prodigy to possess information of any sort at the right time with the conquest of distance actualizes the principle of "knowledge is power".

The system that seizes management, aggravates the problem with the power of occult persuasion of economic-financial centers. This in fact, being information in itself, power in itself, confirms all the more and always the Info-capitalism of information, that increases the Neo-capitalism of money and consequently reproduces structures and anguish.

In reality, it is the economic factor that acts and determines the form of information. And if this coagulates around the nucleus of Homo oeconomicus according to the Economist's version, the new threat for man turns into a new loss for the weaker and more marginalized man. In this regard, we speak of the informed low-level proletariat that is in a position obviously lower than that of the capitalistic proletariat.

Unless we move out from these snares of philosophical economism that kneads Neo-liberalism as the vision of Neo-capitalism, the problems will be aggravated instead of being resolved. Thus, the frontiers-challenges (gaps) of today will remain untouched.

Now, a civilization maintains also its human dimension, in the measure in which it is capable of answering the questions of frontiers-challenges (challenges of inequality).

The philosophy behind Neo-capitalism shows itself incapable. It presents itself, as we have already said, as an anthropological Neo-darwinism in which the stronger ones prevail not only on the interpersonal plane but in the planetary form of inequality of enormous size in humanity.

The reformers who leave this dangerous nucleus at the base of the system's vision put aside the data of the problems without resolving them. They beat about the bush without concluding. The formal democracies of the West are experiencing the anguish of the leopard principle: to reform and to reform provided nothing is changed. The substance of free market in regimes of Neo-capitalism continues to have the man reduced to a machine and the marginalized man as its axis .

In order to succeed to respond to these frontiers-challenges the methodology of collectivism crumbles before the eyes of all. That of Neo-liberalism, on the other hand, is unmasked before the eyes of those who reflect with a critical mind.

Is there a third way?

Yes, there is, provided it is not visualized from the ideological plane. Ideology, taken in the negative form, is a construction of principles ordered to legitimize an existing situation seen partly from the view point of protecting the interests of some. This operation is often furtive so that the ideological process leads substantially to deception. They are visions that have their own concerns and that elude the true problem, that is, the needs of man, of every man and of all men.

It happens that one passes from the ideological plane of analysis to the anthropological plane in order to impose the ethical one that has an orientative and operative synthesis.

And so the third way should not be ideological but ethico-anthropological. The historical conscience needs references to values which are not unstable and to which everything can examine itself in order to avoid arbitrariness and patronage.

It means turning to man, getting to know his real needs and looking for the right solutions; it means working in a way that is not so structured instead practical, respecting the diversity of situations and responding to the various needs of Geo-political conditions. This way of acting is urgent and such action means justice.

This is the applied teaching of the communitarian personalism declared by Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain.

It deals with setting the role of the person and that of the community in a dynamic balance. The person cannot be considered closed to himself but above all, open to what is ahead and to what is above. To what is ahead, to the future and to the other. To what is above, to the values and to the all-embracing foundation of values. Then, the community is not to be considered as a reality that levels down or reduces people to anonymity or deprives its members of their freedom; it should be envisioned in such a way that "being with" is lived as "being for". Therefore the community guarantees the security for the people's work for the equal distribution of goods. Thus it becomes a place where the well-being of each member is served based on the criteria of merits and needs.

On the national political ground, the community implies a form of society that is founded on real solidarity, inter-personal and social, which transforms itself into a structure of a Social State. This form is very different from the Assistance State (Welfare State?) (Stato Assistenziale) which is founded on the by-product of the rule of a political party that needs to survive within an ambient of client fishing.

On the contrary, the Social State with respect to the freedom of market, intervenes to demand the contributions and to redistribute the benefits of their wealth, culture and opportunities for spiritual growth.

Communitarian personalism responds to the challenge of the paralysis caused by the modern State which, even if highly efficient, tends to crystallize its position within the logic of favors and of force rather than within the logic of social justice.

Moreover, communitarian personalism is capable of responding to the problems existing within the basic strata of society. First of all, to the micro society of the family, it facilitates the integration and real sense of equality between man and woman. It helps the school by enhancing the participation of teachers and students in working together. It encourages groups existing among friends to engage in the continuous education to grow in communion, to teach the sense of gratitude and of camaraderie avoiding all forms of evil and depravity. It gives rise to social groups which are endowed with the ability to serve constantly in proportion to their cohesion. Furthermore, regarding the things mentioned about the world of exploitation, communitarian personalism has as its foundation the participation and sharing of benefits as well as the extension of the spaces of work with the assumption of the formula "everybody to work, working less means gaining less".

