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# LISTENING TO VOICES OUTSIDE OUR GATE

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A pre-condition for emergence of true lasting peace in any given country is not merely the absence of internal conflict, but also the fruit of a harmonious interconnectedness of the community of world nations; hence, the compelling need for a global, networked, intentionally- concerted effort for genuine dialogue among religions, cultures and peoples. For dialogue to be possible we have to learn to listen respectfully the experiences of others.

Global peace is not possible unless and until Afghanistan, Iraq, Kashmir, the Middle East, Bosnia, South Africa, South Sudan, Durfur, and all the violence ridden parts of the globe live in harmony with each other, their neighbors and the environment.

### **911 - a new dimension of meaning**

September 11th 2004 and its aftermath marked a turning point in US history. The crippling fear that gripped humanity following the horrendous, unprecedented atrocities of that fateful Tuesday morning, and the insecurity that resulted from the anthrax scare that followed, are manifestations of all people's desire to live in peace. Those who live in North America have been taught to dial 911 in cases of emergency. September 11 has ironically added a new dimension of meaning to the phrase and number 911. On that bleak

day, Americans were rudely awoken from their "dogmatic slumber."<sup>1</sup> In a long time since the December 7th, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour,<sup>2</sup> it was the first time that baby boomers got a glimpse of fear, insecurity, uncertainty and suffering that is the bread and butter of the *hoi poloi* in many parts of the world. The innocence of the "baby boomers" and "generation Xers" was irretrievably shattered. Since then, the consciousness of many has been raised; they have been moved to identify and empathize even more with people who inhabit the trouble-torn countries of the world. Americans have come to a renewed awareness that they are part of the one human family, inhabiting a global village, that is in a state of flux and is still developing.

Those who perished in the twin towers were peoples of all races, sexual orientation, gender and nations. This terrorist act was an assault on humanity in its diversity. September 11 is a symbol of our traumatized, wounded, global village that is pleading with us to be made whole. There are times when some of our politicians, in their rhetoric, have given us a false impression that the value of one American life is worth hundreds of human lives elsewhere, as a way of justifying the expenditure of billions of dollars in military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, not to mention the sub-human treatment of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay Cuba. If we believe that all human life is universally sacred, then there is not one life, that is less sacred than the other. Even though a terrorist's action might have been sub-human, it does not warrant the perpetuation of their logic in treating them in a sub-human manner.

The spontaneous generosity and outpouring support of people, both in the US and abroad, for the victims of September 11 and the South Asia Tsunami of 2004 are affirmations that the human person is capable of tremendous self giving love, yet at the same time the atrocities of terror attack remind us of the human capacity for enormous evil. In this regard, a contemporary philosopher-theologian-economist has made the following timely observation: "To equip an animal with intelligence constitutes not only the possibility of culture and science, but also the possibility of every abomination that has occurred in the course of human history."<sup>3</sup> Viktor Frankl, the founder of Logotherapy and survivor of the Nazi concentration camps renders the same point, as follows: "since Hiroshima we know what is at stake, Since Auschwitz we know what human beings are capable of."<sup>4</sup> It is the irresponsible use of our free will, which makes us all continue to be afraid of one another.

## **Global Implications of Local and International Action**

September 11 is an invitation for each nation to pay attention to the global implications of past and present policies that have translated into local and international action. For instance, is it not ironic that September 11 was hot on the heels of the withdrawal of the US from the UN sponsored *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* that took place in Durban, South Africa on August 31 through September 7, 2001? Prior to that, President George W. Bush's administration refused to sign the Kyoto protocol that would have reduced the amounts of gas emission in the atmosphere, hence ensuring the safety and care of the environment.

Numerous examples of incidents akin and related to September 11, abound outside the gates of America: millions of people continue to languish in abject material poverty, due to political instability, resulting from the puppet governments left in place at the end of colonialism. During the cold war many *coup d'état*, either sponsored by the west or the communist block of nations, have yielded totalitarian and dictatorial regimes in the Southern Hemisphere. The Cold War and its negative economic consequences on third world countries is best witnessed from the failed experiments with various ideologies. Often, the execution of these horrendous acts is made possible through the complicity of persons outside one's national boundaries. This is the reason why our assertion is that the solution to global peace, has and must take into account the need for worldwide partnership and networking, as a positive dynamic force, for healing and recreating the world. This is not an endorsement of strategic military alliances, but a lesson to be drawn from the tactics of those who wage war.

