This month, the ‘Bridge Builder’ brings together thinkers and practitioners in various fields to reconsider the notion of ‘common good,’ as it pertains to politics, economics, and other spheres of human enterprise. The aim of this monthly Bulletin is to share visions of how to overcome perception problems, and thus to better understand life within different communities, including the family, society, education, the work environment and management.

Of course, there are a number of barriers which affect successful communication, including different perceptions and cultural outlooks. Our perceptions are based on our own experiences, our language, our knowledge, our background and our culture. We each have our own perceptual style which impacts how we interpret the information we send and what we receive from others. In particular, the notion of common good is often confused with terms like ‘good or common washing’ and even morality or the general interest. But the term actually refers to a deliberative process, rather than to meta-principles or a static social contract to be implemented.

I would like to thank friends - notably Tom Mahon (San Francisco), Sesto Castagnoli (Switzerland) and Bill Linton (an ‘American in Paris’) for their advice on these points. I also came to understand through Dr Moustafa Traore that, despite terms having clear definition on paper, people tend to give those terms their own unique definition according to their individual perceptions and backgrounds (see his introduction on Page 3).

Thus, the purpose of this monthly Bulletin is to give a voice to people all over the world in order for them to express their vision of the common good, and share stories of life within their unique communities, with a particular emphasis on the philosophy of Ubuntu that comes to us from Africa. This term (literally, ‘human-ness’) has been roughly translated to ‘human kindness, especially in Southern Africa (South Africa and Zimbabwe). Since the transition to democracy in South Africa with the late Nelson Mandela’s presidency in 1994, the term has become known globally, through the writings of Desmond Tutu.

Now we invite you to read the story of a journey of an Ubuntu Girl in South Africa serving as a bridgebuilder, as well as the thoughts of others on the notions of the common good, Ubuntu and Tikkun (“healing the world”).

Also in this issue, read the story of practitioners who have been able to implement both the philosophy of the Common Good and Ubuntu, in France as well as Africa. … and finally, we invite you to send us your thoughts & perceptions on “the common good!”

Dr Moustafa Traore specializes on civilizational issues. He holds an interesting experience of teaching in London both in High School and at University. He is a regular speaker in international conference and lecturer at the Sorbonne University. He is the founder of the NGO ANOpenEye.

In times of financial and social crisis, the notion and concept of Common Good seems to have regained momentum as an answer to understand globalisation and market economy from a human or rather cultural point of view. In most societies, and more precisely in the Western ones, finding alternatives to the exploitation of the mass and individuals - for the sake of a governing system or ruling dominating minority - has become the main concern of most humanitarians. It would however be a mistake to consider that answers and remedies to the inequitable distribution of what affects the well-being of individuals in society can only and solely be found in western countries.

Also it is interesting to notice that despite the clear definition of the concept of ‘Common Good’ by philosophers (Aristotle or Aquinas for instance) and of the concept of ‘Commons’ by Dr Elinor Ostrom, people in general tend to give those terms their own definition and meaning. Indeed, the understanding of the term ‘Common Good’ will thus often differ according to the individual’s cultural, social identities or backgrounds … and consequently perceptions.

In that respect, these discrepancies are also to be taken into consideration when analyzing and comparing the different continents. It is thus, for example, that the notion of ‘Common Good’, rather perceived as ‘Ubuntu’ in some African languages of the Bantu linguistic family, seems to have been engrained in African cultures, values and moralities long before the acculturation provoked and imposed through the contact with the White European’s world. Yet, how the African comprehension of the notion of ‘Common Good’ illustrates and expresses itself still remains little known and scarcely explored by the eyes of the analysts, and academics that we are. What are the different comprehensions and expressions of the African notion of ‘Common Good’ or ‘Ubuntu’? Does the African Ubuntu pre-exist the more Western centered conception of the ‘Common Good’? In what sense can the African ‘Ubuntu’ in times of open globalisation and intensive market economy impact social rules?

These are questions among others to which our work tries to answer.
Sonja Kruse set out with a 33lt backpack, a camera and a R100, completing a year long solo trip, walking and hitch hiking around South-Africa. Over 351 days she experienced the generosity of 150 families, from 16 cultures, throughout 114 towns. She wanted to collect the goodwill stories often omitted from our newspaper headlines. She is busy publishing a book that she hopes will help us build social bridges and equip the next generation with the tools to write the stories we want for our future.

Thabi & Ubuntu

«Thabi! I don’t care what you say! I’m doing this!» I was managing a lodge in the KZN Province of South-Africa when I decided to step into this dream that I’ve had for four years. So, I quit my job; gave my car away and was about to hit the road but not without resistance from my Zulu co-worker and friend, Thabi. She was concerned about my safety and told me that I might be killed. Or starve to death. Her final attempt to stop me from leaving was: «You’ll ruin your skin!» I told her that I will take a hike and do what I came here for. Yet, if any person from here should go knocking on a white person’s door, what would happen? They would very likely close their home? Yet, if any person from here should go knocking on a white person’s door, what would happen? They would very likely close their door. Other times I just engaged with people on the street. It was an instinctive. We are intuitive beings. I could sense when someone was not ready to take on my story.