## 2. The value of solidarity as salvation

Thanks to the media, our planet has now turned to acculturation and to work with the process that goes from the material phase to that of the product of a "global village" market. It offers the undeniable given of the interdependence of groups among States and peoples. Now the recognition of the value or interdependence gives the sign of the times and commitment to the times. And it is this that builds international solidarity. Inter-human relationships are not or cannot stand under the sign of independence. Nor could it be founded on dependence. The alternative is the coherent awareness of inter-dependence which is solidarity.

John Paul II while commenting on "Populorum Progressio" of Paul VI has identified this as a new ethical category that recalls the moral obligation of taking into consideration the rapport of universality, the interdependence that exists in people's behavior, misery and underdevelopment of millions of men, in making personal decisions as well as in government's decisions (SRS 9).

Now this solidarity "is a duty" (PP 48). John Paul II explains that this "is not a sentiment of vague compassion or of superficial tenderness for the evils experienced by many persons near and far. On the contrary, it is the firm and enduring determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to the good of everybody and of every one so that everybody may be responsible for everybody" (SRA 38). Here we speak of solidarity as an attitude to choose new values, characterized by solidity of principles, by demand and by the strength of a moral character that lives in faithfulness and that bravely bears the costs of coherency.

The commitment is directed to the common well-being. This is not to be confused with the half (mediocre) good. The good of all and of each one comes first; then comes the good of a class, that protection of the privilege of a group. This profound attitude presupposes, properly because it is such, the internalization by the individuals and by the group of such an awareness that is marked by the gift of conversion. The world today has arrived at such a crossroads in which reformism no longer suffices. One must either change mentality or perpetuate the existing evil.

As John Paul II declares, conversion, a fundamental biblical category, applied to our case, is the readiness in the evangelical sense to lose oneself for the other instead of exploiting the other and to serve the other rather than truly oppress him through manipulation (SRS 38).

A society humanizes itself when the so called "Biofilis" or the passion for life prevails over "Necrofilia" or the destruction of life in the other. Now, through anti-social tendencies and by depriving the other of the necessary human possibility, the very attempt to dehumanize the other boomerangs on oneself in a negative way. He who dehumanizes is himself dehumanized. He who does evil to another commits evil on himself.

Solidarity is the assuming of responsibility for the defenseless so that they may be protected, for those who are not free so that they may become man who are capable not only of satisfying their basic needs but also of having the conditions to become self-sufficient. Solidarity here becomes a force and makes an impact in history which benefits the entire human community.



Liberty, wisdom and justice, the growth of what is human in man, are essential values to which the values with a functional nature in the economic sphere ought to be subordinated. People empower themselves only when they recognize themselves in others by means of concrete choices. What use it is to accumulate values which are economically ordered if those graces which ennoble man would be suppressed and without them man would be empty and dehumanized no matter how well provided he is with all comforts of life?

This is the principle that transcribes the Gospel warning: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?" (Mt.16:26). John Paul II translates it for our times in this way: "When the individual and the communities fail to respect strictly the moral, cultural and spiritual demands founded on the person's dignity (.....), all the rest will result in dissatisfaction and finally in contempt" (SRS 33).

In short what importance does a world of opulence have in the accumulation of means and of riches which after putting in people's mind the rights of one part of humanity, it destroys the true quality of life? Emmanuel Mounier already gave his judgment to this by saying: "We possess only that which we give or that to which we dedicate ourselves". In a world of opulence where people do not know to give, they do not possess anything but the sense of deep hopelessness. And with such a feeling, people keep watch over their riches yet do not enjoy them in depth.

### **3. Religious values and hope**

The historical religions are today summoned to realize together that platform of solidarity, justice and protection of what is created and of peace which the world urgently needs. In our era of secularization, these religions can prove to the world, with the witness of their life and action, fundamental principles, almost ten essential tasks which could be summarized as follows:

- ♦ first of all, that the love of God is the guarantee for loving our neighbor truly and constantly;
- ♦ that religious movements are factors and promoters of peace in the world;
- ♦ that errors of the past were committed by men not because they were religious but because they were influenced by authentic religiosity;
- ♦ that religion is not an alternative to human values but, by its very nature, it is a complement that is mutually related to human values at the service of man;
- ♦ that "man does not live by bread alone" (Mt.4:4) but by life's meaning. And no scientific undertaking can ever offer such meaning;
- ♦ that religious search is ever actual especially today when the strong emphasis on the "how" of existence leads man to discover the "why" of his existence;
- ♦ that the heart of man yesterday and always is characterized by a restlessness to seek the Absolute which is the longing for the total Other;
- ♦ therefore, that God is not something invented but Someone who is present. He does not alienate but promotes life and commits man to his progress in history.

On these bases which guarantee credibility, the historical religions with which the Churches accompany us in our journey at the beginning of the third millennium, have a fundamental role in the world of today, characterized by the materialism of a science without conscience and by a conscience that is centered only on itself.