Now than ever before, we clearly acknowledge the need for a global collaboration in the on going war against terrorism. September 11 makes it obvious that the reason for the urgency for a collaboration to defeat global poverty is because massive poverty disrupts the conditioned series of schemes which precipitates the emergence of global peace.

For those who admit the need for a higher viewpoint, military action is not enough, and is not the best way of defeating terrorism. For national political leaders it might be the immediate quick fix, providing a catharsis to those directly affected by acts of terror. Also it might be a way of persuading the electorate, that the incumbent regime is seen to be doing something to protect the lives of those who voted them into office. Yet history has shown that a military solution is a reactionary response, and not the needed

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long-term constructive, pro-active approach. As an inhumane form of retaliation it eventually leads to mutual extermination of the warring parties. Unfortunately, the most bitter lesson of war is learned posthumously, when the battle-field becomes one humongous grave-yard of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Our contention is that a worldwide alliance against economic poverty is one of the most effective ways of eradicating terrorism, and a means of achieving global peace. Hence the urgency of paying attention to voices outside one's gate. A person's action, whether deliberate or inadvertent, always has an impact on others. Hence the pertinence of the adage, "think globally act locally;" because actions will always be concrete and particular to a place and time, yet the implications of the thought that originated the action transcends the local situation.

Post September 11, has unveiled a prophetic epoch. A Kairos, i.e. opportune moment for all people of good will to take stock of how their actions, shaped inspired by their economic and foreign policies have contributed to global peace or lack there of.

There is a close link between massive poverty and its capacity for creating totalitarian regimes, generating violence and dissatisfaction among the poor. Communism exploited this connection to the hilt and now terrorism is doing likewise in their recruitment campaigns. One apt method of creating a true, lasting and permanent peace is to ensure that the conditions that create economic poverty are addressed and eliminated. If the richer nations truly want to get rid of terrorism and thereby establish global peace, they will have to take initiative in this regard by first learning how to listen to the voices of the economically oppressed third world countries.

## **Discourse on Culture**

A culture is a set of meanings and values that inform a common way of life. It is what makes us tick, and bond together as a distinct group, in a particular spatio-temporal geographical location. Every culture, nation, distinct group of people has its own unique linguistic expressions, jargon, symbols, written and unwritten norms, history, beliefs, and traditions. Yet, in spite of our particularities, the human experiences that make us laugh and cry, love and hope are the same for every human being.

Since the Enlightenment, discourse on culture in the West has been pervasively influenced by the over-arching classicist notion of culture. Such a notion presupposes and presumes that there is only one culture and one civilization to which all the varied peoples of the world have to conform. Every distinct group of persons on the globe are only considered cultured

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or civilized in proportion to how much of this classicist notion they have internalized:

The classicist notion of culture was normative: at least *de jure* there was but one culture that was both universal and permanent; to its norms and ideals might aspire the uncultured, whether they were the young or the people or the natives or the barbarians. Besides the classicist, there also is the empirical notion of culture. It is the set of meaning and values that informs a way of life. It may remain unchanged for ages. It may be in process of slow development or rapid dissolution.<sup>6</sup>

As long as the classicist notion is in prevalence and particularly when espoused by economic and international policy makers, the print and electronic media and those who are influential and have the skill of persuasion, then there is no need of listening to reality as articulated in other cultural forms, for there is but only one culture to which we already belong. During the imperialist era, western European powers imposed their languages and consciousness on the peoples they colonized. Climbing the ladder of success was only possible for those who understood this dominant narrative. Language is the kernel aspect of any culture. It is the totality of signs and symbols that a culture uses to express its uniqueness. Therefore learning a new language means imbibing a new culture. In this context, listening means paying attention to other cultures. It implies being attentive to both the descriptive narrative of their conscious memory and the explanatory differentiation of the fund of their polymorphic of consciousness.