As we drove on I sensed that something was weighing on his mind. I sat quietly next to him and waited until he had formulated what he wanted to say. He listened and spoke, walking in a Pedi trustland area on a hot day. My feet were burning and I was sweating. He had a sense of victimhood. He wasn’t asking himself the question, ‘What do I want to say?’ He was asking himself the question, ‘What are they going to say?’‘Our’ area, for question more than answers

We are one another’s biggest resources and teachers. I was walking in a Pedi trustland area on a hot day. My feet were slowing me down, so when I saw the red car approaching, I stuck out my hand and hitched. The driver stopped next to me and asked me what I was doing there. He listened and spoke, in Pedi, I presumed with the woman in the back seat. She had a toddler with her. He offered me a lift to their home, about five kilometres away. This is how I met Solly and his wife Catherine. As we drove on I sensed that something was weighing on his mind. I sat quietly next to him and waited until he had formulated this question, that was surely hanging in the space between us. Eventually he turned to me. I sensed sadness, anger and frustration. «Why is it that, a white woman, can come here into this area . . . into our area . . . and you know that you can go knocking on any door and that somebody will take you into their home? Yet, if any person from here should go knocking on a white person’s door, what would happen? They would not be welcome. Why is that?» This question lingers and is an important question for South Africans and one that we are not engaging with fully. Solly and I often phone one another and we have agreed to meet in a space of question, rather than a space where having answers are more important.

Language

In a country with eleven official languages, one would think that there would have been a language barrier. But, so much of our communication is non-verbal. Also, in South Africa, many households have three generations living under one roof and so there was generally some Afrikaans or English spoken, which are the languages I speak (together with very basic isiZulu). Some villages would take it upon themselves to choose a host family for me, upon my arrival. And often they would choose either the wealthiest family or a family who had a better command of the English language. Ubuntu means community and decisions are made together. In a few instances after my arrival at a family’s home, an elder of the village would arrive and the host would make us tea. The elder would then proceed to welcome me to the village and assure me of my safety and also: «You are staying with a good family. They will take care of your needs and will call me if there is something they can’t provide.»

People, Culture and Community

People take a lot of pride in their culture, community and surroundings and shared this with me as we walked around their neighbourhoods and farms or visited their places of worship and places of natural beauty; or as they invited neighbours to share stories about the area with me.

150 families, 16 cultures. Sometimes I would just knock on a door. Other times I just engaged with people on the street. It was instinctive. We are intuitive beings. I could sense when someone did not want me in their space. As the journey progressed, people started approaching me. It was as if I was becoming transparent and being replaced with the stories from the journey. People were attracted to that. An old Sotho woman from the Free State Province taught me that it is not possible to arrive somewhere with nothing. «You never come with nothing. You come with all that you are.»

People take a lot of pride in their culture, community and surrounding and shared this with me as we walked around their neighbourhoods and farms or visited their places of worship and places of natural beauty; or as they invited neighbours to share stories about the area with me.
Even though the notions of common good and of general interest are considered by many to be equivalent, the two terms in fact refer to different understandings of the human condition, as well as to very different visions of society.

Utilitarian purposes

The term ‘public interest’ often seems to be the most commonly used concept in the modern state, and is aligned with the dominant view of the market economy as the alpha and omega of human societies. This point of view presupposes that humans created society for utilitarian purposes, such as economy and security. In that sense, individuals would exist prior to society, and their existence as human beings would represent a natural property of their bodies. Thus, the social life of humans should only concern their existence and wealth, not necessarily their well-being.

A reversal of perspective

Over the last decades of the twentieth century, a reversal of perspective has come into being, and is now fully accepted in the scientific community. Indeed the remarkable progress in primatology, in paleoanthropology and developmental psychology have led to the same conclusion: the raison d’être of human nature is the so-called ‘social state’. Aristotle, Thomas d’Aquinas, and most non-Western cultures are right: the social life does not only exist for utilitarian purposes, or according to basic interests, but also for the common good. This means that social life is not only based on our assets, but also on our well-being.

For a political philosophy of the common good

By Mr François FLAHAUT, Head of Research, Philosophy, CNRS, France

For instance a newborn will only get a place as a human being in a socialized context of coexistence. He will need to be with other people to coexist, and the institutions will guarantee his existence prior to a person. The first kind of experience the baby can experience is the mutual attachment which binds him to adults able to take care of him. This first well-being moment may be called ‘common experiences’ because each partner enjoys the relationship of the property which depends on the condition that others are also experiencing.

