

‘The hurt memory and thinking of tomorrow: Hiroshima 80 years after’

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Memory and the call to « make memory » appear as a determinant exercise of thinking, in order to elaborate, to write and to transmit our human history, from generations to generations. And so, not to forget. Memory is the foundation and the condition of hope.

When we remember, we pronounce the names of men and women who are in our memory and we open the way of a becoming, a way which has been closed by the act of death perpetrated by one man on other(s) and on our humanity. This act which is always in our mind, for we are, from the first man's son, able to kill our brother. To remember is to re-open a perspective – a horizon – which remains, for each generation, a source of anxiousness and questions, of risk and trust, a transcending of fear.

The exercise of memory could clearly appear as a paradoxical exercise, because it links, in the very instant when we try to remember, pain and faith : to try to believe in tomorrow when yesterday is in ourselves as an open wound.

Maybe this is true in all our personal and common dramas, our wars, our mourning and our misfortunes. The wound forever remains open and we understand, with the passing of time, that nothing could obliterate in us this trace of the desire for death, bound up for ever with our thirst for life. Here is what we feel when we make the anamnesis of the terrible acts which were the nuclear bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No violence, except the final solution and the nazi death camps, can be compared to this decision and this act : to decide and to bring about the death of another and, thereby, to destroy our humanity.

And here is the paradox of our thinking today: can we really make an act of remembrance of the unspeakable: the plan and the decision to put end to a world conflict by destroying our human community, symbolized forever by these two towns : Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Three generations later, we are still left with this question : the only question left standing amongst the ruins of our explanations : will we be able to find and pronounce and offer a word of compassion and consolation which could reach the hearts of others, beyond words themselves? For the question here concerns a presence given in silence. What we can offer ourselves and others, beyond intellectual interpretations, is to let our eyes meet and to listen to the fragile breath of those who share our history... a dignity and hope which belong to nobody... but which are like the morning light, the day after a genocide.

As Hannah Arendt said, at the end of her analysis of « The totalitarian system » (third part of her research about « The Origins of Totalitarianism » :

« Each end in our history necessarily contains a new beginning ; this beginning is the only promise, the only « message » that the end could ever give.

Beginning, before becoming a historical event, is the supreme human capacity ; politically, it is just like human freedom. « Initium ut esset creatus est homo » - to be a beginning the human being was created »

St Augustine said. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth ; it is really each human being. » (Hannah Arendt, « The totalitarian system », chap. 4 : ideology and terror ; a new type of political model »)

To remain awake, while the powerful pursue their blind and immoderate pretensions, as the French philosopher Jean-Yves Jolif said (in his reflexion about « To understand the human being », in 1971)

« He who doesn't expect much from human beings is also the one who easily accommodates perverse situations. If we have nothing to hope for, why should we challenge what is ? But such cynicism makes it impossible to understand humanity »

What do we want to say, today ?

We do know that the bomb, exists as a construct in our minds before being built in our armaments factories and then sold, with impunity and in a criminal perspective, to countries wishing to preserve their political autonomy... The philosopher Karl Jaspers said, in his time, that « we have 14 possibilities to destroy completely our planet... But one possibility is sufficient ! ». Today, how many capacities of destruction of the planet do we have?

In this context, what do we want to tell ? to our children, to the poorest people in our world ? As heirs to half a century of hope for peace and human rights, what can we say to our leaders, in this world which is at war again ? How can you reach the human capacity for understanding, in our globalized culture in which the other - in all the historical, cultural, moral and religious aspects of otherness - appears for many as unwelcome... and when political power says « I » and not “we”, according to a possessive individualism...

What do we say, as world citizens, even as we have in our hands, treaties and instruments of international and humanitarian law, always fragile but very real ?

What do we want to say, in these moments when powerful states and governments scoff at such commitments, which are essential for the future of the international community ?

The question is really the authority of these treaties and the required awaking to be sure they are respected and renewed ...

The central consideration – and it is another paradoxical approach – is really to tell violent people : we need the other(s) to become who we are. The other and the others are our richness : we become together !

About deterrence itself, it remains – let us to say it clearly – a terrible illusion, for we know that the challenge is not to maintain fear but to accept to meet one another. But to meet requires that we believe in the other : to consider his/her capacity and talents... to believe also in ourselves and to consent to be touched by this common humanity which binds all of

us... To generate fear always leads to escalation and to hatred of the other as well as of ourselves.

Only the word is great because it is a way.

The late Pope Francis pronounced this strange but so true reflection, in his message for the World Day of Peace, on 1st of Ja

May we seek the true peace that is granted by God to hearts disarmed: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world. (Francis, 1st of January 2025)

In his Encyclical « Fratelli tutti » « All brothers and sister » (October 2020), the same Shepherd and tireless messenger of peace, clearly denounced « the production of arms – and particularly nuclear weapons – that we finally used » and which always leaves the world in a worse situation... » « War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil. . » (F.T. n° 261)

All these reflections are inspired by what we call the catholic social teaching (or the « social ethics from the Gospel »). Already, in 1963, the Pope John 23, wrote in his Encyclical « Pacem in terris » (« Peace on the earth »)

« When society is formed on a basis of rights and duties, men have an immediate grasp of spiritual and intellectual values, and have no difficulty in understanding what is meant by truth, justice, charity and freedom. They become, moreover, conscious of being members of such a society. And that is not all. Inspired by such principles, they attain to a better knowledge of the true God—a personal God transcending human nature. They recognize that their relationship with God forms the very foundation of their life—the interior life of the spirit, and the life which they live in the society of their fellows”.

We have only one « good » we share, only one « common good » : peace by word and by law. Contempt of international and humanitarian law appears as the hidden face of nuclear deterrence, because contempt for the law leads to the use of weapons. It is the way to loose trust – which is shared faith. All that is so fragile, we know that and the symbol of the paper bird that the Hibakusha wear and show to us is clear : life is beautiful but so fragile. And we remain in mourning since August 1945...

From deterrence which is « maintained fear », the first step towards violence... to the risk of trusting, there is however one step : the step of the Word : the word we received and the word we can – again and always – give one another

« In the beginning was, is and will be the Word »