

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, March 8, 1990

Reverend Nikkyo Niwano
President
Rissho Kosei-kai
Tokyo

Dear Mr. Niwano,

First of all, I hope this letter finds you in the best of health. Cordial greetings also to the members of your family whom I remember with great esteem and who are present in my prayers.

I hope that you have received good news from your grand-daughter, Mitsuyo, who is the guest of one of our families in Paris.

Since I received your letter in October, we have been very busy following the great changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe, which have probably had noteworthy repercussions also beyond the boundaries of our continent. We continually thank God for what has taken place and above all, for how it has taken place; that is, in most cases, in a peaceful way, without resorting to violence.

There is much talk here about the building of a common European home. We are convinced, however, that although this endeavour is very necessary, it will not be complete unless we think of it as a part of that "global village" that is now the Earth on which we live.

This idea came to me also from the concern expressed in your letter about the precarious condition of our natural environment. You wrote to me at the end of an exceptionally hot summer, but we could say the same thing at the end of this winter, whose temperatures have reminded us of the greenhouse effect.

In fact, there are increasingly alarming analyses from scientists, politicians and international commissions about our ecosystem. People everywhere are launching proposals in an effort to heal our ailing world.

One authoritative message was that of John Paul II for the World Day of Peace on the 1st of January, 1990, entirely dedicated to the problem of environmental destruction. He said: "Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone." It demonstrates the need "for concerted efforts aimed at establishing the duties and obligations that belong to individuals, peoples, States and the international community."

It is urgent therefore, before it is too late, to find a solution to this crisis. Thus I am very happy to be able to exchange our opinions on the causes of these evils and the possible remedies that can be applied.

Also in our Movement all of us, young people and adults, have felt invested with the responsibility to study the problem thoroughly and to take on practical commitments.

The ecological problem was considered in-depth during the last meeting of the "Youth for a United World," promoted by our Gen Movement. Young people are particularly sensitive to this subject and they feel the need for radical changes both in their relationship with the environment and the relationship between individuals and States in their use of scientific knowledge.

Moreover, they realize that safeguarding the environment and building peace are possible only if practiced on a worldwide scale. They are convinced that in order to achieve the ideal of a united world, the priority of the human person over science and technology must be affirmed. Everything must be considered in the light of the true good of the human person who is considered as a subject and not as an object to be exploited. Otherwise, our economic process would become, as someone has said, like the

uncontrolled race of a car that has lost its driver and no longer obeys his commands.

Development, said Paul VI, must be "for the whole person and for all people." These words bring us to the heart of the problem and indicate the road to be taken, but all our spiritual resources are necessary, all our faith in the love of God. We need a great respect for the life of every created being and above all, we need a new universal solidarity among people and nations in order to give a new direction to the course of events.

Meteorologists tell us that the atmosphere of the earth is so well blended that even local pollution and its effects have spread worldwide. Fortunately, this also means that local improvements to the environment can extend to give its benefits to the whole of our planet.

Speaking in Basel at the European Ecumenical Assembly, Karl von Weizsäcker, whom you met in Tokyo on the occasion of the Templeton Prize, wisely said: "What counts are not the beautiful words that we say, but rather, the actions we carry out day after day."

Very well, it is a question of giving our practical contribution, even if it is a small one, towards the solution of great problems. Our young people have understood and have already undertaken various initiatives which express a personal and collective ecological awareness under many aspects: for example, by purchasing products which do not have a negative impact on the environment, by collecting rubbish so that it does not pollute the environment, and by making a number of choices which stem from a profound respect for nature.

It is by beginning with the small local problems that a moral conscience is formed capable of facing problems on a worldwide scale. In the final analysis, ecology represents a challenge which can be met only by changing mentalities and forming consciences.

It has already been demonstrated by very competent scientific studies that neither technical nor economic resources are lacking for the improvement of our environment. Instead, what is lacking is that spiritual supplement, that new love for the human person, which makes all of us feel responsible towards all the others in a common effort to manage the resources of the earth in an intelligent, just and balanced manner. Let us not forget that God, the Creator, has entrusted the earth to all people and not to only one people or to only one group of people.

This question of a just distribution of goods in the world, of helping the poorer populations, of the solidarity of the north towards the south, of the rich towards the poor, is the other side of the ecological crisis.

If the immense economic resources destined to boost the war industry and a super-production that requires more and more super-consumption, not to mention the waste of goods in the wealthy countries, if these enormous resources would serve, at least in part, to help the developing countries find their dignified way towards development, how much more breathable the atmosphere would be, how many forests would be spared, how many zones would not become desert wastelands, and how many human lives would be saved!

And to think that the United Nations Commission for Environment and Development (Brundtland Report) has demonstrated that we could reduce 50% of the per capita consumption of energy in the developing countries without negative consequences for development, indeed, with great advantages for the protection of the environment as well as for the standard of living of those peoples whose present system makes them increasingly poorer, while the rich become increasingly richer.

And yet, without a new awareness of universal solidarity, we will never take a step forward. But this new awareness can be given only by religion. This, in fact, is the task of religion: to enlighten people on the true causes of and the true remedies to the great universal evils. The Bible, with its account of creation, teaches us that only in harmony with the plan of God can nature and human beings find order and peace.

If human beings are not at peace with God, the earth itself is not at peace. Religious people are aware of the earth's "suffering" when human beings do not use it according to the plan of God, but only for selfishness, for an insatiable desire to possess.

This selfishness and desire contaminate the environment more and before any other kind of

pollution, which is nothing other than its consequence.

Speaking to the Gen last year, I told them that it is as if people throughout the past few decades had walked ahead in the mud wearing a pair of mountain boots, thus causing the mud to splash all over: in the atmosphere, in the waters of the rivers and seas; trees have been ruined, the air has been polluted.... And yet many discoveries have been made; great technological developments have taken place.... But bad has mixed in with the good because people did not act under the gaze of God, they did not listen to Him. Now the disastrous consequences force us to look at reality all together, in the perspective of a united world. If we don't face this problem all together it will not be resolved.

But thank God, the events of today's world contain seeds of hope. Physical, geographical and ideological barriers are falling, and conditions are being created for people and nations to grow closer to one another. But we must remember God and follow his will, which is that of making humanity one big family. We must look at nature with new eyes. In your book on Shakyamuni Buddha, you described very well that enlightened gaze which makes all living beings appear transfigured and completely transformed.

Similarly, we Christians say that it is precisely through the dazzling splendors of nature that we can raise ourselves up to the One who is the Author of these things, God, king of the universe, Lord of the galaxies, the Infinite. And He is present everywhere. He is under the rippling of a brook, in the blossoming of a flower, in a bright dawn, in a red sunset....

This then is another great task of religion: to educate people to respect nature, to help people open their eyes and see the presence of God beneath the designs of visible things, giving rise in their hearts to love for Him, in His immensity, beauty and splendor.

If one discovers that all creation is a gift of a Father who loves us, it will be much easier to find a harmonious relationship with nature. And if one discovers also that this gift is for all members of the human family and not only for a few, more attention and respect will be given for something that belongs to the whole of humanity, present and future.

As you can see, Mr. Niwano, I agree that our religions hold the remedies for healing this ailing world and for bringing it back to a state of health, harmony and peace. I am certain that our efforts are headed in the same direction, and that it is useful, therefore, for us to share our ideas, proposals and practical achievements. It will be a contribution towards making our world a home worthy of the human person.

*It's a certainty del mio es-
sere assieme a tutta
la tua Famiglia
dev. Chiara Lubich*

*Assuring you again of my prayers
for you and your entire family,
Devotedly yours, Chiara Lubich*