Definition of the common good

In that respect, the common good is the essential living of all human existence throughout life. At all ages and in all cultures, we are sensitive to the social environment in which we live. The concept of ‘experienced’ common good meets both criteria specific to that economy called public goods or common property. Economics defines a public good as a ‘non-rival good’ (consumption of the good by anyone who does not reduce the amount available to others), and non-exclusive (free access), for example: public lighting, the light and heat of the sun, radio, Internet. Thus, the essence of the ‘experienced’ common good lies on top of these criteria as a third one. The presence of other people does not diminish the good that I can feel, but on the other hand, other people are necessary to feel the pleasure of a conversation with them. Consequently, the common good can be defined as the system which supports the co-existence of people. Considering that each of us can become a ‘person’ within a social life and culture, citizens should be provided a sustainable common world.

Common good versus morality

Nonetheless broadcasting a moral discourse, or seeking good feelings are not enough. The question of the common good also involves a process of thinking as well as of taking political action. Obviously a balance of power, effective institutions, and adequate economic and social organization are necessary conditions essential to the welfare of people.

Human rights doctrine

A renewed conception of the common good appears as the necessary complement of the human rights doctrine. Human rights are individual rights and they strive to provide a remedy against the abuse of power by other individuals. Thus they do not say what the purpose of the human is beyond his or her utilitarian social function. They do not say what binds members of society together.

According to the liberal societies, it is generally accepted that the state must guarantee individual rights with human rights, but it does not prescribe a conception of the ‘good life’. Individuals are the best judges of what is good for themselves. The government obviously does not have to say what people should or should not like. However, in addition to social injustice, stands degradation of tangible or intangible properties, because they are relational goods able to nourish both the existence of each, and his or her links with others. It is therefore desirable that governments and citizens, at their respective levels, are concerned about what improves or degrades, the quality of the relations and social life of individuals.

Common Good and Totalitarianism

This question may raise to another one: could enforcing the common good lead to totalitarianism? No, quite the contrary. It is essential, in fact, to distinguish between, on the one hand, institutions and authorities that organize society, and secondly, the personal, relational and social life of its members. The social life is an end in itself, while institutions and authorities are not and should not be a means to serve it. Also the philosophy of the common good should not limit freedoms because it promotes the contrary - the importance of each member in the community and everyone as a person. In totalitarian or dictatorial regimes, this order is reversed: the unit of political power enslaves the individual and social life for its own purposes.

Market economy and other spheres of social life

The danger today is not totalitarianism, but rather the domination of the market economy doctrine as totally distinguished from the other spheres of the social life. More precisely, the concentration of economic and financial power in the hands of a minority can favor the search for short-term profit and not a long-term vision. While liberal philosophy give each citizen the freedom to decide for himself what his good is, in fact, they continue to make them focus on consumption as the supreme good. One of the major problems humanity is facing now is to maintain, establish or re-establish a balance between political power for the common good, and the power of money for a select few. Such a balance between these two powers should contribute to the common good of the society, rather than only to the financial gain of a very few.

Common Good, the Commons and intermediaries

Eventually the common good is concretely realized through public goods or more precisely the Commons. However, the role of the latter in human societies is largely underestimated in our social life. Indeed tradable property remains predominant and monopolizes desires. On top of numerous and diverse material commons (sewers, roads, drinking water) co-exist intangible ones (confidence, knowledge, long-term vision) through all intermediaries: institutions, governments, law, forms of sociability (including intergenerational), health, internet, knowledge, arts and other cultural property. The sustainability of the common good also depends on the natural commons: the planet remains our irreplaceable environment.
The philosophy of Ubuntu, underlying many African indigenous knowledge systems, enjoys growing popularity in the northern hemisphere. As Yusufu Turaki summarized its essence, “People are not individuals, living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence.” Thus, Ubuntu contrasts Adam Smith and his followers, who emphasized the individual and its egoism as drivers of economics.

Lessons from Socio-Economic Discussion in South Africa

One of my recurring topics of interest is equal economic dignity. That’s why I attended a HumanDHS conference in spring 2013 at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, hoping to learn how Ubuntu is informing the current socio-economic discussion in South Africa. In which way might Ubuntu provide a guideline for economic concepts overcoming the well-known shortcomings of our current systems? Ubuntu philosophy primarily relates to personal and community-development emphasizing spirituality. It relates to economy as it attaches great ethical value to sharing and generosity. As always, there is the challenge to transfer these ethical values to practice. As a first step one may ask how Ubuntu might help to further develop thinking about economy. At HumanDHS we emphasize ‘right relationships’, a term coined by Jean Baker Miller. Relationships are at the heart of Ubuntu, too. This adds to Ubuntu’s appeal as an indigenous knowledge system.

