

4

L O O K I N G A H E A D

WITHOUT TAKING YOUR EYES OFF YOUR TOES

(Paulos Mar Gregorios, India)

Please do not walk ahead. There are several ditches right in front of you. You may look ahead across the ditches; but if you want to move ahead to what you see, you better first find effective strategies to cross those ditches. Otherwise you will just end up in a ditch. That certainly was not your intention in trying to look ahead. The Third Millennium of our era stands across those ditches and beckons. I would here simply like to identify three of these ditches. I have no strategy to propose for crossing them.

National-Ethnic Identity

The modern nation-state is hardly four centuries old, if the Peace of Westphalia(1648) is to be taken as its date of birth. In every nation the state or the establishment teaches its citizens that the interests of people born in or immigrating into a given geographical territory or nation-state are to be given special preference over the interests of people elsewhere. The nation-state thus becomes a sort of property-holding group, ready to go to war to protect or advance its interests which are often inimical to the interests of humanity or of other nations. They will go to war, erect tariff walls, engage in destabilisation tactics

abroad, overlook injustice in friendly nations and castigate unfriendly nations who practice the same or other kind of injustice, all to defend the so-called interests of its citizens.

How come that the victim of a flood in Dallas gets a disproportionately larger amount of assistance from the state in relation to what a similar victim of floods in Bangladesh can get, despite the fact that the latter's loss is worthy of more compassion because of greater helplessness? How come that a ceramic worker in China gets a much lower reward for his labours which have produced something of greater value, than a German labourer producing weapons of destruction in an armaments factory in Germany? The nation-state as a bestower of privilege to the people within its territorial boundaries seems to me an idea whose time is gone.

Crossing that ditch of national sovereignty seems quite arduous. But national sovereignty is a lie, a hangover from the days of imperialism. No nation is in fact sovereign, though some nations like to act as if its interests were sovereign. The lie should be exposed and dissipated. It is time that we developed and promoted a new idea that goes far beyond that of national sovereignty. That new idea is "responsible global community of nations". In this concept, no nation can be sovereign: every nation is member of a global community and responsible to it, and through it to humanity as a whole. The very idea of sovereignty is obsolete, because it is the antithesis of freedom, community and responsibility. Not even humanity as a whole can be

plants and to the life-promoting environment; it is responsible also to that Source from which it derives its very existence, and by Which alone it can exist. Sovereignty is a false concept. Even God does not exercise it.

What is strange today is that people are forsaking their national identities only to resort to much narrower identities like ethnic, religious or tribal. Yugoslavia and the U S S R are prime examples of the break-up of the larger national identity. There is an important lesson to be learned here. On the one hand we must move beyond national identities; on the other hand, we need sufficiently manageable smaller identities; being just a member of a common humanity somehow does not satisfy the need for the security of one's identity. Each human being has several identities: family, ethnos or race, gender, language, territory, profession, nationality and so on. These need not be abolished; they all need to be brought into one single open, creative, integrative, non-exclusive identity. This is what we call a responsible, global human community of nations. Within this larger framework, every smaller identity can be conserved, so long as it is open and non-exclusive, and be made creative and productive for the whole. So, in crossing the ditch of national sovereignty, we do not abolish national or even narrower identities; we simply put them in touch with a dynamic global human identity.

Secular Civilisation and Its Institutions

public life for granted. We need first to have some grasp of how the idea of the secular landed on our laps. It is, in the form in which most nations use it today, a European creation. In the seventeenth century when Europe began to be confronted with the need for accepting and living with religious diversity, which in fact amounted only to a Protestant-Catholic duality, the European state took the secular road, primarily as a reaction. What was established at the Treaty of Westphalia (terminating Europe's major internal religious war between Catholic and Protestant states from 1618-1648) was the principle of a mono-religious state, replacing that of a mono-religious Europe, which the decaying Holy Roman Empire could no longer sustain. Cuius regio eius religio, in fact means that every citizen is under legal obligation to follow the religion of the King, and also to change one's religious affiliation every time the King changes his. The principle, basically unjust, undemocratic and undignified as it was, failed to work even after the Thirty Years War had ended. Europe fell into religious, moral and economic as well as political chaos and anarchy after the principle was established. It is interesting that the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, which established the opposite of the principle of the secular state, was among the first to use the word 'secularisation' in history - denoting by that term confiscation of church property and making it public property.

