

Global Survival: A Convergence of Faith and Science?

Speaker's Remarks

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We welcome opportunities for an exchange of views on matters of urgent international concern. It is encouraging to see attention being paid to matters that affect the future of humanity, about which so many have spoken. We welcome such involvement, and that of religious and other leaders who are involved at the grassroots level, working among the poor and the dispossessed, the marginalized and the maimed. It is my hope that this is the first of many such interactions.

I would first like to consider partnerships. It is a truism that we live in a global village; an event in one part of the globe has a domino effect on the rest of the world. This effectively means that we have reached a moment in time when a new attitude toward the partnership between the industrial and developing worlds is a prerequisite, for we are dependent on one another. We have to choose either life or death. To choose life is the obvious and only option, for it provides a future in all its fullness, not only for us, but also for our children, and for our planet.

With promising developments occurring in many countries, the time is ripe for new partnerships of trust and hope. The world's holistic nature has always been obvious to those who recognize the need for healthy partnerships in which the different cultures of all are respected and understood. The World Bank's announcement of the alleviation of Mozambique's foreign debt augurs well for the future, and goes some way toward meeting a call I made in London

earlier this year for such foreign debts to be declared odious, and for an international mediation council to be established which would monitor new loans made to developing countries. Thus, in welcoming the World Bank's initiative in Mozambique, I once again call for the debts of developing countries to be declared odious to international financial institutions. This will, no doubt, enable developing countries to start afresh and to contribute meaningfully to global programs to promote the sustainability of the environment. Such actions would also advance the cause of trust. When trust levels have plummeted, there has been a negative impact on ordinary people. We cannot afford to allow this to happen again. We should be working to usher in a new millennium in which we put the needs of people first and the ideologies of nations second.

It is my view that there are three principles which we need to reaffirm for sustainable global survival. The first is the full realization of the intrinsic dignity of all human beings. The second is the inalienable freedom and equality of all human beings. The third is the necessary solidarity and interdependence of all human beings—as individuals and as communities.

Intrinsic Dignity of All Humankind

Humanity's intrinsic worth is to be found in the fact that we are made in the image of God. There can be no greater value attached to us. That is

why we have the responsibility of protecting the sanctity of all life, and of championing the well-being of humanity. The concept of *imago dei* also comes into play in that it underscores that we are created for lifelong fellowship with one another. There is thus an imperative to care for one another and for our world, and to live at peace with one another. Besides this we have a moral function to ensure that our world is ordered so that there is a coordination of the social condition for the common good of all.

When anything in God's creation is tarnished, whether it be the blight of pollution or the specter of poverty, then our Creator's image is dishonored. That is unacceptable. Countries say they reject violence and war, yet billions of dollars continue to be spent on arms. Hence there is a need to help one another in addressing problems that affect the well-being of people.

As you know, in South Africa we have emerged from a baptism of fire. Apart from the global environmental problems that we all face, we have the legacy of apartheid to deal with in areas such as housing, employment, education, health care, crime, and violence. Yet despite these pressing social issues, the government of the day sees fit to call for tenders worth 12 billion rand—that is between US\$3 billion and US\$4 billion—in order to modernize and replenish its armed services. At a conservative estimate this money could be used to build about one million homes for those who are at present homeless, meeting at least some of the social needs mentioned above. This is not acceptable. The situation is aggravated by an announcement that the South African government will only start paying for these arms four years after placing its orders. Conveniently, this will be after the next general election, so no unwelcome pre-election taxes will have to be raised.

But more seriously, our people will be even more indebted than they already are as a result of the borrowings of the previous regime. Such actions are not in keeping with a harmonious global village. All involved, including foreign governments, need to be censured and dissuaded from participating in deals like this. Indeed, the time has come for a mechanism to be found whereby governments can be dissuaded and prevented from pursuing objectives that are

in their own interests, but go against the promotion of human dignity and human rights.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was issued to maintain peace and promote stability. All such statements on human rights have been written as a reminder that we must never repeat the kind of grotesque acts which most of us have probably lived through. The United Nations was created as an act of human solidarity after the war, to find a way of having sustainable peace in the world. Yet we continue to see some governments permitting terrible, brutal, acts and violence by their own agents, provoking counter-brutality from their opponents. I raise this issue because I believe that we urgently need a paradigm shift in our thinking and our actions on these matters. And it is for this reason that all human beings and organizations with the good of humanity at heart must reject violence and war. Only then will governments put into effect an international ordering of common interests for peace.