Let me address three questions: (1) What can we learn from the indigenous knowledge system Ubuntu? (2) Which characteristics of South Africa’s current system limit economic dignity for all? (3) What is imagined locally and globally to develop the current system to overcome its limitations?

The concept of Ubuntu

Ubuntu’s underlying philosophy can be understood as a loose equivalent to our western concept of ‘humanness’. However, it places more emphasis on the social connectedness than on the individual personality of people, compared to our tradition. It also informs the rules for educating children so that they develop into mature members of their social group. Ubuntu became popular in an African context, especially during transition times like decolonization periods. However, all traditional cultures are communal cultures, and Ubuntu thus shares common traits with many indigenous knowledge systems. Desmond Tutu based his theology of liberation, reconciliation and hope on a combination of traditional Judeo-Christian theology and Ubuntu. Since then, the concept of Ubuntu enjoys growing popularity worldwide.

Current impact

As said on the website of the South African Ubuntu Foundation, “Ubuntu is a collective respect for human dignity. How can Ubuntu’s current impact be described? Of course, listening to news reports about Africa, one may ask oneself if Ubuntu is really having an impact on what is going on. Frequent violent clashes as well as everyday violence in families and social groups abound. Traditional family structures are crumbling under attack from many directions: HIV/AIDS, unemployment, drugs and alcohol abuse, deterioration of public services, corruption – in fact, one may justifiably wonder whether Ubuntu has survived the transition from a pre-modern to a post-modern society. Are there built-in limits to Ubuntu, which jeopardize its success? Are current power structures working against it? When digging deeper than news headlines, it is easy to find Ubuntu being lived in many places. HIV orphans are raised by neighbours or members of the extended family. Sharing of basic necessities among the most poor is done routinely, grassroots organizations are formed to alleviate poverty or to educate children. During my stay in South Africa, I became aware of many such initiatives. Let’s look at jurisprudence. Ubuntu is mentioned in the epilogue of the 1995 Interim Constitution of South Africa: ‘there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimization’. Despite the term missing in the 1995 Final Constitution, the Constitutional Court has at least twenty times referred to Ubuntu in its rulings. Apart from that, however, it has been observed ‘there have not been many attempts to incorporate ubuntu into post-apartheid jurisprudence’. As said before, Desmond Tutu based his theology on a synthesis of Judeo-Christian heritage and the African heritage of Ubuntu. This was very influential when he presided the Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 1993 to 1995. He surely made an important contribution to the transition from a racialized apartheid society which perceived itself as ‘Rainbow Nation’. Thus one can say that Ubuntu played a crucial part in overcoming Apartheid. In the 1997 White Paper on Social Welfare of the South African government, Ubuntu is presented as an underlying principle of social development: ‘The principle of caring for each other’s well-being will be promoted, and a spirit of mutual respect instilled. Each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual’s humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being.’

A statement like this, if not augmented by specific Ubuntu-inspired actions, points at a difficulty to tie this concept to a modern government initiative. Maybe that is why in later official documents, Ubuntu is rarely mentioned. As agreed by my interviewees, South Africa’s current government and political leaders are no beacons of Ubuntu. Many see Ubuntu principles being violated in recent years. Nevertheless, Ubuntu often is mentioned by people as the force which defends against futher collapse of society. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki and the philosopher Alexander Shulte realised this when creating ‘The Common Ground Project’, which has the mission to revive Ubuntu ethics. This is just one example of many people and grassroots organizations seeing Ubuntu as an important driver of social progress. Drucilla Cornell, a co-founder of the Ubuntu Projects at the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Studies, critically analyzed whether Ubuntu ‘could be considered a crucial aspect of the democratization of the customary in South Africa, or alternatively, as it is viewed by its skeptics, as an empty signifier that has been cynically deployed by its proponents to promote and thus capture young black South Africans in the commercialism and consumatism of advanced global capitalism.’

She concluded that ‘First and foremost, ubuntu remained at the very heart of how the young black South Africans that I interviewed saw ethics and politics.’ (Cornell 2003)

My personal experience is in line with her conclusion. Ubuntu as a management concept

Sigger and coworkers report on empirical results from Tanzania on applying Ubuntu as management concept. More than 200 top managers from Tanzania have been educated on business schools in Europe and the United States. Most claimed that they follow Ubuntu principles in their management style. However, as the authors indicate, further research will be needed to confirm how this influences real business practices or whether such allusions are just lip service. It has been stated that business education in Africa is not based upon the concept of Ubuntu, but relies on the same textbooks and paradigms as business education at western universities. Steps have been suggested to develop business education toward Ubuntu, the first step being to recognize that a firm is a community, not a collection of individuals. Further steps that would be to analyze observable corruptions of Ubuntu ethics, among them nepotism, group-think and suppression of individual initiative. All of them are clearly observable in the current political society. However, they are identified as deviations from the Ubuntu concept, not integral to it. Therefore, it is needed to further develop education, theory and practice of Ubuntu.
The concept of Beloved Community

Steeped in the American Civil Rights movement and Martin Luther King’s theory of the power and efficacy of nonviolence, love, and social justice, I know best the concept of ‘the beloved community’. As the goal in the 1950’s and 60’s struggle for civil rights, the beloved community, as articulated by King, is made up of all those of good heart who seek a community, even a world-house, characterized by agape, socio-economic justice, equality, and the flourishing of all people. It is a world without war, poverty, or racism. At its very heart is solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and with those burdened with the consequences of injustice.

