

St. Stephen's College/Sept. 28/12

Some 36 years ago, St. Stephen's College honoured me by making me an honorary member of your community. Now I'm privileged to be back with you. We're not getting older, we're getting better! Well, at least St. Stephen's is. Through the years, you have enhanced your ability and reputation as a vibrant ecumenical community offering sacred spaces for learning and transformation. Your theological education courses are grounded in the highest standards of social and ecojustice, mutual respect for diverse cultures, a commitment to honouring feminist perspectives, and freedom to explore theology and spirituality. You are, in short, a gem in the education constellation of Canada.

I come before you as a politician offering my humble theology of the street. I have never thought that politician and theology are oxymorons, for surely the study of the nature of God can be done from the public arena. I do not believe that God created the world in order for it to be blown up by nuclear weapons, sullied by environmental degradation, or huge numbers of its inhabitants denied the fundamental requisites of human life and dignity. The God of my vision inspires me to seek social justice and the peaceful resolution of conflict. When Jesus said,

“Blessed are the peacemakers...,” he enabled me to feel a union with God, and it is in that spirit that I dare to come before you today with my own theology of the street.

For me, a theology of the street is all about the global conscience, a way to reach out for something greater than myself. Working on the human security agenda -- nuclear disarmament, sustainable development, protection of the environment, and advancing human rights -- is the way I relate to God, the way I think I understand better his plan for creation. He has left us free to choose creativity or chaos. My theology of the street is not just about God and me; it is about God and the world.

The new global conscience challenges us to deal with the over-arching questions of our time:

- Why is there so much starvation when there is so much food in the world?
- Why are we polluting the atmosphere and waters and producing global warming when we have the technology to avoid this?
- Why do we tolerate the existence of nuclear weapons, which threaten to destroy the processes of life?
- Why do we have the United Nations and then refuse to empower it to stop wars and end starvation?

The answers to these questions are not yet sufficiently strong to overcome an unjust world economy, world disorder, and the undermining of human rights and the rule of law. Perhaps the world will still have to endure yet more wars, more religious extremism, and a wave of nuclear proliferation. But the very forces of nature, business, communications, and world politics are building up a single society. The chief characteristics of this society are its common humanity and the need for a common law.

Today, all religions, in a spirit of humility and service, should, with a united voice, loudly proclaim their support for the U.N. global strategies of disarmament, development, equity, and justice – which are the basis for a culture of peace. Religions should remember that here on Earth, we have the responsibility to continue and protect God’s plan of creation. The preservation of the planet must be assured as a first step in the expression of our love for God. Religions will not lose by joining enthusiastically with secular humanists in the promotion of a global ethic that centres on the well-being of humanity. Religions will then truly be in the service of God.

A global ethic to solidify the culture of peace cannot be achieved by either secular humanists or the religions talking only among themselves. It will take an enormous push by the combined forces of civil society. Religions have a duty to work

alongside the representatives of politics, business and the financial world to foster the recognition that a global ethic is necessary for the survival of the world.

As one who has worked in the public arena for more than 40 years, I know all about cynicism, which never seems to go out of fashion. I am used to being called an idealist, but I say to you tonight that it is the idealists – those who believe that God’s planet was meant to be a place with a reasonable amount of social justice -- who are the realists because we know that a two-class world in which the 1 percent at the top of the economic ladder dominate the 99 percent is not survivable. Cynics today cannot match the power of a critical mass of people across the planet awakened to a new understanding that can prod governments to move forward on equitable policies for food distribution, clean water availability, decent sanitation, properly equipped medical clinics, and sufficiently funded education systems. Critical thinking can move the leaders of commerce to accept that sustainable business is good business and that protecting the environment is not a cost issue but a human survival issue.

I know it’s hard some days to think that the world is actually getting to be a better place. Terrorism, street-fighting, and human suffering are a staple of the news every day. We need to hear more of the creativity of countless persons and organizations that are

lifting up society: those who care for the most vulnerable, those who educate students for a better tomorrow, those who work in the public arena to produce more humane laws.

It cannot be denied that we are strengthening international and humanitarian law. Violence, compared with the world wars of the 20th century, is declining. Global conscience keeps driving us forward to a world of greater care and mutual respect. Violence, war, greed still assault us. But the body of humanity, elevated in its spirit, mind and capacity to act, grows stronger. The stirring and movement of this body provides new hope for humanity.

Our faith and our hope strengthen us for the way forward. The path is lit. God is calling us.