

## Reflection for January 2019 Peter Millar

### **\*\*\* The Vision of Hans Kung for the year ahead.**

The British translation by John Bowden of the German theologian's "Global Responsibility: In search of a new world ethic" was published by the SCM Press in 1991. For many of us it was a seminal book in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The world nearly 30 years on is a very different place. We stand at a certain kind of brink in global affairs, framed by climate change, fake news, wars and dictators. For my six young grandchildren and for their generation the future is entirely unknown. This week at the annual Davos Forum (to which 1,500 private jets carried some of the richest on the planet) the naturalist Sir David Attenborough in a dialogue with Prince William said in relation to climate change that we can wreck the natural world with ease, without even noticing it but in doing so we wreck ourselves.

Hans Kung's influential book was based on the idea that without a global world ethic, civilisation will not survive. He rightly pointed out that without a basic consensus, involving a minimum of common values, norms and attitudes freely chosen and holding within them a planetary responsibility our human future is bleak. Let us be reminded of his vision as we contemplate our world in this year of grace 2019. Here are some of what Kung calls our "post-modern requirements" for civilisation to remain intact. Of course there are many more, but these are core necessities.

**\*\*\* Not just freedom, but also justice. \*\*\* Not just equality, but also plurality. \*\*\* Not just brotherhood, but also sisterhood. \*\*\* Not just coexistence, but peace. \*\*\* Not just productivity, but solidarity with the environment. \*\*\* Not just toleration, but ecumenism.**

We are a long way from experiencing what Kung calls "a global ethic" but many around the world are seeking such a vision in order that future generations may survive. Yet such an ethic also demands peace among religions which always involves dialogue between the religions. And it is to be hoped that the religions of the world, as they search for understanding of each other, will also be in the forefront of the global campaigns to save the natural world which is God's creation.

### **\*\*\* Lyudmila Alexeyeva**

Lyudmila Alexeyeva the well-known Russian human rights campaigner died recently at the age of 91. Many in the West did not know her name but for 60 years her typewriter was one of the symbols of the bravery and enterprise of those dissidents who resisted Soviet communist persecution. Back in the 1960's she volunteered to begin typing a Chronicle of Current Events, an underground samizdat publication that reported on the treatment of those who were attempting to challenge the Soviet regime's monopoly of power and strict censorship. For years she worked tirelessly to restore in reader's minds the idea of telling the truth about Soviet society uncorrupted by propaganda and political terror. She said that working on the publication, "meant to pledge oneself to be faithful to truth: it meant to cleanse oneself of the filth of double- think, which has pervaded every phase of Soviet life." In recent years as Putin tightened his grip, she found new causes to champion such as opposition to his actions in the Chechen war, his annexation of Crimea and his governments attacks on journalists, activists and those for gay rights. Let us salute this brave spirit and all the others who with courage and commitment speak and write words of truth and goodness in our time. In the years ahead the articulation of a grounded moral vision will be a world-wide imperative.

### **\*\*\* From Raphael Houessou**

Lord, you are God of all Europeans, all Americans, all Asians...you are also my God – me an African – me, a Beninois. Lord, I want to sing, dance and look radiant with happiness, but alas the wars on my continent, AIDS, poverty and malaria are destroying my brothers and sisters. Instead of joy there is sadness, fear, sorrow and anxiety. Lord, I am confused but not downtrodden because for me, an African, an Beninois, you are my God and Jesus your Son, who died and rose for me, my Saviour. He is my eternal hope. And the hope of all the peoples here and in Europe and in America and in Asia and everywhere on earth.

### **\*\*\* Our sisters and brothers**

Some words from a Canadian aid worker in Africa who writes... what do I see here day by day? The infinite colours and patterns, the reflections of a rich culture, a deeply rooted connection to the land. I see the reflection of the Spirit of a people who cannot be crushed – not by slavery, not by modern colonialism, not by the brutal structural “adjustment” programmes that are thought up in plush offices far away. I see an incredible resilience in people; an irrepressible sense of fun and humour in the ways the children and gossiping women tease me. An aristocratic dignity, and fierce awareness in the high-boned faces of burdened women stepping elegantly around raw sewage and truck effluent.

I am a white man – white as enriched, imported French flour. I am respected for my money, knowledge, experience. I am not rich in humanity. I am not wise. I am not developed. Here I am secure in my first-world privilege, locked in my Landrover, protected by my mefloquine, bottled water, credit card and open-ended air ticket. What experience do I possess of living with death every day, of creative survival, of incredible good-humoured patience, of real hope, of dazzling resurrection? I feel like a child here. What do I have to teach these people? The truth is very different for I have the world to learn from them! To start understanding what living is really about.

### **\*\*\*Our Stories**

Telling our stories is a political act. Without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories we don't learn the value of our struggles or comprehend our pain. Without stories we cannot understand ourselves. We are closed in silence. Yet when we begin to speak of the real truths inside us we start out on that long journey of walking with others, lovingly and unmasked.

### **\*\*\*Isaiah's Truth - Isaiah 43: 1-4**

**Do not fear for I have redeemed you: I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and the rivers will not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned. You are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.**  
Isaiah 43; 1 - 4

### **\*\*\*End note by Adrienne Rich**

**My heart is moved by all I cannot save; so much has been destroyed. I have to cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.**

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