When King took the civil rights campaign to Chicago, he did not stay in a comfortable hotel. Rather, he stayed where the poor are found: a 4th floor walk-up where the hallways smelled of urine, a building situated in Longview, a depressed section of the City. Learning from Mohandas Gandhi of the power of love and nonviolence in a struggle for freedom, what Gandhi called soul-force, King led the civil rights movement with the vision and hope that the movement would build a beloved community. Through the method of nonviolence, and determined when beaten by police and bitten by dogs to love, to refuse to hate, he believed that justice and righteousness would have the last word.

Though believing that evil was real, “stark grim, and colossally real,” he was sure that love, truth, righteousness, and nonviolence were more powerful and enduring than hatred and violence, and would, finally, however long the struggle, prevail. «The moral arc of the universe», King often quoted, «is long, but bends toward justice.»

Project for Public/Global Citizenship

As faculty and co-founder of the Marist Praxis Project for Public/Global Citizenship at Marist College, and founding resident of the Beloved Community House, I have the enormous privilege of initiating public work, and to mentor such work initiated by students themselves. From several local public praxis sites - humanitarin, environmental, after school - to a corner dump in Kolkata and an AIDS orphanage in Kenya, students are meeting with those who inhabit a world walled in by poverty, loss, addiction, violence, and exploitation. Lacking material goods, an adequate education, or even a support network, the
very poor have no known way out of the conditions in which they have been effectively ensnared.

Gradually forming reciprocal relationship, students get to know residents personally, begin to gain their trust, and unobtrusively find ways to lessen burdens, and consider possible remedies for aspects of the situation. Glancing, first-hand, the lived reality of those who ‘don’t matter’, who are not on any urgent list of policy-makers, students see an angle on the world not visible anywhere but in this shared space. Socio-economic structures and political policies, seen through this lens, surprise with clarity and revelatory power.

A public praxis experience in Haiti

Let me illustrate the above through a public praxis experience in Haiti. Over spring break, a year after the calamitous earthquake, I took my class in the course, Haiti, Praxis, and Solidarity, to Les Cayes, Haiti. The mix of 12 adult and traditional students, with at least half earning a public praxis minor, and myself, teamed up with H.E.L.O. (Haïti Home, Education, Love, Opportunity), led by Elisabeth Kennedy, co-founder with Pastor Jean Beaucœur of HELO’s three-house orphanage, headquartered in les Cayes – our destination.

With most class members seasoned ‘praxivists’, they connected immediately with the orphanage kids of all ages, the house parents, staff at Pastor Jean’s, and Elisabeth. Practicing Creole for weeks before the trip, they engaged the kids, the best they could, in their own language. One excited little girl drugged Katie across the grounds pointing at stones, & jumping the rope with the children, “he related, “but I couldn’t hold the ball.” Kate and I went outside for some air? I agreed because it was too painful to sit meaningfully, experiences of the day, the more I thought about that little girl. “The more I thought about it, the thicker the tears were filling my eyes. Then it all hit me at once, and I broke down. It was not a little break down, either.”

One evening touched the deepest part of us all. The day had been spent at a newly opened house for rescued restavek children, essentially child slaves. Haitian families so poor that they cannot feed their children give them to live with better off families as live-in servants. The trade-off is the expectation that the family will feed the child and send him or her to school. In some instances this happens. But in most cases, the child is used for all kinds of work, from morning to night with no time for play or school. They are often beaten, to night with no time for play or school. They are often beaten, or punished with their shins rubbed in a grinder.[1]

The difference in presence and behavior between the orphanage children - squealing with excitement and delight - and these former restaveks was a chasm to one’s spirit. The rescued children were at first awkward and hesitant. The students brought out a soccer ball, bouncy ball, Frisbee, and a whistle ball with a bat. Katie showed some of the smaller kids how to hold the bat and hit the ball; Joseph kicked the soccer ball around and little by little some of the kids joined in. “I even jumped the rope with the children,” he related, “but I could not keep myself in one place... I was jumping side to side and the kids couldn’t figure out what was going on.”

