

# Higher Education for the Third Millennium

T.A. MATHIAS, s.j.\*

**W**e are now just three years away from a watershed: the end of the second millennium of recent human history and the opening of the third. For Christians, this is also the 2000th anniversary of the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Son of God in our midst, an event which marks a real turning point in human history. Certainly 2000 will also represent *a culmination of many recent events and trends.*

As I see it, the end of the 20th century is marked by four major historical processes or revolutions which will reach their culmination in the 21st century. These are the *ideological<sup>1</sup> revolution of egalitarianism*, the *technological and scientific<sup>2</sup> revolution*, the *electronic information transmission<sup>3</sup> revolution* and the *market economy<sup>4</sup> revolution* which has swept the entire world. Let me say a few words on two of these revolutions: the Egalitarian Revolution and the Market Revolution.

## 1. THE EGALITARIAN REVOLUTION

The egalitarian revolution has been least appreciated in recent times, but in fact, it may account for much of the disorder, dislocation and social tensions throughout the globe. It is because of certain perceptions of equality and justice that there are violent upheavals in Northern Ireland, Israel, India, Pakistan, Yugoslavia. Much of what is called 'terrorism' is the result of people believing, rightly or wrongly, that equality and justice have been denied them.

This sense of equality has been fostered by the communication revolution and the rapidity of modern travel which has shrunk the world into a global village. The inauguration of international organizations like the United

---

\*Fr. T.A. Mathias is Professor at XLRI, Jamshedpur.

Nations and its numerous agencies has brought people into daily contact on a footing of equality in a way that was unthinkable before World War II. The frightful and destructive power of modern weaponry and the exploration of outer space have made it imperative for people to understand one another. Finally, economic and industrial activity is no longer centered in a few European and American nations with all others playing a satellite, peripheral role. New industrial powers are rising in several countries; global trade has reached unheard of proportions touching off fierce competition between the old and the new industrial powers. On the other hand, there is also growing international collaboration, witness the GATT agreement between 104 nations and the setting up of a World Trade Organization (WTO).

### **Cultural Unification and Global Values**

The egalitarian revolution has made it possible for Global Ideas and Values to emerge today. Even the concept of Global Values would have been unthinkable just 100 years ago, when different national societies lived in isolation from one another and each nation was quite convinced of the superiority of its own people, its own culture and values over those of any other country.

Today, as Saul Mendlovitz says very well, "It is necessary to seriously accept not only the rhetoric but also the reality of the term '*the global village*'. The fact that the overwhelming majority of humankind understands for the first time in history that human society encompasses the entire globe, is a phenomenon equivalent to the acceptance of the fact that the earth is round rather than flat."

We are, therefore, confronted with a world which for the first time in human history has the possibility of evolving something akin to a world culture and globally acceptable values. The cultural unification of the world is reflected in ideas and values, and also in many other areas such as music, cinema, sports. Pop singers, like *Michael Jackson* are heroes to teenagers in places as far apart as Holland, Hong Kong, Bombay, Moscow, Seoul, Rio de Janeiro and Paris.

That global values have already been achieved to some extent, is indicated by the universal acceptance of the UN charter; ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by a majority of nations and the numerous other conventions and agreements signed and accepted by a majority of nations. *All these agreements are based on five factors:* (a) a value system which recognizes the equality of all men and women regardless of race, culture, education, economic or social situations; (b) the supremacy of the rule of law over the might of individuals or nations; (c) the concept of individual freedom and human rights; (d) the need for justice: national and international; (e) the idea that certain of the world's resources (e.g. in the sea, in Antarctica) are '*the common heritage of all mankind*', which must be exploited for the benefit of all people, whether they have the ability to exploit them or not.

### **The Market Economy Revolution**

A truly extraordinary phenomenon of the last few years is the world-wide acceptance of the market economy as the only way to prosperity and growth. Never before in history has such universal agreement prevailed. Surely socialism corresponds to the finest instincts of the human heart. That is why it was spontaneously embraced by the early Christians; that is why every religious order or community practices it in one form or another. The famous Marxian principle: "To each according to his need, from each according to his ability" is the principle on which every decent family is run. Why then, did the system come crashing to the ground? Simply because socialism, as implemented in Communist Eastern Europe and China was an aberration going against the most fundamental urge of human nature, the hunger for political, economic, religious and cultural freedom.

