

Point VI. The foundation for new social structures

When organising new social structures now considered adequate to build a more stable, peaceful society, it is sometimes dangerous to base them on other older structures, even though these may have been considered appropriate in their time. It is safer to build the foundations of these new structures on human geographic units. At the same time, the risk of these structures closing on themselves must also be avoided since this gives rise to all kinds of frictions and even wars.

The Letter of Peace does not question whether or not new social structures should be put in place. That is a matter for politicians and corresponding social advocacy groups to decide. What the Letter of Peace does do is organize the structures so that the pertinent parties may focus specifically on making the base for peace stronger and firmer.

Civil Society and Social Structures

By nature the human being is a social creature. However, this doesn't mean we have to idolize society as if it were responsible for providing us with all things indefinitely. Citizens should construct, organize, and mold society. They should do this cooperatively, thus merging the freedom of different groups and social bodies to the freedom of all citizens. In spite of the existing problems today and because peace is desired it is necessary to stop saying that there is nothing that can be done about it. We must come together by living responsibly and cooperatively. To know how to incorporate convenient peace provoking structures, in the spirit of solidarity, is civil society's grand task.

The structures that human beings use in social life are analogous to the steel beams and rafters utilized in the construction of buildings. When placed wisely these girders serve to organize the different spaces within the building.

Sociologist Salvador Giner¹, warns us of the complexity involved in defining the term *social structure*. He approximates its definition to *a relatively stable ensemble of interrelations or*

¹ S.GINER. *Sociologia*. Barcelona. 1998. p.68-73

interactions between its diverse parties following a dynamic order. This is to say that social reality is generated through human conduct and actions, their relations or their interactions. This concept then adheres to certain guidelines or institutions which we call structures; the very ones that establish the socially objective world that surrounds us. Basically the social interrelations are standard social actions that transcend the life expectancy of individuals.

From clan to urban community or from tribe to state, all communities must understand each other taking into consideration their particular location and their immediate environment.

This point of the Letter of Peace not only focuses its attention on the population of a given territory, it addresses the volume and density of its social groups. This is due to the impact quantitative variations have on important qualitative changes. This point is also linked to culture, political and economical conditions because they influence the demographic dynamic.

Adult Social Communities

Population is structured within a framework of groups and sub groups which can be considered units of structures. The structure operates on the basis of two fundamental groups: the community and the associative.

Today structures are being created nationally and internationally from within an array of academic, artistic, cultural, health, economic and political arenas just to name a few. Structures are also of pivotal importance in causes such as the preservation of the environment, the fight against drugs, and the quest to eradicate terrorism. All the above mentioned contemporary phenomena require a strictly organized social structure.

Outside the realm of public administration structures are also born from civil society, which, it is felt by many, should play a bigger role. Hence, new associations, federations, clubs, and other entities, many denominated as NGO's, (non-governmental organizations), continue to spring up.

Community

Community is the backbone of sociability. It comes about when a person engages in a basic, direct and emotional relationship with another person; such as my father, brother, partner, husband, daughter etc. It becomes established and coheres internally through the active engagement in emotions such as loyalty, affection, love, and membership to a group, etc.

The community abounds many groups, like: the nuclear family, the couple, a circle of friends, and common interest teams whether musical or sports related. Communities are the entities which give meaning to human life.

Association

An association or corporation occurs when the relationship between human beings is based on laws, institutions, and bureaucracies... Here the fellow human in the relationship is no longer my father or my brother; instead it is the doctor, the judge, the police officer etc. Membership depends on the position the person holds within the corporation. A corporation's structure does not revolve around the emotions of individuals. For example, a bank manager's employment connectivity is determined by his usefulness and efficacy.

These structures are limited because they are made by man. Their creators saw them as convenient at a given moment. However, sooner or later they will expire and become useless. During moments of great social and cultural change such as our present, it is normal that new social structures should habitually emerge (i.e. The European Union, MERCOSUR, and The Indian Ocean Commission).

It is necessary for these new social structures to be appropriate to the times.

The parties responsible for creating them must conduct honest and conscientious research on how and when such structures should be organized. History holds many examples of inefficient organizations or ones with shameful objectives.