The students talked to one little girl, M, never smiled, and didn’t play. Joseph tried to figure out ways that she could make her happy; he tried eating the leaves of the trees. This didn’t work. While I was trying to make her smile, I remembered the times when I was little and was left at places where no one looked after me. I thought I could feel just a little what she might be feeling. Then I remembered the whistle ball, so I tossed it in her direction. At first there was nothing, but then she tossed it back to me and I missed it. I noticed something changed... she had a great big smile on her face and was laughing. This made me feel good because I had finally broken through that force field that had built up through years of abuse and mistreatment.

Joseph's group was in charge of that night’s meeting. As members shared meaningfully, the group to hear what we would be doing the next day.

Back home at the College, Matt, class member and Mar’s assistant with the Public Praxis Project, interviewed on camera all the participating students, went over reams of pictures, wrote the script, featured Amanda’s deep and soulful account of her day with the rescued restaveks, and made a documentary that won first place in the annual Silver Fox Award, as well as being named a finalist for a significant upstate documentary festival. Sharon, an adult pre-med student, edited a ‘Special Edition – Haiti’ of The Pravixist Project with everyone in the class writing a thematic article related to Haiti and their experience. Joseph wrote of his day with the restavek children. Each also presented at the annual Public Praxis Forum, followed by a Haitian meal served special that night in the cafeteria.

Since the trip approximately half of the students have returned with Elisabeth. Jennifer visiting little Saphira whose care she adopted and who is the subject of the children’s book she has written. Kim and Kate taking their mothers, and their mothers returning multiple times themselves with needed items, once with a bank of computers.

The entire experience has been a communion, with each other, with Elisabeth, with Pastor John and his household, with all the orphanage children, and with the wounded former restaveks, all animate into a love that heals, that connects hearts across all lines of ethnicity, age, orientation, faith traditions, and affinities, that from one person to another like new tributaries from a mighty stream gathers the power of increasing humanity. This soul-force, of all who give themselves to love in any of its many forms – as Rambali, the beloved community, tikun, the common good, common decency – this love, as does ‘the moral arc of the universe’, finally, prevails.
The culture forges both the person and the framework where people live. In this reciprocal tension one finds «Community personalism», a philosophy designed by Mr Emmanuel Mounier, founder of the Magazine Esprit (1932) in France. Every individual is considered as a person - unique and responsible - structu-red through his or her interaction with other people and the world. Soon after his death in 19xx, Mounier’s philosophy inspired the creation of ‘La Vie Nouvelle’ (the «New Life») movement, which is designed to be a common property of all its members. Since its inception in 19xx the movement has dealt with events, surprises, upssets and provokes engagement. A brief history can be found at:

Established in 1947, the New Life movement comes from the Scout friendships and its slogan «Act and not suffer». It was also inspired in 1949 by the concept of Community personalism in Mr Emmanuel Mounier’s work. Evolving from Scouting, small friendly teams called «fraternities» were created. These were places where the members of ‘La Vie Nouvelle’ could gather for reflection, exchange, freedom, listening, speaking, and where everyone could build relationships with each other listening to other points of view. Those ‘fraternities’ developed a spirit of community in which the key feature was development of common experience and good-will between each student, even where there are disagreements. Each of the students are aware that the truth is not «in - itself» but «in the inter-se»: in the relationship with each other. Those fruitful disagreements allow everyone to advance respect as regards the difference of each other. In the early 1950s, La Vie Nouvelle implemented an idea coming from the book «Economy and Humanism» and animated by the Father Lebret’ thinking. In-deed in a spirit of sharing, each member makes a financial contribution, proportio-nal to his income, to the common good for the operation of the movement.

Over time there emerged shared fruits of passionate debate, as well as ruptures in terms of orientation. Originally linked to the Catholic Church, the movement eventually opened its doors to Protestants and agnostics. While Vatican II initially encouraged the opening of new points of view, the encyclical Humanae vitae in 1968 discouraged much religious practice for people engaged on issues related to contraception and family planning. Eventu-ally positions for the so-called ‘Veil law’ (allowing the possibility of abortion) finally cut ties with the institutional church. This secularization has been accompanied by a pluralistic openness to the meaning of life in a broader sense. Politically the same evolution developed among Christian Democrats, as the movement radically changes position, notably on decolonization matters. In that respect, the war in Algeria was a key moment. La Vie Nouvelle approaches the so-called «second left» party, and groups like the Club «60 Citoyens» founded in 1959 by Jacques Delors who also runs the magazine «Citoyens 60». During the presidential election in 1965 between De Gaulle and Mitterrand, the left orientation was confirmed (i.e. in favor of Francois Mitterrand).

With these changes, the movement deepened its philosophy of the notion of ‘person’, while he identifies it as a move-ment of popular education. New authors became references, such as Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricœur, Jurgen Haber-mas, Hans Jonas, Hannah Arendt. Those representing French social and political life, such as Christophe Delombe, Michel Albert and Jacques Delors, played a crucial role in the building of the movement.

