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SECOND ASSEMBLY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Plenary Session

Friday, August 20
8:00 - 9:30 P.M.

Address

by

Secretary General Dag Hammerskjöld

It is for me a privilege to be given this opportunity to address, as spokesman for the United Nations, the World Council of Churches. As a student I saw at close quarters the beginning of the great ecumenical movement, and I learned to admire one of its inspired leaders, Archbishop Nathan Soderblom. This makes it a special pleasure for me personally to be here with you at this important conference.

The Churches are guardians of and spokesmen for the deepest beliefs and the loftiest dreams of man. The United Nations, on the other hand, is an organization for continuous diplomatic negotiation concerning concrete political issues, providing also for international administrative action in the economic and social fields.

Yet, in spite of all differences in character and responsibility, the Churches and the United Nations have an aim in common and a field of action where they work side by side. I would like to talk to you this evening about a few aspects of the international situation as they appear to me in the light of what we have in common. However, before doing so, let me try to explain more fully how I view the task of the United Nations.

In a televised interview some time ago, a youngster of 16 asked me with concern why there is no reference to God in the United Nations Charter. In my reply I drew his attention to the Preamble of the Charter where the nations express their "faith in the dignity and worth of the human person" and pledge themselves "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors." I felt sure that he saw here an expression of what, in the faith which was his, was recognized as the will of God: that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. He could not expect a document, which should serve as a basis for world co-operation, to go further in the direction he had in mind. The United Nations must recognize and respect all the different creeds and attitudes represented by its Member Nations.

The question and my reply emphasize some basic facts. The United Nations stands outside - necessarily outside - all confessions, but it is, nevertheless, an instrument of faith. As such it is inspired by what unites and not by what divides the great religions of the world.

The keywords of this Conference are Faith and Order, These words could, with only a slight change of sense, serve as a motto also for the United Nations in its international activity. The Organization must be animated by and defend Faith in the dignity and worth of men, born equal. It must serve and strengthen Order as a guarantee for peace, giving to everyone a possibility to live a full life in freedom. In the Introduction to the Ecumenical Survey of International Affairs, prepared for this meeting of the Council of Churches, it is said that what is needed from Evanston is "a renewed faith and determination, expressed throughout the worldwide fellowship in responsible action for peace and justice." In the same spirit it may be said of the United Nations that what is required from the Organization - and from the governments and peoples therein represented - is a renewed faith, a faith renewed every day, expressed in a never abandoned, every day newly initiated, responsible action for peace.

Thus, in spite of their different roles in the life of the community and the peoples, the Organization and the Churches stand side by side as participants in the efforts of all men of good will, irrespective of their creed or form of worship, to establish peace on earth. Problems that worry us in the United Nations must worry you, and achievements which we may be permitted to make will be welcomed by you.

There is no need for me to describe or analyze the international situation of today in any detail. The facts are well known to all of you. Has there indeed been any time, when the troubles of all the world were brought so quickly and so fully into every home? Quickly and fully - but how rarely in a spirit of objectivity! How rarely in such a way as to make it possible for the common man to find what should be his proper reaction to world affairs in the light of his basic ideals!

It may be said that there is today - for the first time in how many years? - no open warfare anywhere in the world, but this does not mean that there is peace. Names that we find daily on the pages of our newspapers remind us of the major conflicts. Korea and Indochina. Palestine. Kashmir. The remaining problems are great, indeed, in all these places, although differing in scope and character. To resolve them in a way which preserves peace and gives to the peoples concerned freedom and safety in a way of life of their own choice, is an aim never to be abandoned, but still far from being realized. Other names could be added, like Germany and Austria. Still others may in their turn come to dominate headlines telling about new threats of war.

Even if all these various conflicts and unresolved problems were but isolated cases they would be disturbing and deplorable indeed. They are alarming when, as is now the case, they must be viewed as expressions of trends and tensions, which make them all symptoms of one and the same sickness of our world.

Looking for explanations of the situation we are facing, we will find beneath the surface, forces which are in themselves to a large extent both natural and constructive. However, permitted to develop outside a system of legal order which is inspired by a will to peace, these same forces threaten with destruction.

In broad terms, our time is characterized by two predominant trends, one in the direction of social and economic equality within the nations, the other one in the direction of equal rights and opportunities for all nations. I feel that we should welcome both trends as reflecting an urge for a world of greater justice - such justice as is necessary for lasting peace. But we should also recognize that, if no means are provided for an orderly development, these trends may lead to cataclysms like those which we have seen in the recent past.

In an effort to meet the demands, which these trends make us face, we must approach our task from two angles. There is, first of all, in the international field, a need for practical action, helping under-developed countries to achieve such economic progress as would give them their proper share in the wealth of the world, and there is a need for political arrangements, providing a framework for a development in peace towards independence and self determination for peoples now experiencing a revival of national pride and achieving political maturity. But, on the other hand, there is also a need for inspiration, for the creation, for the creation of a spirit among the leaders of the peoples which helps them to use the forces which they have to master, for peace and not for war, for evolution and not for revolution.