The notion of the 'secular state' is a specific creation of the European Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries, in repudiation of both the mono-religious

state religion) principle which replaced it in 1648. In order to solve the problem of Roman Catholic states and Protestant states fighting each other, the new principle of the 'secular state' was established, by which religion was no longer to be connected with the state at all and therefore supposedly not a ground of conflict among them.

The so-called separation of Church and State was first proposed as a way for enabling warring European states to live together in peace. The 'secular state' has not, however, in actual fact, been able to conserve the peace in Europe. Before the establishment of the secular state, religion only **seemed** to be what the European states were fighting each other about. The real causus belli was conflict of economic interests, and religion was only a mask. That is why the secular state has not been able to put an end to war.

But the principle of the secular state has done something enormously significant to humanity's religious consciousness. It is this impact that we should now begin to assess at the end of the second millennium, in order to find a principle for the state which goes beyond that of the 'secular state'. We can here give only some pointers for such an assessment of what the secular state has done to the consciousness of humanity.

First by driving out religion from political institutions, from schools, colleges and academies as well as from hospitals, and from the public media, we have managed *to give, not only to our children, but to our own selves as*

they not teach it in the school?" It is a curious fact that while 80 percent of the world's people today adhere to one religion or another, and it plays such an important part in their lives, both consciously and unconsciously, the ideology that rules in our public institutions is that of the 20 percent who profess no religion. This marginalisation of religious faith and the domination of the secular ideology in our public life has radically distorted religion itself.

Driven out from public life, religion, which is naturally corporate and communitarian, becomes a matter of individual preference for which the individual is solely responsible. This privatises and individualises religion and deprives society of access to its benefits except through individuals and their personal contributions.

We need today a kind of state which neither prescribes the religion I should pursue, nor drives it out from the public realm altogether. This is possible only when the state itself assumes some responsibility to promote the more open and humanitarian aspects of all religions and discourages their antihuman and sectarian political uses. The state is not to control religion, but actively to promote the more humanitarian elements in all religions. Religion should thus be given an opportunity to be a positive factor in public life rather than being excluded from it. Without religion, of course with some necessary refinements, becoming central to public life, we can have little hope of breaking free from this secular stranglehold on our public life. Reli-

need a new and refined matrix produced by all the religions and the secular ideology in a community of dialogue with each other and in common search for the creation of a new civilisation. Out of such a matrix and not out of the secular culture alone can emerge the basic elements for a new, more free, more creative and more human civilisation on earth.

Liberating Science/Technology

Science/Technology, that inseparable pair, is the hallmark of the civilisation in which we now live. Without the conditions created by secular civilisation, science/technology could not have triumphed the way it has. But without that sci/tech this civilisation of ours could not have achieved what it has. The secular civilisation and science/technology reinforce each other and seem to be symbiotic.

The third ditch we have to cross on our way ahead would be the one where we find science/technology a prisoner of war and profit. Sci/tech can resolve many of the problems facing humanity, like malnutrition, poverty, lack of housing and health care, illiteracy, floods and famines, epidemics and so on. But this can happen only when the control of science/technology passes over from the defence establishments, from arms traders and from corporations out to make the quick buck.

Science/Technology today is no abstract

its own power elites and has a lobby power equal to that of the Church in medieval Europe. One can seldom manage to challenge its authority and get away with it. With all the power at its disposal, however, it is not able to solve the problems of humanity. To do that it must be liberated from the control of its present masters and brought under the responsible control of a responsible public (not the politicians, God forbid!). Only a vigilant and informed public can set that liberation process in motion. We better find a strategy to do that before the Third Millennium dawns.

** ** ** ** ** **

There certainly are many more ditches, some offering considerable resistance. The determination with which we face the three we have mentioned will need to be applied to these other ditches as well. The important thing is to start.