The rights of human beings must be central to the very heart of civil order. Human interests must dominate national interests. Thus the need for a paradigm shift. The old order of the twentieth century, in which the major powers spent billions on the arms race, is gone. That order needs to be finally buried. We cannot afford to live in a global village that excludes a workable design for long-lasting peace and social justice. It is too risky.

Freedom and Equality

Another aspect of the necessary paradigm shift is that of replenishment. Humanity was called to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, over every living creature that moves on Earth. Science helped us to do that, but we are also called to replenish Earth, and this we have not done. We have entered an age in which we must be willing to pay the price of replenishing Earth by changing our values, our lifestyles, and our political and economic objectives. We must remember what Hans Küng said, that the basis for a global ethic was to treat all human beings humanely, and to ensure that what one does to others one would be prepared to do to oneself (Küng 1997).

We are co-creators with the God of this world in which we live, and we need to appreciate the unique character of our natural world. The biosphere has all the resources necessary for sustaining life. All oxygen comes from plants and is completely recycled by living organisms every 2,000 years. The point is that nature's global village is a sustainable society, if only we act to make it so. The key to sustaining Earth concerns the management of the atmosphere and the ocean. To sustain the world we need a new brand of science and technology, and these need to be governed by a new brand of economics and politics, with a sound moral foundation. Ethics should precede politics, economics, and the law, because political action is concerned with values and choices. Ethics must therefore inform and inspire our political leadership.

Solidarity and Interdependence

Dealings between world powers and developing countries have resulted in the inequitable distribution of resources, to the detriment of ordinary people. In the new millennium we must be vigilant about the way in which we use our natural resources, and we must move fast to ensure that the ecosystems of our world are well protected. We too readily allowed scientists and entrepreneurs to convince us that the industrialization of some of the world's most pristine sanctuaries of flora and fauna was in the interests of the economic advancement of humankind. Yet what one nation does impacts others: what has been done in Mozambique will inevitably influence what happens in southern Africa, in Africa, and ultimately in the world.

It is fascinating, for instance, to see the development taking place in southern Africa where planning is at an advanced state to develop cross-border natural reserves. The creation of these reserves recognizes that the animals and plants do not respect human-made political boundaries. Governments have cooperated to create one sanctuary, political boundaries notwithstanding, to ensure that wildlife in all its forms survives. This involves South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe at this stage. If this is possible for wildlife, it should also be possible in terms of ensuring the

sustainability of development for the benefit of the human species.

It must have implications for the manner in which we address the need for appropriate technology and capital to be made available, so that humans can prosper as a result, and the environment can likewise benefit. It is our responsibility to ensure that developments in the fields of science and technology are used for the greater good of humanity. We are all responsible for the well-being of our planet. Science can assist us in meeting the challenges of our time, as it is doing in ensuring that the magnificent flora and fauna of southern Africa is preserved.

In the medium to long term, this means that issues such as the supply of water for people, the need to guard against deforestation, and the facts of global warming must be creatively addressed. The convergence of faith and science implies an understanding that personal and societal freedoms are not without responsibilities. Freedom is not a license to do as one will, but to do what one knows to be right, true, and consistent with one's beliefs. Truth can only be discovered in an open relationship with God. In acknowledging this, we must recognize that all the great faiths tell of the need to use our resources in a responsible manner.

Christianity, for instance, makes it clear that people can benefit from one another when they become partners with the creative, living God. The parable of the five loaves and fishes is a simple story that tells us that when people share their resources, then finite resources are multiplied for the common good. The story tells of people who took what they had, shared with one another, and saw a multiplier effect taking place. It is this multiplier effect that will be required in the run up to the new millennium. Incidentally, it is also instructive to know that, faced with the hunger of people, Christ did not form a committee or do a feasibility study. He acted. He acknowledged what was available and worked with it. This age-old parable has relevance even for the most skeptical among us today. For while we meet and discuss issues that confront the world as we come to the turn of the century, it is still plain, simple action that will achieve the desired ends.

Specific Actions to Sustain the Ecosystem

The sustainability of ecosystems is vital for the well-being of humanity. Such sustainability can only come about if we are able to have an ordered universe based on a solidarity of purpose among both humankind and our natural world. Such solidarity would provide a much-improved possibility of ensuring that our planet remains environmentally viable. This will require a determination on our part, we need to revisit our commitment to ethics and values. This will be the foundation for the future world ecosystem.

