
Closing Remarks

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It is not easy to draw together the threads of a conference such as we have had today. I will start at the end and go back to the beginning. Bertrand Charrier showed us some of the pressures and the limits that population growth is going to put on the planet. The source of the pressures, as recognized in a lot of our discussions, is twofold: it is not just the sheer number of people, but also the consumption patterns of different segments of the population. People asked Herman Daly how he dealt with inequality. Bella Abzug was absolutely right to ask about gender issues as they fit into this complex equation. Not only is there, or should there be, some reasonable bounds against which we hit against community, but there is also a behavioral pattern associated with that.

The top 20 percent of the world's population is more than 60 times as wealthy as the bottom 20 percent. Yet that top 20 percent contributes, on average, less than 0.3 percent of its income to development assistance. Here we are, talking about ways to close the great gaps in equality, but the people who have wealth, who could obviously make a difference, are unwilling to share.

We are not asking people to share a huge amount, just 0.7 percent—this target has been set time and again. A number of countries, including the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, have achieved it systematically, year in, year out. They have shown a sense of responsibility without a marked loss of well-being to their citizens. But the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development countries, as a whole, have not only failed to achieve a 0.3 percent contribution, but their rate of giving is declining.

I join with Bella Abzug, as I said earlier today, in stating that we must not tolerate the continued oppression and exclusion of women under the guise of cultural specificity or other such manifestations. This not only precludes the achievement of a just society and diminishes us all—there will be no future without the empowerment of woman. The evidence is overwhelming for those who are not moved by ethical claims to action.

About two years ago we had a similar conference, organized by Richard Barrett. Similarly, I started the morning by quoting from Mortimer Adler and discussing the idea of liberty, equality, and justice as guiding principles. Mortimer Adler said something that struck me. He said that as a young man he often found himself in confrontation with the belief, found in practically all religious traditions, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And he could never accept that: how could fear ever be the beginning of wisdom? That was his reaction as a young man. But as he grew away from his youth, he saw what was meant.

He saw that with the fear of the Lord there grew a consciousness of the consequences of one's actions—not the immediate, material consequences, in the sense of whether we can get away with something, but rather knowing before the Lord whether it is right or not. If we

become truly conscious of the consequences of our actions—if we reflect on them in counsel with the Lord, ourselves, our conscience—then we begin to move away from immediate gratification. We look beyond the narrow idea of what is legal, what we can get away with, to what is right. This is then, indeed, the beginning of wisdom, the willingness to think about the consequences of our actions. Mortimer Adler found it striking that the very word *wisdom* is not one we generally associate with youth. A young person may be brilliant, a genius even, but wisdom requires experience.

We have, however, very few young people who are truly in charge of the world today. The decisionmakers—I am thinking back to the World Bank-International Monetary Fund Annual Meetings in Hong Kong in September, where I was with many of the world's ministers of finance and governors of central banks—are easily in their fifties, on average. They should not lack for exposure to these issues.

So I return again to this idea of the beginning of wisdom: to the acceptance of universal values, the ability to reach out, the notion that somehow a sense of equity, fairness, and justice is innate within us; to the recognition that legality does not equal fairness; and to the understanding that we must act in certain ways that we recognize as being right and fair, in a word, ethical. It is that ethical dimension that I think should guide our actions.

There is a statement in the Koran that has parallels in the tenets of many faiths: the Lord shall hold each of us accountable to what has been placed before us. The responsibility of a poor peasant farmer in a remote area of Uganda is different from the responsibility that I bear as a senior person in the World Bank, and different from that of a captain of industry. But we shall each be held accountable for how we act, given the position we are in and the horizon we look upon. This message came through clearly from a number of the speakers, that we must each start with ourself.

If we start with our own actions, as we heard in John Hoyt's moving story of the starfish, we

will learn that what each of us does makes a difference. If we then accept the principle of looking within ourselves for guidance on what is right and what is wrong, what is fair and what is not, and not whether "might makes right," then I think we would be well on our way to really interpreting the vision of thinking globally and acting locally. We would be on the road to thinking for the long term and acting in the short term. It is not beyond our abilities to do this. Just think that in the past century, people with a sense of what was right and fair took on the vested interests of slavery with the clear understanding that it demeaned the human race. They did this against an impossible array of opposing attitudes. Similarly, who would have imagined 15 years ago that we would have seen such an attitudinal shift against smoking in the United States, despite the availability of cigarettes everywhere, the enormous power of the cigarette companies, and the constant barrage of advertisements. In our own time we have seen that civic action, arising out of a sense of equity and to promote the general well-being, has produced societal changes that create a better future.

Bertrand Charrier spoke to us about Captain Jacques Cousteau. I recall my last conversation with him. I was telling him, "You are taking on bigger and bigger tasks." And he said, "Yes, but I have unlimited confidence. I have unlimited confidence in the youth of this world and their commitment to a better future. And I have unlimited confidence in the ability of the average citizen in the street to ultimately shame decisionmakers into action."

With these parting thoughts in our minds, I can promise you, on my own behalf and on behalf of my colleagues in the World Bank, that we are committed to taking on what you have said, to think about it, and to internalize it. From our location, with our particular set of responsibilities, we are committed to finding the ways in which we can act responsibly to promote an environmentally friendly and socially responsible economic order for the future, for that is a task that we owe to future generations as well as to Earth and all its species.