In the face of the religion of technicalism or of the idolatry of means, more than just counter-balancing its ends, these religions offer the service of revealing the folly of man in his adoration of the 'golden calf'. It is a first class service, which is both cultural and historical in nature, to unmask these expressions which declare to serve man but in truth enslave him. It is not to minimize the progress but to value its center, which is in man, when we propose the religion of ends and not the religion of means; when we propose the adoration of the Ultimate End of everything and of every end which is God. With this religion we value the dignity of life.

In the face of the different cultures marked by tendencies to individualism, narcissism and personalism, these religions recall the contribution of re-education to the sense of openness to the above, that is to the conviction that the individual cannot put himself at the autarchic center as the end of everything, but should work at recognizing the superiority of values and their transcendent foundation which is God. This is the God who in the vision of the Abramitic, Jewish, Christian and Islamic faith reveals Himself as the sole Creator of this unique humanity. The re-education to the vertical transcendence leads to the acknowledgment of the equality of the dignity of other. This lays the foundation to the ever valid declarations like that of the United Nations Organizations in the Preamble of the Statutes of the Rights of man of December 10, 1948, which need a foundation. Today more than ever before, in a sick world due to technicalism (religion of means) and egoism (religion of the self), there is a real need for voices; voices which are not sonorous but perpetuated in man's history because of its consistency and therefore convincing; voices which announce over and again the religion of values as ends and not of values as instrumentalized.

Rather than being parasitic and being concretizations of essential dimension of man, these religions have a task today that is beneficial and irreplaceable: to re-educate man to be someone mature, one who is able to overcome the two ineffective points of the idolatry of means and of the autarchic ego, be it in personal or collective way.

The religions of the year two thousand are becoming united due to this indispensable fermentation of the salvation of the world that is sick of 'value asphyxia'.

In the past, their official representatives have not seldom divided the world with religious wars, a result of the infidelity to the original religious inspiration.

The Catholic Church which has established the basis of dialogue and the acknowledgment of religious authenticity in other forms through Vatican Council II, must continue the journey which she has initiated. The Catholic Church must nourish this passion to serve the world in working together with other religions towards a communion that is not syncretistic but operative. This is an inter-religious commitment made for the glory of God and for the prosperity of all men who are His children.

The local Churches, while they give their contribution to a world that is greatly diversified, receive also from it challenges and stimuli, advantages and benefits of salvation. It is an osmosis that is being created. Vatican Council II declares in the Constitution "Gaudium et Spes"; "Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the Church as a social reality and a driving force in history, so too the Church is not unaware how much it has profited from the history and development of mankind. It profits from the experiences of past ages, from the progress of the sciences and from the riches hidden in various cultures through which greater light is thrown on the nature of man and new avenues to truth are opened up" (GS 44). In this operation, the Churches reveal the riches that they possess; thanks to the process of catalysis. For the rest, Christ is already present in its germinal forms in the midst of cultures and religious experiences. And there it works with the Holy Spirit through mysterious ways. The service of the Churches is to share their spiritual riches with cultures and religions and to empower those great values already present in them in mutual collaboration that is respectful and intelligent.

This is one of the fundamental forms of collaboration given to a human world that it may become more human. This process then becomes History. Life then becomes a life-together which manifests that all men are brothers.

## Conclusion

It is a fabric of reconciliation, of collaboration that needs to be constructed patiently through an operative dialogue among all men of good will. All the consciences are to be moved to overcome the big challenge of the disintegration of humanity not only because of the ever present nuclear threat but above all and from within, because of the snares of nullifying human values which tend to endanger the very foundation of the possibility of becoming man.

We have arrived at the crossroads of history "to be or not to be". The alternative to "never again not-to-be" is "to be always and all the more", making "to be all the more" the humanity that is crushed by oppression and endemic alienation.

It is either "to be all the more" or to resign to be one more piece of the economic and technocratic macro structure, an object among objects, in a spiral of death that involves both the oppressor and the oppressed. Development necessarily passes through the operative capacity of contributing development.

Either "to be all the more" or "never again not to be". The anguish of living for death produces a culture of death, provoked by the death of the true culture such as development. The nullifying of culture produces the culture of void and emptiness.

The biblical God in the Book of Deuteronomy calls man and treating him as a being responsible for his own destiny, says: "I have placed before you life and death. Choose life so that you can live, you and your descendants" (Deut.30:19). The man of today is summoned by the Lord of history. His choices for life are choices for the growth of his own life and are conditions for the life of his posterity. There are also the rights of the unborn who are supposed to receive the inheritance of life proper to man. Man is called to wake up by overcoming the daily numbness towards values and towards the consciousness of his greatness and nobility. We call this responsibility. Responsibility before the very face of the history of God and before the very face of the God of history who is the God of all men.

The awareness of development moves ahead due to the development of the individual and collective awareness (conscience).

Hope, the soul of history, is called responsibility in history.

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