The listening is to be extended beyond one's gates. The gates are manifested by the varied ways by which we identify or define, often in terms of relationships; for example the various spatio-temporal categories we use to limit our horizons or to classify the other. These frontiers vary from the national boundaries to virtual societies in the World Wide Web, religious affiliation, political-ideological persuasion, racial specificity, gender group, age group, generation, ethnicity, cast, economic class, profession, and cultural differences.

Up to now it is the so-called "third world" cultures that have done most of the listening. Notice that it is unfortunate that for lack of a better term, we all continue to use the sociological demeaning term, 'third world', which is a categorization that does not express the essence of what a person is, but rather what a person lacks economically. In essence we are not what we have or possess but human beings, created in the image and likeness of God. "History is written by conquerors to justify their conquest." In relation to our topic, listening means paying a respectful attention and understanding to the history of others, as narrated from their unique per-

spective.

One would think that given all the gains and advancement brought about by Information Technology, and all the wealth of data that we have at our finger-tips with a simple click of a mouse button, that it would make us better communicators and listeners; knowledgeable and respectful of other cultures. Unfortunately in the 21st century it has become increasingly difficult to be attentive even to oneself. Instead, the ordinary uncritical individual who has no time for private reading, and solitary reflection, is credulous of whatever he or she sees on TV, or read on the Internet. For most, seeing is believing. Instead of the electronic media being creatively used as a means of communicating truth and paying attention to others, it has become the main obstacle to listening to narratives of others. Some forget that the corporate media has an editorial policy; a clear agenda supporting the vision of their particular interest group and therefore biased towards other voices.

Leading up to the invasion of Iraq and coup over Saddam Hussein, we were distracted by the irresponsible, opinionated, propaganda-style journalism practised by some of our cable networks. This brainwashed the uncritically minded. Many are not aware that whenever a communication medium, and for that matter, a culture lacks self-criticism it becomes an irresponsible instrument; gullible and manipulative of the uncritical. The movie *The Running Man* and George Orwell's book *1984*, depict societies riddled with half truths, aimed at screening of memories. To overcome such warped views of reality, one needs to have a perspectival outlook, which Bernard Lonergan associates with the notion of cosmopolis.

... It is the business of cosmopolis to prevent the formation of the screening of memories by which an ascent of power hides its nastiness; it is its business to prevent the falsification of history with which the new group overstates its case ...as cosmopolis has to protect the future against the rationalization of abuses and the creation of myths, so it itself must be purged of the rationalizations and myths that became part of the human heritage before it came on the scene.<sup>7</sup>

With the exception of native-Americans, many people in the US trace their ancestry outside the borders of this, so called, "land of opportunity." America is a country of immigrants. The US is a great nation, because of pluralism, and support for ingenuity. To survive, each new generation of immigrants has had to learn how to interact with others and how to harness the environment to serve their needs. The US is one of the few nations that is keenly aware of the importance of pluralism, networking, and collaboration;

for the rest of the world to be at peace a similar dynamic is essential.

Due to historical reasons, difficulties of listening have further been compounded by the economically dominant cultures which know only one language. Up to September 11, the urgency and importance of learning other languages of the world by the general populace was not acknowledged. No wonder Dennis Baron, a columnist in the New York Times put it humorously by saying, "America does not know what the world is saying."<sup>8</sup> Dennis highlights the problem by saying that Americans do not understand the languages of their attackers, yet those who planned and executed the atrocities of September 11 understood English and the psyche of the American. He further observes that bilingualism is not widespread in the FBI or the CIA. That is why the FBI acknowledged that before the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre, it had in its possession tapes, note books and phone taps that might have provided warning signs but they failed to decipher them because they were in Arabic. Dennis concludes his timely remarks by asserting that "if we really want to understand the words of our enemies, not to mention those of our friends, we need to put more emphasis on learning languages and show more respect for the bilingual people in our schools and communities."<sup>9</sup>

## **A New Globalization**

Throughout the world there is a growing awareness of the need for a new Globalization. Not the current type of globalization which advocates for the transfer and control of the resources of the Southern Hemisphere to the North. Not the exploitative globalization as myopically understood that supported economies built on the surplus and cheap labour of capitalism. Not the economies that transfer natural resources: oil, diamonds and gold, from South Africa, Nigeria, Angola, and Zaire to the first world, without a just remuneration of the miners. Not economies built on unjust wages dolled out to the cash-crop farmers of Latin America, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Kenya, who do all the heavy lifting growing the tea and coffee that we drink, yet it is the European middle man who gets to be paid handsomely for the produce. Not to mention the poor working conditions and unjust wages dolled out to sweatshop workers.

