

Religiosity, the motor for a new Ethics

(A new expanding religiosity, foundation of the Ethics of the future)

I would like to thank, first of all, the Punta de Vacas Park Commission, who is hosting us and has allowed this very extraordinary Symposium to take place. My thanks go as well to the Center for Humanist Studies who came up with the idea of a meeting concerning such a fundamental issue such as Ethics, and especially to the friends of the Center of Studies of Mendoza, Santiago and Buenos Aires for their efforts.

I would like to accentuate that I am not a specialist in the area of Sociology or Comparative Religious Studies, but just a scholar interested in observing the great variety of social phenomena which are developing before our eyes. In order to understand, in part at least, their meaning and direction.

There is a great force living inside the Human Being and People. A force which has allowed history to overcome difficult moments and to produce jumps in evolution. A deep and powerful feeling living inside each person's profundity. A feeling which has allowed entire Peoples, in complicated situation, to launch themselves in the building of new civilizations, leaving behind dieing ones. We are talking about Religiosity.

Religiosity, as we understand it, is the search for meaning, an orientation towards a transcendent direction, an act of rebellion and of freedom.

It is an act connected to faith, but which cannot be confused with any specific religion.

It expresses itself more in attitudes, in mystical or social movements, in a clamour raised by people.

Historically, it is easy to observe how this feeling has opened up the path of evolution, allowing significant changes in the values and aspirations of People, or an entire region, in moments of deep crisis in different civilizations, and generating a new ethics. Sometimes this feeling transformed itself in thousand year old religions, others in civilizations or systems of thought, in others still; it remained alive in the heart of the Human Being as a profound hope.

Only think of Zoroastrianism, in Iran, which against all beliefs at the time established a new vision of the world. We find developments of this old religion, not only in the Persian Empire, but also in Christianity with the Manichaeist heresy, in Islam with the Sciites, up to today with the Ba'hai religion which has attained more than seven

million followers in just a few years.

We can refer to Buddhism, in India, which radically transformed ancient traditions, influencing the whole of the Far East. It generated numerous currents, of which some are still rapidly growing today, such as Soka Gakai in Japan and Europe, Falun Gong in China, persecuted by the Chinese regime. Both of them have achieved millions of followers.

We can also point to Christianity, which gave unity to the West and which still today multiplies in many currents and faiths in all continents. Islam, which today numbers perhaps the greatest number of practicing adherents and inside which certain orthodox and intransigent elements are fast growing.

But our observation on Religiosity's fermentation cannot end with the great historical religions. Without claiming to make a complete list, we would like to show the variety of widespread and unstructured phenomena in which today's Religiosity manifests itself, according to us.

It is certainly not surprising to find out that still today the most widespread religious practice is shamanism. Other than the regions it is traditionally tied to it is gathering new strength in a fast and unstructured way in Europe, North America and Latin America.

We also cannot omit the great present current with religious-like traits such as Spiritism, Occultism, New Age movement, Scientology, Jehova's Witnesses and all of the small and large movements we often meet in our everyday life.

It is possible to observe in the last ten years numerous cultural and social phenomena which, at a closer look, surely have the above mentioned traits: faith in something overriding the present state of things, a search for meaning, rebellion.

This was the case in the 60's young people's movement, in which the image of a return to some sort of "lost paradise", the search for freedom and rebellion mixed together. This phenomena, far from being extinct, lives on today in new generations all over the world.

This is also the case in the great proliferation of UFO sightings, entities which come from "another world" and which bring us hope of a luminous future. Hundreds of mystical movements are organizing themselves for the arrival of the new gods.

On the sidelines of the great historical religions, cults develop towards people, no longer living but to whom special powers are attributed. In Argentina, the case of the

Difunta Correa and Gauchito Gil are noteworthy and count on the participations of hundreds of thousands of people. In Italy, the case of Padre Pio stands out. He is venerated and is followed by millions of people, so much so, he was sanctified last year by the Catholic Church.

We could also mention as an example sports fans, though that could give rise to arguments. For them, the victory of their team merges with some kind of aspiration towards a new kind of state. It is impressive to observe how millions of persons all over the world follow with such passion the events of their teams and how thousands of athletes are more or less active in religious groups.

In a strictly cultural sense, movies and fantasy books very much in fashion in the 60's and 70's continue today with great success in the fantasy genre where "other worlds" overlap with the real world and only thus solve this world's problems. We cannot help noticing how many popular movies or TV series refer to the existence of life "beyond" death.

Religiosity then, accompanies us and continues to grow in individuals, populations, even though the media show us a world which seems to base itself exclusively on Stock Exchange quotations. It accompanies us and pushes us to overcome old schemes and old morals.

We can observe the symptoms of this search everywhere, in an intuition perhaps, which wants to free itself from the ill-fitting clothes of a dying world, to establish paths the human being will still be able to tread beyond the absurdity of this historical moment.

Because we cannot hide that this old world of ours is in a crisis and that the Human Being is on a search, sometimes struggling and without clear direction, of that which goes "beyond", of what faces the future and is capable of changing the present.

But I don't want to linger on the crisis, convinced as I am that we are all well aware of it, even though we live in different cultures.

I would rather, and here I come to what is for me the key point, highlight the fact that this great force we are talking about, Religiosity, has always been the foundation of all Ethics.

And it is in this profound feeling, which manifests itself today in so many different ways, where the Ethics of a new human civilization is being born, the Ethics of the Universal Human Nation.

We affirm; therefore, that there is already a search going on of this new Ethics; it is already on the way. But we also say that it seems fundamental that this “movement”, this great force in motion, is taking an evolutionary direction, a direction which once for all allows to overcome the violence of the world we live in.

As in the moments of great hardship and great inspiration of human history, a great force has been put in motion. Which direction will it take? That of fanaticism and destruction? Of superstition and magic? Of intolerance and violence?

Or will we be able to transform our fears, our beliefs, our morals, to go deeper, in the heart of our Religiosity and ask ourselves: what is really necessary for the Human Being in order to be free? Which new Ethics points us towards the future in a way which modifies sensibly our present?

We are speaking about the Ethics of the new times.

Of that Ethic which will give without any doubts foundation to human actions, whether they are personal, social, political, scientific, religious or profane.

We are speaking about that Ethic which sinks its roots in the deepest aspirations of the human being and which gains its strength from the living experience of the feeling of Religiosity.

An Ethic, which first of all opposes itself to violence in every aspects with a deeply nonviolent attitude. That will allow us to jump beyond this obscure moment of history founding the bases for a new, new truly human civilization.

An Ethics of coherent action, of valid action, where the foundation become one's experience of action, an ethics oriented towards overcoming pain and suffering in one's self and in those surrounding us, towards the growth of freedom in one's self and others.

Will we all scholars, politicians, women and men of culture, be able to listen to these signals and make our choice? Will we be able to give our sincere contribution to the birth of a new Ethics and find a direction of overcoming in such a complex time?

I believe this is the present great task waiting for us and which we cannot avoid.

Nothing else. Thank you very much.