

HIROSHIMA, 80 YEARS LATER

THE WOUNDED MEMORY AND THE THOUGHTS OF TOMORROW



Child carrying his dead younger brother to the crematorium after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki
(Photo by Joseph Roger O'Donnel)

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The act of memory: a commitment to humanity

To make memory and to call to « make memory » can appear as a determinant exercise of thinking, in order to elaborate, to write and to transmit our human history, from generations to generations. And so, not to forget. We could say that memory is the foundation and the condition of hope. When we remember, we pronounce the names of men and women who are in our minds and reflections. And we open the way of becoming, that way which has been closed by the murder of the brother, the action to destroy the life of the other(s) – the “brother”. We have to say that this act is always in our mind, for, from the first man’s son, we know that we are able to kill our brother. To remember is to open again a perspective of life, this life which remains as a challenge, for each generation, but also a source of anxiousness and questions, of risk and trusting.

The exercise of memory can clearly appear as a paradoxical exercise, because it links pain and faith, in the very instant when we try to remember, when we try to believe in tomorrow while yesterday is in ourselves as an open wound.

May be this suffering of the violence is the common experience in all our personal and common dramas, our wars, our mourning and misfortunes. The wound is always opened and we understand, with passing of time, that nothing could obliterate in us this deep impression of death, bound for ever with our desire of life.

Here is what we feel when we enter in the “anamnesis” of these terrible acts which were the nuclear bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No other violence, except the final solution in the nazi death camps, can be compared to

these decision and act : to decide and to act the murder of a part of our humanity (We know that, in many spiritual traditions, to murder one person is to murder our humanity)... Project and decision to put end of a world conflict by destroying our human community, symbolized for ever by these places : Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Three generations later

Three generations later, we are left with this question: the only question which appears in the ruins of our explanations : shall we find and pronounce and offer a word of compassion and consolation which could reach the hearth of the others, over our all explanations ? For the question is about to be here, to offer to be present here, perhaps silently... What we can try to offer, over the intellectual interpretations, to exchange looks and to listen again to the fragile breathe of those (I think of the children and grand-children who survived and who tried to believe in life today in Japan, from August 1945) ? In front of us, dignity and hope remain and they belong to nobody... This dignity – which can be presented as the irreducible secret dimension of everyone is like the morning light of the “day after” genocides.

As said the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, « *the naked face of the other human being reminds to you : you will not kill* »¹

As the jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt said, at the end of her great analysis of « The totalitarian system »

« It remain that *each end in our history necessarily contains a new beginning ; this beginning is the only promise, the only « message » that the end could ever give. Beginning, before to become an historical event, is the supreme human capacity; politically, it is just like human freedom. « **Initium ut esset creatus est homo** » - to be a beginning the human being was created », St Augustine said. This beginning is guaranted by each new birth; it is really each human being. »²*

¹ Emmanuel Lévinas, « Humanisme de l'autre homme », chap. 9, « La Trace », Edit. Fata Morgana, 1972, p. 57 et ss).

² *The totalitarian system* (third part of her research about *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

To remain awake, while the political powers go on their blind and immoderate pretention, we must proclaim our conviction for the future of creation and human community... even if individualism seems to close the world and dialogue, as the french philosopher Jean-Yves Jolif said, in his reflection about "Understanding the human being, in 1971.

*« He who doesn't expect very much from the human being is also who easily manages with perversion situations, said Jolif. If we have no hope, why could we contest the situation in which we are rightnow ? But such a cynism forbides to understand humanity »*³

What do we want to say, today ?

We do know that the bomb and all the nuclear weapons, were first elaborated in our minds and in our armements factories, in Europe, before being sold, without any moral approach and in a criminal perspective, to states which wanted to save their political autonomy... The philosopher Karl Jaspers said, in his time (in 1960), that « we have 14 means to destroy completely our planet... But only one is sufficient! ». Today, how many means of destruction of the planet we have, really ? All that is crazy

In this context, what do we want to tell our children and the most poor people in our world? We enjoyed one half century of hope, peace and human rights... even with cold war and in spite of local violent conflicts...

What can we say to our leaders, in this world which is in war again? How can we touch the human capacity of understanding, in our global culture, in which the other, the historical, cultural, moral and religious alterity, appears for many as unwelcome... and when the political power says « I » ("I am going to tell you truth and future), according to a "possessive individualism" (to get benefits of a Riviera in Gaza or to have a new great Russia)...

What do we say, as world citizens, while we have in our hands, treaties of international and humanitarian law instruments, ever fragile but real ?

³ Jean-Yves Jolif, *Comprendre l'homme*, Avant-propos, Édit. du Cerf, Cogitatio fidei, 1971, p.11

What do we want to say, in these moments when powerful states and governments scoff at these engagements, which are determinant for the future of the international community?