As a fruit of the developments which we thus find below the surface of world events, but also, in part, as an ideological inspiration behind those very developments, we meet basically different attitudes to the evolution of society and of the world community. Such differences are only too wide and too obvious even among those who share the same fundamental faith in the dignity and worth of man. Let us not overlook the ideological tensions, but, on the other hand, let us not exaggerate their significance. Especially, let us not get caught in the belief that divisions of our world between the righteous and the wrongdoers, between idealism and materialism, between freedom and slavery, coincide with national boundaries. The righteous are to be found everywhere as are the wrongdoers. Those whose only ideal is material well-being meet us in every country - as those whose ideal is selfless service.

The conflicts behind the surface of international - and for that matter also of national politics, are conflicts whose battlefield always has been, is and always will be the hearts of men. In a certain area, in a certain period, those in power may predominantly represent one or the other tendency. But we would lack in historical sense and psychological insight, if the experience we have gathered during our short span of time would lead us to believe that this or that people is to be considered as an enemy forever of our ideals, or if we were to believe that ideals which we feel should dominate our own society, will survive without an honest and continued fight for their supremacy in our own public life.

In the effort to build a world of justice and order the main task of the United Nations must primarily be one directly referring to the acute, concrete cases of conflict, where mediation, negotiation and reconciliation are timehonoured ways to establish peaceful conditions. But the United Nations can also serve the governments as a useful instrument in their attempts to direct the social and political forces behind the conflicts and to meet the widespread demands which these forces reflect. Thus, the United Nations is the main organ through which peoples under trusteeship, or the non-self-governing territories, may be helped to independence and self-determination. It is also a place where a nation, young in its political independence, can find a floor in the debate on world affairs. Through technical assistance and through pioneer action in the social field, the United Nations, however, can also be instrumental in lifting the living standards of peoples and in furthering their economic growth.

When we go beyond the great social and economic trends to the underlying ideological tensions, the contribution that the United Nations can make is more limited. Faithful to its ideals, impartial in the clashes of interest, and with patience and perseverance, it can be one of the focal points for the hopes of all those who honestly work for peace. It can help to justify their patience. It can give encouragement to their own will to impartiality and to their respect for justice. But the very nature of the organization makes it inadequate as a means of influencing those basic attitudes which are decisive in the battle for the hearts of men. The impact of its actions and attitudes can only be a very general one, and will always remain uncertain unless properly explained.

A war to be fought in the hearts of men can be waged by those speaking directly to men. It is here that I see the great, the overwhelming task of the Churches and of all men of good will of every creed in the work for peace. Their vital contribution to this work is to fight for an ever wider recognition of their own ideals of justice and truth.

However, they also have the power to show men the strength - so necessary in our world of today - that follows from the courage to meet others with trust. We have seen how out of present day conflicts and the underlying tensions has grown a widespread state of fear and frustration, of distrust and desperation. This is, as we all know, in itself a source of evil. It maintains an atmosphere in which unbalanced reactions may suddenly release the explosive power of the forces which we have to master. In the face of this development, we have reason to remember the truth that he who fears God will no longer fear men.

In speaking for justice, truth and trust in public affairs, the Churches may be a decisive force for good in international and national political life, without assuming a political role or trying directly to influence political decisions. Can or should the Churches go any further? In my view there is one thing they could do. They could help to explain how world affairs are run and what is the responsibility of every one of us. In doing so they could help to explain what an organization like the United Nations stands for: how its ideals run parallel to the very aim and beliefs of the common man who wishes to live in peace with his neighbors, with freedom to build his own little world in human dignity.

In explaining to the peoples the failures and achievement of the work for peace - whether it is the work of governments or churches, of an international organization, of private associations or of individuals - in order to win their understanding and their support for that work, there is one thought which I feel should be stressed.

In the Sermon on the Mount it is said, that we should take no thought of the morrow - "for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Can anything seem farther from the practical planning, the long term considerations typical of political life? And yet - is this not the very expression of the kind of patience we must all learn to show in our work for peace and justice? Mustn't we learn to believe that when we give to this work, daily, what it is in our power to give, and when, daily, we meet the demands facing us to all the extent of our ability, this will ultimately lead to a world of greater justice and good will, even if nothing would seem to give us hope of success or even of progress in the right direction.

Certainly, the words about the evil of the day and the things of the morrow do not mean that our actions should not be guided by a thoughtful and responsible consideration of future consequences of what we do. But they do mean, that our work for peace should be pursued with the patience of one who has no anxiety about results acting in the calm self-surrender of faith.

For the Christian faith "the Cross is that place at the centre of the world's history...where all men and all nations without exception stand revealed as enemies of God...and yet where all men stand revealed as beloved of God, precious in God's sight." (I quote from the Report on the Main Theme of this Assembly.) So understood, the Cross, although it is the unique fact on which the Christian Churches base their hope, should not separate those of Christian faith from others but should instead be that element in their lives which enables them to stretch out their hands to peoples of other creeds in the feeling of universal brotherhood which we hope one day to see reflected in a world of nations truly united.