13 Community and World Order*

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As World War II drew to a close, we who considered ourselves men and women of goodwill and good sense, responsibly concerned about the future of humanity, thought that we were in substantial agreement about the kind of world that we needed and wanted to create and maintain. In negative terms, it was to be a non-Hitlerian world, one that would not be periodically subjected to the destructiveness of war, and one that would be cleansed of tyranny and imperialism. In positive terms, it was to be a world of peace and security, marked by respect for the principle of national self-determination and for basic human rights, a world moving in orderly fashion to the achievement of social justice and economic welfare for all. The goal was clear. Our leaders stated it well in the Preamble and Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, which we accepted as the manifesto of right-thinking people everywhere. We understood that the War had been fought to prevent the establishment of the wrong kind of world order; we believed that the United Nations was being created to promote the establishment of the right kind of world order. We were accomplishing the dethronement of Hitler and, belatedly, the enthronement of Wilson. We recognized that many uncertainties and difficulties lay ahead, but we had our ideal clearly and firmly in mind. We knew the nature of the achievement that was essential to our future.

Actually, the consensus of 1945 was less solid and meaningful than it appeared. There were substantial differences of objective among those who negotiated and signed the Charter and among the peoples for whom they spoke. Many of these differences were not so much resolved as papered over by the constitutional instrument that emerged from the Conference at San Francisco. Agreement was to some extent an illusion fostered by the ambiguity of terms employed in the Charter, and to some extent a pretense, a posture adopted by statesmen who

thought it impolitic openly to reject ideals that seemed to command the passionate allegiance of the greater part of humanity. Looking back, we find it obvious that the peoples and governments represented at San Francisco were united neither in their understanding of nor in their dedication to the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter. That document was the form of words upon which the assembled representatives were willing to declare their agreement; it expressed a purported consensus. The artificiality of that agreement was not altogether hidden from us at the beginning, but we took comfort from the thought that formal acceptance of sound principles and noble purposes might provide the basis for reaching real agreement and organizing common effort to give them effect. Naivety about reality was less prominent than hopefulness about the possibility of progress.

In fact, the differences concealed by the Charter have grown in number, scope, and depth as time has passed, circumstances have changed, and the ‘we’ referred to in the Preamble has been progressively enlarged. Major discrepancies have been revealed and have developed in the United Nations as to the nature of justice and of order, the ideal relationship between these two values, and the relative emphasis that should be placed upon stability and upon change. We have seen the fading of confidence that meaningful agreement has been reached, and of hope that it might be reached, upon such matters as promoting respect for human rights, eliminating the vestiges of colonialism, and developing collective sanctions against disturbers of international peace. The history of the United Nations has been, in considerable measure, the story of the gradual dispelling of the illusion that we had, in 1945, a genuine consensus on goals for mankind, and of the progressive disintegration of whatever consensus we did have at that time.

Nevertheless, those of us in academic or associated pursuits who have continued to address ourselves to the central problems of international relations have adhered to our original conception of the nature of the world order that should be established. Deprived of confidence that our vision is universally shared, we have fallen back upon the conviction that we know what the world needs; if we cannot purport to express what mankind wants, we can at least declare what it ought to want and strive for. Recognizing that global consensus is a hope for the future rather than a reality of the present, we can hope to serve at best as members of a creative minority or at worst as true prophets crying in the wilderness.