

Community or Empire?

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1. Conscience of the world, supported and demanded by young people

As you know, thousands of young people from all over Italy have arrived in Florence, where I had the honor of talking to them. They were not there as tourists, nor did they come to attend a sports event. All of them were studying as they marched; we were discussing our common duty to be citizens of the world without losing ties to our own nation.

If young people give us this example, we adults can only earn their trust and appreciation when we make the effort to understand what is happening in the world, and only when we have enough courage to move beyond beautiful ringing pronouncements.

Let no one be deceived: we will either find valid and audacious means to defend justice without resorting violence, or no one will be able to hold our young people back...

Here is what I suggest for our encounter:

- Let us start by remembering how the empires of today have been born and imposed. Without hatred, as objectively as possible, let's try to discover whether they are really rivals and or whether they have in fact formed an alliance in order to divide up the world into spheres of influence and domination.
- On the other hand let us remember how the European community was born. It looks like a generous and beautiful idea. Look closely, however, and you will see signs that the European community itself is quickly becoming one more bloc, one more empire, full of ambitions and injustices, just like the rivals they are trying to replace...
- Finally, we must face some very pressing issues: What is non-violence capable of doing in a violent world? Is it Italy's duty to help prevent the European community from becoming an empire? Would the European Community have the necessary means to completely restructure international trade policy?

2. Empires and super-empires that control the world

What are the empires and super-empires that control the planet in our times?

One of the major empires is the United States, which was largely formed in response to situations in Europe.

Your continent, with so much political experience and with a powerful cultural inheritance, should be an example for all humanity. Without even calling to mind the saddest chapters of Europe's past, we all know that in 1914 and 1939 Europe failed to avoid two terrible world wars. In order to put an end to them, Europe had to ask the United States for help, thus stimulating and consolidating one of the major empires of all times.

In order to win World War II, the United States felt it had no choice but to ally with Russia, which appeared to be its irreconcilable enemy.

In 1917, Russia had lived through a communist revolution. In half a century Russia went from being a semi-feudal country to a first-class power and rival to the United States. However, for half a century, it also forgot about the humanist ideals of socialism, and became a selfish, cold empire, just like America.

The United States and Russia fought together and won. However, before World War II ended, the United States and Russia divided up the world into zones of influence and dominion, with the help of England.

Since then, the two great powers have been using and abusing their different ideologies as they have marched toward Cold War, an arms race, and the conquest of outer space. Even today, there are still naïve people who think that sooner or later the clash of clashes, the war of wars, will break out between capitalism and communism. Imperialistic ambition on both sides always wins out over every socio-economic system or ideology. Even while creating new divisions, they still find reason to establish a "hot line" between themselves. Just think, for example, about the recent meeting in Moscow, where your own Mediterranean Sea turned out to be Russian-American lake.

Japan, which was flattened during World War II, now presents itself as an empire next to the US and Russia, at a high cost of human exploitation among its own people. Emerging as an economic power, its results are quite impressive. For now its military power is quantitatively insignificant, though it has qualitative elements for a dramatic growth.

What about China? Is it a sub-power, a power, or a super-power? There is no doubt that since the communist revolution, this country has experienced an even faster and impressive development than the one that took place in Russia.

In the list of empires, China still has a debatable position. However, it is no coincidence that the US president decided to visit Peking, nor that China was accepted as a member of the UN, and then elected to the Security Council, which is the most important organization of the United Nations. Sad proof that China follows in the path of the great empires, despite its own terrible confrontation with US and with Russia, is its incredible

attitude towards the war between India and Pakistan. What's more, China and Japan are already understanding and cooperating with each other.

If we have taken the time to scrutinize the superpowers of our times it is because they are largely responsible for the growing distance between the capitalistic and socialistic world (the so-called First and the Second Worlds) on one side, and the so-called Third World on the other, which includes Africa, Asia and Latin America. These are poor countries but a great source of raw materials.

Nowadays, we know for sure that if there are poor and rich countries, the difference between them does not come from race, intelligence, honesty or willingness to work. Within poor countries there are usually privileged minorities that built their own wealth on the misery of their own citizens. However, what makes the situation of these poor countries even worse is the terrible injustices committed by rich countries and their international trade policies. The rich countries talk about helping the poor countries, but in reality rich countries are the ones who receive most of the help because their wealth has its roots in the misery of poor countries.

At the third UNCTAD – the third round of negotiation between rich and poor countries – evidence emerged that more than two-thirds of Third World countries is already turning into a Fourth World, a world with no chance of pulling itself up out of misery.

3. The European Community: community or empire?

In May of 1950, Robert Schuman, who at the time was the foreign relations minister of France, asked all democratic nations of Europe, especially Germany, to share their deposits of steel and coal through the supervision of a broader authority, independent of any government.

Five countries – Germany, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg and your own Italy – supported the proposal from France. Two years later the "European community of coal and steel" was already established. However, it did not stop there. In Messina, 1955, the proposals for the European Economic Community (or European common market) and the European Community of Atomic Energy (or Euratom) were approved.

So there you see how things are developing. It is true that the EC faces grave crises. However, beginning the 1st of January 1973, the six member countries will become nine through the addition of Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark. At the executive level, the Commission and Council of the European Community are already functioning, along with the European Parliament and the Court of Justice.