### **Five Universal Values**

I believe, there are today five values, in addition to the concept of equality, which are universally accepted, at least by thinking men and women. These values are likely to form

the *basis of World Society in the third millennium*. They are: (1) Peace, (2) Economic well being, (3) Social Justice, (4) Ecological stability, and (5) Positive Identity. The opposites of these would be war, poverty, social injustice, environmental destruction and alienation. One way or the other, these values or their opposites come up in every international forum and are embodied in every internationally accepted convention, agreement, or declaration. In fact, we could safely say that no international convention or declaration will be accepted if it clearly defies even one of the above values.

These values obviously have profound moral and spiritual roots, and since they are accepted the world over, every culture (even those that in the past did not accept one or other of these values) has to pay obeisance to them. Similarly, even religions have to show that these values are part of their own world view and their vision of man.

### 1. *Peace*

Peace is not just the absence of conflict, but also implies mutual understanding between people, sharing of cultures, values and material goods. True peace, includes four elements which should be applicable to all the groups in a national society and all nations in the world. These are equity or justice, autonomy instead of dependence, participation instead of marginalization and solidarity between groups.

### 2. *Economic Well-being*

The second universal value is Economic Well-being. Economic Well-being is now perceived as a basic human right. No more is it acceptable that one group of individuals or nations are to be hewers of wood and drawers of water so that other groups or nations may live in luxury. Division of labour, based on such things as caste or social status, is no longer meekly accepted. Today most people believe that only free enterprise and a *market economy* can produce economic well being because of the freedom on which they are based.

However, the collapse of communism should not be considered as the definitive vindication of capitalism.

Western capitalism or, indeed, any political or economic system cannot stop the progress of history. Capitalism can only draw temporary comfort from the disintegration of the socialist state. Capitalism may have a hard time proving its own worth. For decades, the negative aspects of the Stalinist state boosted the credibility of capitalism; now capitalism's internal weaknesses and contradictions will become more obvious; now Capitalism will have to stand on its own record; it will be accepted world-wide only if it shows it can really protect the human person effectively.

While there is no doubt that *capitalism is the best system, to increase the quantum and efficiency of economic production*, it will now have to prove its ability to *care for people*. "The more capitalism appears to triumph totally, the more questions are raised about its capacity to be magnanimous in victory, to heed the cries of the poor at home and abroad, to seek the path of justice and to care tenderly for the earth." (Arch Bishop of Canterbury).

### 3. *Social Justice*

Social justice is probably the most potent and dynamic of the universal values. It embraces *national social justice*, i.e. equitable distribution of goods and services among different groups in the same society and also *international social justice*, i.e. equitable distribution of the world's resources among different nations and peoples of the world.

The concept of social justice, and the way in which it is universally accepted today is really something new in human history. This is based on two perceptions viz. firstly, that: 'All men and women are equal before God' and secondly, that 'the goods of this world are intended to satisfy the needs of all men and women, not only a selected few'. These are powerful ethical principles which are affirmed in some religions. They are subliminal perceptions of how things ought to be, and it is a psychological fact that such deep universally accepted human perceptions correspond to a substratum of reality in human nature.

Social justice, like economic well-being, is based on the new egalitarian revolution previously referred to. *Human equality is perceived (particularly by the less fortunate) to outweigh all other considerations such as the degree of cultural, technical and industrial advancement of a nation or an individual.* Reservations for SC & ST are based on a belief in social justice.

#### 4. *Ecological Stability*

Ecological stability is the fourth universal value. It is an issue which has assumed enormous importance in the past 20 years. In the heyday of technological development, it was firmly, though naively, believed that the resources of planet earth were limitless. If one particular kind of resource (e.g. firewood or coal or oil) should run out, another would surely be discovered to replace it. Moreover, hardly any attention was paid to the waste products of industrial development. When people did think of this at all, it was only to assume that the world's eco-system had built-in mechanisms to take care of all water, air or other forms of pollution. There was also the belief that technology could solve all the age-old problems confronting the human race—hunger, disease, illiteracy; and that a new era of prosperity was opening up before mankind. These beliefs were reflected in the conclusions of the UN Conference on Science, Technology and Development held in 1963 at *Stockholm*. The optimism evident in this conference was also caused by the circumstances of the time: the industrial nations were experiencing unprecedented economic growth, man was making his first *excursion into space*, the *green revolution* was promising a technological solution to world food shortages and nuclear power was being widely acclaimed as the inexhaustible energy source of the future, *small pox*, that ancient scourge of humankind was on the point of being conquered.