The question is really about the authority of these treaties and the required awaking to be sure they are respected and renewed ... The question is our citizen responsibility and our will to be “architects” and “artisans” of peace (as le Pope Francis said)

The central consideration – and it is another paradoxical approach – is really to tell the political leaders and assemblies: we need the other(s) to become who we are. The other and the others are our richness : we become together !

About deterrence itself, it remains – let us tell it clearly – a terrible illusion, for we know that the challenge is not to maintain fear but to accept to meet one another. But to meet demands to believe in the other : to consider his/her capacity and talents... to believe also in ourselves and to consent to be touched by this common humanity which binds all of us... To make fear always leads to higher bid and hate of the other as well of ourselves. But how can we develop a “culture of encounter” (which a culture of mutual hospitality). Only our capacity to speak one another can open (again) our history

Only the word is great because it is a way.

“Peace is given a disarmed heart”...

The Pope Francis, just disappeared, pronounced this strange but so true reflection

« Let us look for the true peace, the peace that God gives a disarmed heart : a heart which does not calculate what is mine and what is yours : a heart which undoes egoism by running to go and meet the others : a heart which cannot hesitate to recognize himself to be a debtor in front of God and which is ready to undo the debts which oppress the nearest ; a heart which overcomes discouragement in front the future, with this hope that everyone is a richness for this world. »⁴

⁴ Pope Francis, message for the Mondial Day of Peace, last 1st of January 2025 :

In his Enciclica « Fratelli tutti » « *All brothers (“brothers and and sisters” – as he said himself) » (October 2020), the same shepherd and messenger of peace, clearly denounced « the production of arms – and particularly nuclear weapons – that we finally used » and which always lets the world in a worse situation (than before)... » « War, Francis said, is always a defeat of politics and humanity, Francis said, an ashamed capitulation in front of the strenghts of Evil. » ⁵*

In line with a social, legal, and spiritual inspiration, the reflection and contribution of the Churches to this “memory for tomorrow”—which is another name for hope—have consistently emphasized the importance of local and international law and human rights throughout the past century, and particularly after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. In this regard, the contribution of Pope John XXIII in 1963 remains a constant point of reference. All these reflections are inspired by what we call “the catholic social teaching” (or the « social ethics inspired by the Gospels »). Already, in 1963, the Pope John 23, wrote in his Encyclica « Pacem in terris » (« Peace on the earth »)

«Now, when everyone is becoming conscious of his rights, the consciousness of duties is growing in him : his own rights are expressions of his dignity he will request to be considered, and for all of the others will be the obligation to recognize these rights and to respect them. »

« And when the rules of the common life are explained in rights and duties, human beings open themselves to spiritual values and they understand what is truth, justice, love, freedom ; they realize they belong to a society founded on theses considerations. More, they are called to know more true, transcendant and personal God. Now the relationship with God appears as the foundation of life, the intimate life in their soul and the social life they share in community with the others. » ⁶

⁵ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, October 2020, n°261

⁶ Jean XXIII, Encyclique « Pacem in terris », 1963, n°44 - 45

One « common good »:

Finally, we have only one « common good »: this “common good” is peace we can promise one to the others by word and by law. Contempt of international and humanitarian law appears as the hidden face of the nuclear deterrence, because when we scorn the law, we are going to use the arms. It is the way on which we loose faith and trusting. All this is so fragile... We know the symbol of the paper bird that the Hibakusha (the mothers of Hiroshima) wear on their clothes : life is beautiful but so fragile, like a paper bird. And we remain mourning since August 1945... and as long to the end of all the nuclear weapons.



From deterrence – which is something like a “permanent and maintained fear”, and paradoxically the first step towards violence – from deterrence to trusting, there is however one step : the step of Word we received and that we can give one another – again and always

« In the beginning was, is and will be the Word », the Bible says in the Book of Genesis and in the first line of the Gospel according St John.⁷

I would like to offer to you one last reflections we received from the Pope Francis, in his Enciclica “Fratelli tutti”.

“Certainly, all this calls for an alternative way of thinking. Without an attempt to enter into that way of thinking, what I am saying here will sound wildly unrealistic. On the other hand, if we accept the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity, we can rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity. We can aspire to a world that provides land, housing and work for all. This is the true path of peace, not the senseless and myopic strategy of sowing fear and mistrust in the face of outside threats. For a real and lasting peace will only be possible “on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and

⁷ See Genesis 1, Gospel according to Saint John 1:1

*cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family.”*⁸

November 1st 2025

⁸ *Fratelli Tutti* 3.10. 2020; n° 127: this last reflection was pronounced by the Pope Francis in Nagasaki, on November 2019; we underline.