The objectives of the European Community are grand and promising! Among them:

- To put an end to the conflicts that long have destroyed Western Europe;

- To reestablish political and economic stability in Europe in order to play the international role that is proper to it, in light its economic power and cultural inheritance;
- To cooperate in promoting a well-balanced economic development within the Community and the entire world;
- To improve living and working conditions for Europe's own peoples through a new joint initiative;
- To abolish the economic barriers that have transformed Europe into a collage of miniscule markets and transform the Community into a unitary economic zone;
- To trigger technological progress and increase productivity, both in industry and in agriculture;
- To offer more effective cooperation to the least favored regions of the Community, and to help developing countries on a multilateral basis;
- To establish a deeper and deeper union among the European nations.

It is only natural that along with idealism, practical considerations are motivating the EC: unless Europe unites, unless it forms its own alliance, how can European countries confront the overbearing march of the world's superpowers?

On this basis, the chance of Europe itself falling into the temptation of becoming a superpower would seem small. Official publications of the European Community lay bare the goals that are in fact motivating the EC, however, as its places itself on par with the US, Russia and Japan.

The European Community proclaims itself the third most important industrial bloc in the world, second in the production of automobiles, third in the production of steel, second (next to Russia) in the production of milk, and second in the worldwide production of meat. Between 1958 and 1970, the gross domestic product of the European Community increased 96%, while in the US it increased 60%. Exports, in the same period of time, increased 183%, while in the US the increase was 168%. Within the Community, trade among member countries increased 530% between 1958 and 1970.

The European Community is thus the top commercial power in the world and leads the world in trade with developing countries. It is well known that more than 90 countries keep diplomatic representatives at the headquarters of the European Community; 24 countries are associates and a great number of others are currently negotiating trade agreements with it.

All this would be wonderful if the dream of the founders of the European Community, like every beautiful human dream, were not in danger of deformation.

We have seen how the European Community proclaims absolute supremacy in international trade. Well, recently, at the third UNCTAD, the Organization of American States submitted official reports which demonstrate that in the last twenty years the flow of foreign capital to the third world has created a net deficit of more than a hundred thousand million dollars, and a public debt of almost seventy thousand millions.

So, here is a question that we must face without hypocrisy or subterfuge: When full members of the European Community sit down together at the table with their associates, is it really a meeting between equals? Or do they – despite the new name and the new image of the European Community – still consider their associates to be their traditional providers of raw material? If so, what we have is good-old colonialism reborn [as neo-colonialism].

Another question: Which agency of the European Community will come up with arguments convincing enough to stop member nations from all-out efforts to build up their arms industries? When a country has seen itself invaded and dominated by foreign forces, it is easy to understand their appeal to their right and duty to produce weapons for self-defense. But here is how the logic of violence works:

- In order to make the production of weapons economic (or at least less uneconomic) there must be a surplus of weapons to sell, besides the ones produced for the country's own self-defense.
- The need then arises to sell the surplus of production, by advertising and peddling weapons to other countries that don't even have the money to save millions of their own children from starvation. These children are thus condemned to live with physical and mental disorders for the rest of their life. Countries with high cultural and moral standards end up being the ones who are promoting a mini arms race in the so-called Third World.
- Finally, in order to dispose of surplus weapons and induce buyer nations to purchase new and modern ones, the ultimate temptation is to promote and feed war. Who can claim not to know that when small nations destroy and devour one another, large nations are always in the background?

3. The ultimate test for nonviolence

Honestly, do we have any valid suggestions to make, using non-violence, in order to insure that Italy is effective in making the European Community a community and not an empire? And if that would happen, how might the European Community force changes in the structure of the international trade policy?

We should not waste our time with this or that timid proposal or mere band-aid solutions. So I will finish this speech, which is already too long, with three fraternal suggestions:

- Why don't all those hundreds of technicians working for the European Community do something besides using their intelligence and their specialized education to help an increasingly restricted group of elites? (When I'm in Milan, I will be speaking about macro-companies and multinationals.) Why don't these technicians force a change in the structures, by showing us the route towards a truly human economy and by forging safe and reliable paths to liberation? Within every group of technicians there is always a minority that is not content to be a well-placed shock absorber for an increasingly inhumane world, which even their own children can no longer tolerate.

Who knows? Where conditions allow, these Abrahamic minorities of technicians could lead a peaceful rebellion of technocrats working within the system.

- Those of us who bear the responsibility of having faith and belonging to a religion, especially we who are Christians – instead of abandoning the faith and rebelling against our Church, why don't we put our roots down and remain in order to demand coherence, authenticity and the application of our marvelous texts and the ringing message that appears in our religious literature?
- Concretely, why don't we Catholics give unqualified support to the *Justitia et Pax* commission? This commission is already serving within the Catholic Church as a very credible prophetic organism. Let us provide the support that allows it to engage fully, and not get stuck in half measures. It does not lack vision or courage; it simply lacks support.

Let's help the pontifical *Justitia et Pax* commission fully realize the ideal that the fathers of Vatican II envisioned, and which Paul VI has already courageously begun to make concrete. The goal is to have a very sensitive antenna within the Church that will denounce the great injustices of our times and prompt the nations to change the structures that enslave people, wherever they exist.

For the Church to have the moral force to preach these structural changes, let us encourage the pontifical commission to promote concrete actions that liberate the Church of Christ from the grinding mechanisms into which our human weaknesses have led....

Think about other actions; completing or correcting the ones that I have presented to you. But have no illusions: young people are watching us! Are they going to stay with us or will they march off? Will they continue nourishing their hopes or will they fall into despair?

Everything depends on how we act.