In short, technology was the new God. Alas, technology soon proved to be the God that failed. It did not take more than 15 years before the most enthusiastic supporters of science and technology clearly realized that nature itself had provided certain conditions which act as built-in limitations on the extent

and type of technology that can be used. By 1975, a whole range of by-products of modern technology had made themselves brutally evident. Rising economic production through modern technology was having a serious and often irreversible effect on the environment, on the air we breathe and the water we drink. Entire rivers were found to be so polluted with industrial effluents as to make the water undrinkable, and marine life impossible. The beneficent air had become poisonous in large cities like Los Angeles, London, Tokyo and now Bombay, Delhi Calcutta.

Even apart from technology, it is now clear that if humans ravage nature, it will take its revenge on them. If forests are indiscriminately felled for whatever reason, soil degradation and erosion are the inevitable result, leading to floods where there are rivers and to desertification where there are none. India's own experience over the last ten years, amply proves this.

All these factors have brought into focus a very important value: a new understanding of nature and of its relationship with man. *Man, animals, plants, natural resources, minerals, water, land, air are all part of a closed eco-system* which has to sustain and recycle itself. If treated like a friend, nature reacts like a friend and provides man with nourishment and means of leisure, rest and solace. If treated like an enemy, raped and ravaged, it reacts and becomes hostile to man and brings him death and disaster.

##### 5. *Positive Identity is the fifth universal value*

At first sight, this appears to be something too vague and too insignificant to be a world value. However, its very vagueness is due to the richness and variety of its content. Consciously, but mostly subconsciously, people are seeking a sense of their own identity in all that they do and say. There has surely been no other age when personal identity has been so important a value. Even though people may not have been able to articulate it in the past, there has always been a subconscious understanding of the role played by self-identity in giving a person a sense of his own dignity and worth. This is

seen by the fact that the first concern of all those who sought to dominate, subdue and enslave other human beings was to strip them of their identity, their sense of being someone distinct. The slave dealers of America stripped *African slaves* of their identity by forbidding them under pain of whipping and even death to use their own language, sing their own music, practise their own religion, even keep their own names.

Through all these measures, the Black American slaves became totally rootless persons, lost all sense of their identity, and with it their sense of dignity and worth. Slavery appeared to them to be a normal state for people such as themselves. In other words, through loss of a sense of identity they ended up internalizing the oppression of which they were victims.

It required the rise of the Black liberation movement in the USA to restore a sense of identity and therefore, dignity to American blacks.

Attempts to strip people of identity are always made, wherever there is a large-scale effort to oppress and enslave whole classes of people. Thus, all colonial powers have consistently denigrated the culture, languages, religion, customs and the values of people whom they subjugated.

Another example is the treatment accorded to *Scheduled Castes in India*. The whole object of excluding them from the Hindu society, like prohibiting them from drawing water from the common well or visiting the village temple was to create in them a sense of their own worthlessness, which of course would make it easy for them to accept exploitation. Therefore, any effort to uplift them must begin with an effort to restore their sense of identity or give them a new one. It was for this reason that Ambedkar advised his followers to quit the Hindu fold and accept a religion like Buddhism, where they would be treated as equals.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORLD VALUES

This then, as I see it, is an overview of the world we have to expect at the turn of the century. It is to prepare for this world that educators will have to consciously direct their efforts. How can universities and colleges, particularly Christian ones,

prepare for this new epoch in human history? That is our question today.

Let me begin with a few preliminary observations. That the world values we have identified: Peace, Equality, Social Justice, and Positive Identity are *explicitly religious values*, certainly found in Christianity. Economic well being is a corollary of equality and social justice. Only Ecological Stability does not *explicitly* flow from the scriptures of any religion.

