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Unity at the grass roots

Can a spirituality influence international relations? An interview with Professor Vincenzo Buonomo, expert in international law.

By Michele Zanzucchi

Q: At this point in time, people are wondering where our world is heading. As an expert in international relations, how would you respond?

A: Current thoughts regarding world trends in international relations fail to reveal the inner unifying elements.

This is due to a particular type of interpretation of the course of history that holds that individual nations, or groups of nations, determine the status of international affairs. A unifying vision is lacking. International politics appears to be the result of varying foreign policies, in which problems are taken into consideration only if they have a direct impact on an individual country's own interests. Yet, the pursuit of a truly international dimension, where everyone is involved in the problems of everyone, is irreversible. In fact, the complexity of various situations that concern the environment, human rights, and the economy has reached such heights that individual nations are no longer able to deal with them on their own.

Q: Accessibility to travel and the influence of the media have fostered globalization. Has there also been a parallel fostering of world unity?

A: Although the idea of traveling across the globe is not new, it has become a normal part of life only in recent years. And, unfortunately, it is true only for a small portion of humanity; just 5% of the world's population manages and consumes 90% of its resources. It is this same 5% that is also able to travel. Something, therefore, has been achieved, but not on a universal level. This is one of the drawbacks of the globalization process, which in itself is neither positive nor negative, but may become so, depending upon the way in which it occurs.

One positive aspect of globalization is that we can now be aware of the well-being of other peoples in various parts of the world. Distances have been breached on both a commercial and economic level, but not on an ideological level. After having before ascertained that the world is divided between the east and west or the north and the south, today, instead, I see the world as divided into contrasting categories such as those of the rich and the poor (whether it be a country, a people or an individual). And this, undoubtedly, has also led to the emergence of a new concept of the "enemy."

We must, however, acknowledge that there is also a thrust towards uniting, not so much among high-level political authorities—even though, technically, they are the ones who will ultimately come together—but rather at grass-roots level. People around the world are becoming more and more aware of the fact that it is only through mutual exchange that the identity of each one is restored, rather than surrendered.

Until recent decades, efforts for unity on a political plane were due to the growing economic markets or to avert threats of nuclear conflict. Instead, such unity is being attained today through diverse endeavors for the protection of specific bodies of water, geographical regions or for the atmosphere—as well as for the environment as a whole. It's a clear indication that courses of action along the road towards unity are underway in the worlds of culture, science and among professionals in the various disciplines.

Q: The Focolare spirituality of unity has always presented the ideal of a “more united world.” What are the principal aspects it offers for the fostering of international relations?

A: I have always considered the spirituality of unity not only as a key for the interpretation of international events but as a methodology of action as well. The aim of a united world is not that of creating a super-state, but of seeking, instead, to enhance world order by starting from the people, and basing itself upon common objectives.

In this regard, I deem two elements to be operational on an international level: the first is the ability to convey to others the idea that the world must unite or the future will be very grim. The concept of a united world is that of one human family, not one of governments and administrations inventing heartless technical solutions. Then, a second element is the fact that each individual must consider how he or she can personally contribute to this communion among peoples.

Looking at the world’s problems, one might be inclined to think that at most one can express interest in it but without any great effect on an issue. Instead, becoming knowledgeable of these problems already signals a clear-cut choice: we cannot isolate ourselves and think only of the problems existing in our own neighborhoods, cities and nations. We need to be “global persons”, with our hearts “opened wide” onto all of humanity.

Observing the dynamics of international organizations, it’s a logical conclusion to say that the interests of a selected few are the determining factors in many decisions. The spirituality of unity, instead, proposes that the objective interests of the world’s populations should govern decision-making. It is this perspective that can help reach solutions.

Q: “Love the other’s country as your own,” is a concept supported by Chiara Lubich. How can this be achieved?

A: Patriotism, the love of one’s own country, is connected to the protection of one’s identity. Looking at the current situation from the viewpoint of unity implies that we must safeguard individual identities and bring forth what is positive in every culture. Back in 1959, Chiara Lubich formulated the idea of a world parliament composed of entities from different backgrounds and origins, but all sharing a common goal.

To “love the other’s country” is not just a spontaneous act of generosity. It implies that we understand the other’s situation so that we can work together without attitudes of superiority. Rather the attitude should be one of promoting a mutual exchange of gifts that leads one to say to the other: “Whatever your governmental, political or economical situation, I value it and respect it, even if it is different and perhaps wouldn’t meet my ‘standards’.”

Therefore, the word “country”, understood only as a certain territory or a nation, has to be broadened to mean “the land of our forefathers,” an expression used by Pope John Paul II. This means that, as an individual, I am able to call the whole world “my country”, not just my own homeland. Through this definition of country I find my place within the human family, without eliminating diversity.

And there’s more: the concept of “loving the other’s country” is also very much connected to the “golden rule.” In most of the world’s religions the concept, “Do to others as you would like them do to you,” can be found within the various sacred books and writings. The foundation of reciprocity, when it is reduced to the notion that “I won’t do anything if the other doesn’t do anything” is no longer sufficient for maintaining a world order. Unfortunately, it is a way of thinking that has become more than routine, and is at the basis of wars, violence and retaliations.

The “golden rule” speaks, instead, of a reciprocity in which each individual acts independently, regardless of whether the other is ever able to return the gesture. This kind of a relationship then becomes the best tool for dialogue, the tool that will allow us to attain the goal of loving the other’s country as our own. This is what will ultimately lead to a united world.

Captions:

“By putting the commandment of mutual love at the basis of our personal and public lives, a noticeable renewal in the most varied sectors of human existence occurs.”

—Chiara Lubich

Founded in 1991, the Economy of Communion (EOC) is an innovative economic proposal based on a culture of giving. Over 700 businesses worldwide now follow its guidelines. From far left: Visitors at the EOC FEMAQ foundry which produces fused iron molds for the automobile industry in Brazil; the warehouse of RIDIX, an Italian EOC import business of industrial machinery and supplies.

Founded in 1996, the Movement for Unity in Politics is an association of politicians who, in unity across party lines and in different countries, put the common good first. Left: Italian politicians at a prayer service for peace.

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