There are a number of other major actions we have to take in order to sustain humanity. We must restrict population growth to limits that can be born by Earth and its resources. We need zero growth in consumable goods. We must distribute resources where they are needed most. We need zero growth in pollution. Sustainable society emphasizes people, not goods; quality, not quantity. We need less cars in the developed world, and more mass transport systems. In our obsession with production and consumption we fail to hear the cry of the suffering and to recognize the aspirations of those in the developing world.

Poor countries have no chance of developing adequately unless the rich countries reduce the huge proportion they contribute to the total impact. Countries with technology in addition to resources already have enormous power. A just world involves a total restructuring of the international economic order. The entire world cannot live without technology, yet we do little to find a way of living in harmony with it. The developing world requires access to technology and capital. It requires the expertise of those who are able to contribute to capacity building. This must all be done in an atmosphere of mutual trust and equal partnership in which each party is accountable and productivity for the good of the environment is the defining factor.

There is still another all-important influence—that of greed. One-sixth of the gross world product is controlled by multinational corporations. Multinationals have increased production, but their products are mainly designed for the rich who can afford them. Yet two-thirds of the world's people live in poverty. If we intend to inhabit our world village, there

must be a change of attitude by those with economic power toward those who are powerless.

I will not bore you with statistics. But the century that is ending has shown us that any change of power will never contribute to an equitable distribution of Earth's riches. So let us use power in its best context: the need to empower people so that they, in turn, can empower others. The new millennium presents as great a challenge to religion as to secular authorities and business interests. Religious organizations can never be divorced from the social, economic, or political realities of the world. For this is God's world.

In this respect there is a commonality between the various religions of the world. I have already referred to the multiplier effect of Christianity. Judaism sees humankind as God's partner in the ongoing work of creation. Islam promotes religious witness and unity. Hinduism, the essential oneness of human kind. Buddhism also emphasizes achieving higher forms of unity in a world of interdependence. Chinese spiritual traditions revere harmony as the supreme principle of nature and society. All contemporary religions need to be relevant, and that involves a rediscovery and reevaluation of their place in an interdependent world. Whatever our religions, we must inculcate in people a moral ethic that optimizes the quality of life, of people.

It is important to note that religious institutions still command the loyalty of hundreds of millions of people, from which they draw inspiration. The church and other religious traditions or faiths have a crucial role to play in pointing to the opportunities that exist in the world. We stand at a critical juncture in our history, a crossroads in time, a new *kairos* moment, if you like. Models of hope are urgently needed. Those involved in development need to hear the success stories of a Mozambique, a Uganda, a South Africa. Even the small triumphs at the grassroots level need to be reported so that others can learn from them and implement successful strategies in their own communities.

The character that South Africa has shown in overcoming apartheid and the divisions that threatened the establishment of a liberated country must shine true and beyond our political accomplishments. Who would have thought that

we could have become a country seen as providing signs of hope, economically and diplomatically, under the leadership of a man who spent almost 30 years incarcerated on Robben Island. South Africa has shown that humanity can change, and the quality that enabled it to do so, in spite of the long night of darkness that was apartheid, was hope. Hope, sustained by faith, can transform this world.

Professor Lesslie Newbigin, a one-time bishop of the church of South India, was returning to his homeland, England, after doing missionary work on the Asian subcontinent, and was asked, "What is the greatest difficulty you face in moving from India to England?" His answer was straight forward and carries with it a strong message. He said, "The disappearance of hope. Even in the most squalid slums of Madras, there was always the belief that things could be improved. In England, by contrast, it is hard to find any such hope." This world is a place where we can easily become despairing, yet we dare not be hopeless. The 1978 Bangalore Commission on Faith and Order described hope thus: "it is a resistance movement against fatalism. Those who believe in God know the power

of his love. It is this love that creates persons and societies."

All of us, from industrial and developing countries alike, should commit ourselves to a hope that refuses to accept an unjust and tarnished world order. God reigns. He wills only what is good for the world. We have a major responsibility as people committed to the survival of the global village. Political liberation has come to almost every nation on earth. Now we need to work afresh for spiritual and moral liberation, which brings wholeness of life. This may sound idealistic, but it is idealistic men and women who have shaped history in the past. They need to do so again. The need has never been as great for people to be shown that the new millennium offers hope, but it will depend on the world's leaders, acting decisively and with conviction in protecting resources, giving nations a fresh start, and by giving the lead for a new moral order.

Reference

Küng, H. 1997. *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*. London: SCM Press.