



Raising global consciousness

Many promote a vision of a more united world, where collaboration and cooperation work for the good of all

By Emilie Christy

Looking at the declining role of “superpowers” in the world, the rising influence of the East (especially China), the economic fragility of the European Union and the uncertain outcome of an “Arab Spring,” we might ask: what do these signs of the times mean for us? At the same time, there is a growing international interconnectedness created by advances in technology and economic interdependence that make humanity always more a “global community.”

The international arena is confronted by challenges that no country can resolve alone, such as threats of terrorism, concerns about the environment or the viability of national economies. What is the significance of this moment in history, and how can we address this situation? Many promote a vision of a more united world, where collaboration and cooperation work for the good of all. Is this just a utopian dream; is it something attainable?

In recent years, we all witnessed the sense of solidarity emerging in the aftermath of natural disasters, terrorist attacks and extreme circumstances of injustice. Amid the confusion, suffering and perhaps even mishandling of the situations, the walls of indifference dissolved into an outpouring of concrete help, compassion and a readiness to do anything to relieve the pain.

A vision of a more united world is not easy to conceive. The United Nations has exerted much effort to provide a forum for the world’s nations to work together collaboratively, and in Europe there has been great determination to unite economically and politically, but there has been a lot of difficulty abiding by international pacts, agreements, unions and covenants. (*un.org*)

Yet the very existence of these efforts underlines the need and desire for unity, and a recognition that what affects one of us impacts us all.

Steven Kull, professor at the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy and director of worldpublicopinion.org, has studied international issues and regularly offers analysis of public opinion in the U.S. and international media. He suggests “that the future of global governance is not viable if it is left only to foreign policy elites, disconnected from the aspiration and sentiments of the broader citizenry.”

He cites a World Values Survey showing that while most people have a strong national identity, in 43 of 46 countries polled, 72% of the population also saw themselves as global citizens. But members of institutions (corporations, interest groups, political parties) tend to pursue their narrowly defined self-interest, he says, while individuals are more interested in pursuing the common good.

At grassroots level

A number of grassroots organizations have come to life that offer perspective on how to counteract typical tendencies toward self-interest within and among organizations and nations. One is the United World of Colleges founded in 1962 by a German educator, Kurt Hahn, who wanted to transmit a spirit of mutual understanding to young people in order to help them overcome prejudice and antagonism by living and working together. His belief is that education is a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable culture. (*uwc.org*)

Citizens for Global Solutions is based in Washington, D.C., with roots dating back prior to World War II. It has counted among its membership authors and intellectuals such as Norman Cousins, Albert Einstein, Senator Alan Cranston and Mortimer Adler. They share a vision of “one world,” and the “unity of humankind,” a “future in which nations work together to abolish war, protect rights and freedom, and solve problems facing humanity that no nation can solve alone.” (*globalsolutions.org*)

Other significant contributions at a grassroots level come from ecclesial movements among which is the Focolare, now present in 182 nations around the world. It seeks to build unity among individuals, nations and groups of every language, race, nationality and religion. The spirituality of unity that motivates its members has given rise to a new way of life with a distinct communitarian dimension lived out by millions of people worldwide.

Inspired by Christian principles, the Focolare lifestyle emphasizes parallel values in other faiths and cultures. They propose that each person, in their large or small world of daily activities — families, schools, workplaces and communities — can truly be builders of peace and instruments of unity.

“Was it not the memory of the pain and suffering of World War II that gave rise to the United Nations?” said Focolare’s late founder, Chiara Lubich, in her May 1997 address at the United Nations in New York. “Out of the negative experience of division and conflict came the positive goal of integration among states and unity among nations. It is not by chance that the Focolare was born in that same moment in history. Amid the bombs and the darkness of that terrible war, a group of young women discovered the light of mutual love and were ready to give their lives for one another. They decided to spread this love among people, groups and nations without excluding or forgetting anyone.”

The reciprocal nature of the relationships that were created among the early Focolare group called them to go beyond self interest in order to establish relationships with everyone, believing that other people also wanted to resolve the social problems of the world and work for peace.

These efforts of the Focolare recall the words of Pope John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps in January 2000. Having pointed out the remarkable advances in science that characterized the twentieth century, he asked the question: “Was this century also the century of ‘brotherhood’?” He underlined “the persevering action of farsighted diplomats” in their attempt to build an authentic “community of nations” as a sign of “a real desire to build a world based on brotherhood in order to create, defend and spread peace all around us.”

“We are aware that people are moving toward unity with a thrust of exceptional speed,” he told young people at Genfest 1990. “The events that we are witnessing urge us to quickly formulate adequate and original responses without any hesitation . . . The path toward a united world, which is the path of peace, is founded on the construction of relationships of solidarity, a solidarity rooted in love.”

If we are called to build the history that we want to see in our future, we have a new opportunity to discover the diverse gifts that each individual, nation and culture have to contribute to a civilization of reciprocal relationships of love, of universal brotherhood. It is a reciprocity capable of leading each person to embrace a global identity, and to reach out to other peoples and nations not only in emergencies, but in everyday life.

Large majorities of people increasingly see themselves as global citizens.

Box:

Stronger international ties, polls say

Large majorities around the world support giving the U.N. a variety of expanded powers, including having a standing peacekeeping force, the authority to investigate human rights violations and the power to regulate the international arms trade.

U.S. polling by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2010 found a majority of Americans support having a standing U.N. peacekeeping force (64%), giving the U.N. the authority to go into countries to investigate violations of human rights (72%), creating an international marshals service that could arrest leaders responsible for genocide (73%), giving the U.N. the power to regulate the international arms trade (55%) and having a “U.N. agency control access to all nuclear fuel in the world to ensure that none is used for weapons production” (64%).

Large majorities in most nations say that when there are concerns about the fairness of elections, countries should be willing to have U.N. observers monitor the elections.

Large majorities in countries around the world, including the U.S., reject a dominant role for the U.S. but do want it to participate in multilateral efforts to address international issues.

CCGA polling of Americans in 2010 found them largely in step with world opinion. Just 8% favored the U.S. being the preeminent world leader, while 19% favored U.S. disengagement and 71% favored the U.S. taking a cooperative approach.

Gallup revealed similar results when it asked Americans about the role the U.S. should play in trying to solve international problems.

Worldpublicopinion.org

Captions:

United Nations, Geneva.

The United Nations has exerted much effort to provide a forum for the world’s nations to work together collaboratively.

Model U.N., New York. Students from Monroe Community College competed in the National Collegiate Conference at the New York City Model United Nations for seven days. The conference offers this program to more than 4,000 college and university students from five continents who have diverse cultural, religious and social backgrounds.

European Parliament, Bruxelles. In Europe there has been great determination to unite economically and politically.

Youth for a United World, Chicago. Young people around the world are determined to build a world based on brotherhood in order to create, defend and spread peace.