One can also perceive changes in its operation. The early, highly centralized and interventionist direction of the beginning faced new challenges: the personalist inspiration that nourishes its members would upset the organization of the movement. The members of La Vie Nouvelle have multiple commitments. The richness of the common good within these society repre-sents the multiplicity of belonging to each of the various social groups. Also it gradually empowers local groups and conducts workshops in tune for local action around issues - such as women’s empowerment, as well as sociocultural events. Also at the beginning, within the churches, were proposed liturgical animations or manufacturing of the so-called ‘agenda Alleluia’. Many members of La Vie Nouvelle participated in the 1960s in the creation of actions, such as in the cities. From these initiatives came ‘federal sectors workshops like «political workshop» from ‘60 Citizens’, as well as the «spirituality workshop» of the Alleluia team which continued with the workshop ‘Faith - Meaning of life’. In the 1970s, the revival of personalist studies lead to the establishment of the workshop ‘Philosophies of the person.’

More recent initiatives from local groups have mounted two other federal workshops: «For a united future» and «Sobriety and sustainable development».

La Vie Nouvelle currently publishes the magazine «Citizens», notebooks political education, philosophical and spiritual is-sues. It is dedicated to its members, partners but seeks a wider audience as well. It develops diverse and reasoned opinions, and presents stories of people involved in this society.

Note the formation of Commissions, the organization of work-shops sessions for members but open to the public as well, in particular to discuss different matters for each election.

Examples:
- Beyond fears and folds, which political projects? (2012);
- Living together the governance of the Commons for an inclu-sive future;
- The local democracy: living it, engaging, and how?
- What kind of solidarity in Europe to fight the emergency of serious Economic, ecological and social issues (2009);
- And coming soon, on 8-9 February 2014: Euro-citizens and Europol players: a Parliament for what to do?

Through the commitments of each shared in common, the movement take into account the different facets of the current multiple crisis. It is definitely part of a civil society that seeks to be heard even in a climate where individualism and gloom prevail. That is why, following a conference on «Democracy facing potential risk of spirituality» (December 2008), La Vie Nouvelle decided to become part of the “Pacte civique”, a kind of civic Covenant, gathering collective societies and activists who are rethinking, acting and living in a different way.

Some researches coming from those people intend to provoke changes in personal behavior, as well as modes of institutional functioning, or political challenges.

Thus, Community personalism, far from being a fixed doctrine, is a philosophy that accompanies a person throughout his or her personal history and living the history of the community. It should led him to reflect on the causes and consequences of events that he can see in practice and so listen to the daily life of events and people.

construction des désaccords féconds permet à chacun d’avanc

er dans le respect de sa différence avec l’autre. Au début

des années 1950, la Vie Nouvelle met en application une idée

gui vient d’« Economie et Humanisme », qu’anime le père

Lebret : la péréquation. Dans un esprit de partage, la contri-

bution financière de chaque membre au bien commun qu

cesure, présente des témoignages de personnes engagées.

Avec la commission formation, les ateliers organisent des

sessions, pour leurs membres et ouvertes à l’extérieur, en

particulier afin de faire le point à chaque échéance électorale.

Des exemples :

- Au-delà des peurs et des replis, quels projets politiques en

2012 ?

- Vivre ensemble les biens communs pour un avenir solidaire

- La démocratie de proximité : la vivre, la faire vivre, comment ?

- Quelle Europe des solidarités face à l’urgence économique,

écologique et sociale ? en 2009

- Et prochainement les 8-9 février 2014 : Euro-citoyens,

Europ’acteurs : un Parlement pour quoi faire ?

À travers ces évolutions le mouvement approfondit sa philo-

sophie de la personne, en même temps qu’il s’identifie à un

mouvement d’éducation populaire. De nouveaux auteurs font

référence tels E. Levinas, P. Ricoeur, J.Habermas, H.Jonas,

Clairement lié à l’institution catholique, le mouvement s’en

détache progressivement, s’ouvrant à des protestants puis des

agnostiques. Vatican. II incite à l’ouverture tandis que l’ency-

clique Humanae vitae éloigne de la pratique religieuse les plus

engagés sur les questions de contraception et de planning

familial ; les positions en faveur de la loi Veil courent défi-

vement les ponts avec l’Église institutionnelle. Cette séculari-

sation s’accompagne d’une ouverture pluraliste sur le sens de

la vie. Au plan politique, même évolution. Initialement lié à la

démocratie chrétienne, le mouvement s’en sépare nettement

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United Nations Human Rights Commissioner

During the main conference, Mrs Mary Robinson, UN Human Rights Commissioner at the time, referred to Ubuntu:

"We can draw inspiration from the African concept of Ubuntu, that ancient term which embraces humaneness, caring, sharing and being in harmony with all of the world. Ubuntu empowers everyone to be valued, to reach their full potential while remaining in accord with everything and everyone around them.