It is quite desirable for new social structures to be destined in the construction of a stronger and more peaceful society. One of the many rights proposed during the International Congress for the Declaration of Human Responsibilities² celebrated in Valencia, Spain (1998) was one that establishes that "all jobs engaging human beings must directly or indirectly collaborate toward peace while never hindering it" In fact in order to attain peace, strong well structured societies are required.

The Base of Social Structures

It is common for those who oversee the implementation of social structures to wish to keep such structures in place and working well. In doing so they secure their positions; positions they do not wish to change due to comfort, fatigue, hunger for power, or other reasons. That is why

² <http://www.valenciatercermilenio.org>

they proclaim such structures as optimal and sometimes as the only ones on which new structures may be built upon. Hence, in order for these organizations to support new frameworks they must be reinforced.

The Letter of Peace does not affirm that it is impossible to base new social frameworks on existing ones; however it does state that doing so is often dangerous. The reason for this is that the existing structures were organized for other situations and thus lack the capacity to address new circumstances. In addition, many of said structures are not always free of specific ideologies or concrete and personal interests. It is easy to recognize historical examples with terribly painful outcomes³. It is unethical for certain social and political protagonists to place societies in unnecessary peril. If peace is desired basic social and cultural achievements must not be jeopardized. We must become magnanimous and search for the appropriate principles on which to edify adequate structures for society today.

Jordi Cussó⁴ explains this as follows:

“Any structure that coerces or hinders the freedom of people is one that obstructs peace. It is necessary that our present economic, social, and political structures be revised with peace in mind. They must not be revised in haste. We must decide which improvements we desire to make whether they are economic enhancements, being more competitive or achieving peace. If it is peace we desire, we will soon discover that people organize themselves in ways that provoke conflicts within life’s dynamics. Therefore, if the links of our structure are not well connected as soon as one link comes undone peace will be broken. So if we are truly pursuing peace we must ask ourselves if our current social structures are based on the desire for peace.”

Human Geographic Units

What the Letter of Peace affirms is that it is wiser to lay the foundations for new structures based on human geographic units. These are the social structures based on society’s natural and collective elements such as nations, ethnic groups, or other groups organized with liberty,

³ Examples available at: www.cartadelapaz.org/aulap/puntoVI

⁴ J. Cussó. “*Donde buscar las nuevas estructuras sociales*”.en *Barcelona en clave de pau*.

Barcelona, 1998. p. 99

solidarity, and respect for a person's dignity. These groups tend to isolate themselves; therefore to avoid this from happening appeals to an existential brotherhood must be made.

Indeed, social structures are based on society's natural elements and not artificial ones, possess concrete and specific objectives that are not easily modified. These human geographic units make up a more solid foundation on which to support new structures and address unpredictable future situations.

This is not to say that edifying new social structures solely based on human geographic units guarantees safety. Jordi Cussó⁵ explains in the following words that there are other aspects to be considered:

“Point VI of the Letter of Peace warns us of the risk of nations, groups, and communities generally provoking disputes, conflicts and wars by isolating themselves. For this reason, Point V expounds on existential brotherhood. The fact that we exist binds and bonds all human beings. Hence, there is a deeper reality, a common root among all humans. If we are unable to discover these roots that bind us to all others beyond our own, by merely existing, this blood bond can repeatedly become the cause for conflict and war.

Of course I must tend to my own; yet if I am capable of caring and being concerned for those who are far away, for strangers, I am sure I will take care of those who are closest to me and my best friends.”

The Letter of Peace focuses on where we base and support the social structures; because a society with fragile structures will become undone with the slightest of setbacks. A clear example of this today is the desire to construct a politically and economically united Europe. However, the question remains the same: Where should this new Europe be fostered? Because, depending on where it is supported it may be unable to deal with new and unpredictable questions that arise with unforeseeable force. Surely the pursuit of unity is desirable, but not when just based on economic or political reasons. Alone, these reasons can not lead to solid construction. Point VI of the Letter of Peace warns us that if we fail to create new social structures geared toward peace, sooner or later our structures will give way and society will crumble.

⁵ Op. cit. p. 97