A new Globalization acknowledges the need for a balanced use of the world's resources. The listening involved in a new Globalization is one that listens to the cry of the 'third world' for a rectificatory justice.<sup>10</sup> The minimum response would probably be debt forgiveness, yet the just will be to obtain complete restitution of what the West owes the third world. The

later would amount to restorative justice; reparation in monetary terms of the resources, which had been extracted from Africa, including retroactive compensation of farmers and miners; giving them their back wages. An acturist does not need the aid of a very sophisticated instrument to work out the accrued cost of the gold and diamond that lies in the vaults of many western banks, which had their origin in the third world through unjust transactions.

Listening to voices outside our gates admits the urgent need for a new globalization, perhaps a new cosmopolis, which celebrates the truth that we all share the same human dignity. We inhabit the same global village for which we have a collective responsibility, and this is what compels each to be responsible stewards of all the earth's resources, including the environment. Each local action has a lasting impact on the globe and therefore no single group is at liberty to guzzle up all the fossil fuels of the earth; ignoring its global implications and imbalance on the eco-system.

With respect to life forms outside one's frontier, there has been a scotosis,<sup>11</sup> an unconscious shortsightedness which has afflicted decision makers of the dominant cultures. They have failed to pay attention to the relevant possible questions regarding the global consequences of their actions, and blocked the possibility for these questions to arise in their consciousness, hence blocking the conditions for the emergence of the further supervening act of understanding called insight, which tackles squarely the whole problem of having limited interests.<sup>12</sup> Relatively speaking, policy makers at times appear to ignore the obvious, yet disturbing fact, that lasting peace is inseparable from justice; particularly, restorative justice: the righting of political historical wrongs.

The first phase of "operation enduring freedom" which has now lasted three years, cost tax payers two billion dollars a month to pay for the military action against the *Al-Qaeda* network based in Afghanistan. Leave alone the billions of dollars that will be needed to rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq when the military action is over. Not to mention the billions needed to reconstruct New York, the Pentagon, improvement of security at airports and compensation of the families of the victims of September 11.

Let us for a while imagine the following hypothetical, yet realistic scenario: supposing the billions used to pay for the war in Afghanistan and Iraq was used towards the Millennium Development Goals in poverty alleviation programs in third world countries. It would be a much more responsible and humane way of the US offering constructive leadership to the world of Nations. The profound consequences of such a positive non-violent action would translate into spontaneous routing of the conditions that

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create and support terrorist activity throughout the world. Such action if taken would be a more effective, long-term solution to terrorism, and a harbinger of the realization of Global peace that cannot happen without justice.

This is the *Kairos*, privileged moment in time, for the voices of the third world cultures to be listened to, because the cry of the innocent lives snuffed by September 11 is in resonance with their cry for life. The pain, terror and fear experienced by ordinary Americans is intelligibly understood against the background of third world peoples quest for freedom. This is an invitation to listen to the signs of the times, as embodied in the mournful cry of the citizens of the world, calling for restoration and restitution, and not retaliation. Listening to voices outside one's gate is a humble admission for the need for all cultures to complement one another. We know that reality is too vast for any one mind or even one culture: We need one another.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An expression borrowed from Immanuel Kant's reaction to David Hume's rejection of the principal of Causality.
- <sup>2</sup> Home page of the Naval Historical Centre. <http://www.history.navy.mil/> (last visited on January 23, 2007)
- <sup>3</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, p.219.
- <sup>4</sup> Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* Pocket: 1997
- <sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*.
- <sup>6</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p.xi.
- <sup>7</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, p.265
- <sup>8</sup> *The New York Times*, October 27, 2001 (Section A; page 19; Column 2; Editorial Desk)
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, in Jonathan Barnes, (ed), *The complete Works on Aristotle* Vol.2
- <sup>11</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 215
- <sup>12</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 3

