

## **EASTER TIME: TIME TO PAUSE, REFLECT AND GET READY FOR A RENEWAL**

I take up the challenge launched by Professor Massimo Caneva, AESI's president, through his call for reflection on the subject of ethics in international relations, by formulating a series of thoughts on the fundamental context in which international relations take place.

The most important premise is that the human being is made up of mud and heaven: somebody who has his/her feet well mired in the stark contingencies of earthly life, while at the same time looking up towards a moral set of principles and values. The grimmest egoism was at the beginning necessary for the mere physical survival of the individual. Only subsequently, with the passage of centuries and millennia, that instinct has slowly given way to a more elaborate principle able to encompass the survival and well being of others beyond the immediate circle of the most intimate natural association of people, which is the family. Only the creation of a real, effective human society, increasingly organized in a structured state, has allowed for the attenuation of egoistic, aggressive instincts and for the development of a collective dimension. But, deep inside, human nature has not radically changed since time immemorial.

It is the building of a society, with its agencies, rules and encroachments upon individual prerogatives, the ultimate pillar of the transformation of human beings into civilized people. And when societies collapse – history attests to that so many times – their members risk reverting to the old habits of absolute egoism.

According to some authoritative scholars, the strength of states is strictly connected with the robustness of their respective national institutions, politically, economically and socially speaking.

I have always been struck by the realization that when states, through their representatives, interact in the international arena, they always resort to the most simplistic criteria of behavior which, if compared to those prevailing in a national society, would be considered childish and primitively elementary. Those criteria are based on brutal aggression and defense, acquisitiveness, outright protection of exclusive interests, deception and concealment. Only rarely under exceptional circumstances the spirit of cooperation seems to prevail.

Why is that so?

Simply because there is no international society as such but only a "fiction" of it in which international law – though indispensable – is so elaborate as it is not enforceable for lack of a centralized authority endowed with sufficient force and the legitimization to use it.

Unremitting efforts, though subject to periodical relapse into paralyzing contradictions, were deployed particularly since the end of World War I in order to attain that result. But in the second post war period all the formulas which have prevailed (East/West confrontation, bipolarity, USA unipolarity, multipolarism) did not prove to be efficient enough to bring acceptable, durable and just stability to the world. The present state of affairs has even witnessed a reversal, in the so-called world order, towards more divisions, fractures and instability. All the great acquisitions, on the level of international norms, of the last sixty years are now under increasing threats. The features of a more robust international society, which have been mutually reinforcing themselves for at least a part of the post war period, seem now on the verge of becoming ineffectual.

What to do?

The objective remains the same.

- 1- Strengthen the present inadequate international community on the institutional level by reforming or creating new agencies which offer a renewed context for cooperation among nations. Multilateral agencies should not become instruments for the major powers to assert their privileged status; they should instead be the forum where all countries, starting from the smallest ones, feel treated equally and their respective interests taken care of in an equitable way.  
Whenever international contingencies arise leading to dramatic circumstances (situations like Bosnia and Rwanda) where the life of thousands of people entrusted to the protection of UN military personnel is under threat of physical annihilation, the Secretary General of the UN should charge the “Blue Helmets” with the task of safeguarding in all possible ways those people, even going beyond the bureaucratic mandate received by the Security Council. That attitude could enhance definitively the role of the United Nations and function as a valuable precedent in the path towards the configuration of a world Authority, strong enough as to speak on behalf of humanity.
- 2- Facilitate the insertion in the international community of more subjects of non-national nature (principled organizations based on the defense of specific rights, humanitarian NGOs) which might validate the concept that there are interests going far beyond the limits of states’ expectations and so envisioning the needs of the entire humanity.
- 3- Act, in the internal arena of each country, in such a way as to promote the ideals of a more inclusive world order and control democratically the attitude of national leaders when they perform duties concerning the international sphere.
- 4- On an individual basis, increase the personal awareness of international issues and, in the case of an individual inclination towards some sort of diplomatic or international profession, study and prepare himself/herself thoroughly and with a moral involvement.
- 5- Support generously those religious leaders (such as the Roman Pontiff) when they address problems of vast international significance because their message stems from the depth of history and knowledge of human nature.

The road towards the edification of a real international society is a long one. Some steps have already been taken. It will not be the work of one generation. The present “deadlock” caused by the coronavirus crisis and the ensuing scenario of possible radical transformations of some aspects of the international community offer good opportunities for recommending the various contributions that individually and collectively can be made with a view of creating a real family of nations.

AESI, with its extremely small human resources but its deep dedication, fits well in this worldwide endeavor.

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