### CHRISTIANITY AND CAPITALISM

The simple fact is that the capitalist system is, in one way or another as old as man, because it is based on the natural human urge for freedom, self expression, personal responsibility. Far from being an offshoot of Christianity, the early Christians and other religious people like Buddhists and Hindus instinctively rejected the system and opted for a socialist, communitarian type of life which they perceived to be more akin to the value of solidarity and neighbourly love taught by Jesus. To this day, people of all religions resonate more easily to the sharing and concern for the other which are at the heart of genuine socialism.

This being said, it is still true that personal freedom, the right to be one's own master and to provide for one's own family which lie at the basis of free enterprise, are, without any doubt, precious values. Only, they are not absolute values, but have to be tempered with neighbourly concern.

The problem of finding an economic system which will combine the undeniable merits of the free market economy with human solidarity, national and international social justice and neighbourly concern is one for scholarship in universities and colleges in the years to come.

Given the power and availability of modern weaponry, it is clear that the egalitarian ideal will have to be translated into fact very rapidly in the next millennium if the world is to survive. It is true that large parts of Asia and Latin America have made rapid economic and social progress in the last twenty years, and that this progress continues. However, it is also true that hundreds of millions of people in China, South

and South East Asia, Africa and Latin America still live sub-human lives in absolute poverty.

We all know the facts of the mal-distribution of the world's resources and they do not need detailed repetition. For us who are involved in higher education, suffice it to recall that 80% of what the world spends on education is spent in the Northern developed countries inhabited by 25% of the world's population. What's more, the North has a virtual monopoly in the field of research which is of central importance for modern-day progress. It is in this area of research that the discrepancy between North and South continues to grow. *90% of the funds and equipment for research* are at the disposal of the northern countries. Statistics show that *35,000 scientific journals* and *750,000 authors* are from these countries and, as everybody knows, an increasing proportion of these researchers and authors are scholars from the South, attracted like moths to the flame of funds, equipment and salaries. All these myriads of scholars and research institutions are busy solving the economic, social, medical problems of the wealthy minority of the world's peoples. Thus, infinitely more research is done on Alzheimer's disease, a Northern affliction, than on the Southern disease of Tuberculosis, Malaria or Leprosy and yet, infinitely more people are afflicted by the latter than by the Alzheimers.

It is here that Universities and Colleges have a role to play. The flow of talent to the North has to be at least slowed down.

## COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FACING THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

The first task, I believe, is to understand the type of world we are entering into and for which our young people are to be prepared. In particular, Universities should conduct research on viable economic and social models for the future; models, combining freedom, democracy and social justice—models for individual countries and for the world community.

One of the most important *attitudes* that our Universities must foster is that of *human solidarity*. Solidarity is the foundation stone upon which the whole structure of the future world rests. In fact, given the frightful weapons at our disposal,

there seems no doubt that the survival of humankind depends on the *ability of people who think differently to act together.*

*Human solidarity is what will distinguish the third millennium from the ages past.* Solidarity is the belief that all humans in North and South, East and West, belonging to different religions and races, are *part of a single human family.* They must prosper together or perish together. It is the antithesis of the narrow nationalism, racism, religious exclusivism of the past.

Solidarity is for all, rich and poor. It is an intellectual and spiritual attitude, fostered through education of mind, heart and conscience. Universities and colleges, certainly Christian ones, must foster a real sense of human solidarity among their students through every means: the structure of their courses, the international nature of their student bodies and faculties, the nature of the research they do.

Given India's size, its growing economy, and the influence it wields in the world, people involved in higher education in this country must contribute to an understanding of the values and requirements of the new millennium that will shortly dawn on us.

## References

1. Hofstede, Geert *Culture's Consequences*, Beverley Hills, California, Sage Publications 1984, p. 21.
2. Mendlovitz Saul H., *On the Creation of a Just World Order Preferred Worlds for the 1990s*, New York, The Free Press, 1975, p. xvi.
3. Mathias, T.A., "The Bible Ecology and the Environment", *Indian Theological Studies* 22 (1), March 1985.
4. Mathias, T.A., "World Culture & Global Values" in *Cultural Forces Shaping India*, New Delhi: AIACHE, MacMillan, 1989.