This spirit is reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights when it speaks of "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family".

Mrs Robinson also referred to Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s view of Ubuntu:

"Africans have this thing called Ubuntu. It is about the essence of being human – it is part of the gift that Africa will give to the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe that a person is a person through other persons, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inexplicably, with yours. When I dehumanize you, I inexcusably dehumanize myself."

Reflecting on the rich conversations leading up to and during the Durban conference, I felt as if I had found a long-lost and very dear friend – Ubuntu! I also intuitively knew that this was the beginning of a personal journey – that continues to this day.

Realising that Ubuntu really is a ‘gift to the world’, as Archbishop Tutu so beautifully put it, my vision has been to share this gift as widely as possible.

Lessons from Ubuntu-oriented societies

My first step was to learn more about Ubuntu in order to understand the depth of its meaning, researching literature and networking with people who come from Ubuntu-oriented societie or who work to promote and implement Ubuntu through their work. It was a fascinating time – exchanging ideas, co-creating platforms for dialogue, arranging panel discussions, and attending seminars and conferences. Geneva, with its international community, was an ideal launch-pad for such an initiative, and a number of events were hosted at the United Nations itself. As a representative of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University at the United Nations, I met many who were interested in exploring the spiritual dimension of Ubuntu – specifically the spiritual wisdom that exists at the core of every culture, and the universal values that live in the heart and soul of every individual and that are the foundation for living together in harmony.

Ubuntu in daily life?

Very soon, however, I found that talking about Ubuntu was not enough – it had to be actually felt and experienced in order to be understood, incubated and implemented in daily life. I started to develop creative activities and workshops to help people to discover their own Ubuntu.

It also dawned on me that in order to convey the concept to others convincingly I would need to live the values and principles of Ubuntu myself – a huge, life-long challenge! Nelson Mandela became my role model. Despite serving 27 years in jail, he never lost the Ubuntu values of forgiveness, compassion, reconciliation, dignity and solidarity. At moments when I let myself down, for example, instances of unkindness on my part, I often say to myself «That’s not Ubuntu!» It gives me a mirror for self-transformation.

From Ubuntu to a method of education

In order to develop effective ways to help people of any background to experience the beauty and wisdom of Ubuntu, I needed a method which is thoughtful, creative and fun. I drew from the Living Values Education approach. Living Values was established in 1994 and has grown into a global network of educators passionate about bringing values into every aspect of a child’s development, through reflective, experiential learning. The teacher aspires to be a role model of values and encourages the students to achieve their full potential in a learning environment where every individual feels valued, understood and respected.

Helen Sayers is manager and trainer, Oasis Life-Skills Training Services, based in Oman (www.oasissom.com). She specialises in Ubuntu workshops as ancient African code of ethics, providing a framework for exploring universal values for living and working together in harmony. Creative interactive workshops have been favours in Ghana, India, Italy, Kuwait, Oman, Portugal, Germany, South Africa & UK – for teachers, students & professional groups. A trainer’s guide: ‘UBUNTU! The Spirit of Humanity’ is available through Oasis, available in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and soon in Italian. Oasis Life-Skills Training Services is a local company specialising in life-skills for personal and professional development. Oasis works mainly with business and educational institutions wishing to develop the capacity of their staff or students, and supports the work of youth groups and community organisations. Creative interactive workshops are designed to explore new ways to bring out the best of talents, strengths and qualities. Consultancy services are offered in the area of developing training programmes for youth preparing to integrate into the workplace and for recently-employed young professionals.

A teacher by profession, Helen taught science in the UK, Kenya and Swaziland. Her experience of living in Africa inspired an interest in values-based education and its application in different cultures. Helen is a lead trainer with the Association for Living Values Education International (ALIVE). She has trained educators in a number of countries in Europe and Africa, and in India, Kuwait and Oman. Founder and former president of the Swiss Association for Living Values, Helen currently coordinates its programmes in West and Central Africa, and supervises training workshops for teachers from early childhood to secondary school level and for street children.

Full of creative activities and ideas for interactive workshops, the concept of Ubuntu is used in the book as a framework for exploring and experiencing the values essential for living together in harmony and for building bridges between people of all backgrounds and cultures. The book has been printed in English, French and Arabic and is available in Spanish in e-version. Italian and Konkany (Goa) translations are in progress.

Workshops in Africa and worldwide

Ubuntu workshops have been conducted in Oman, Kuwait, the UK, Goa, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland and Germany, and in a number of countries in Africa. The fundamental values are the same in almost every context: respect, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, cooperation, team-spirit, etc. Activities can be adapted to be used by different groups – from staff in large companies, to students of higher education institutions, to street children, to kindergarten toddlers!

A key objective of the project is to put forward that the values that Ubuntu embraces are not confined to Africa but are universal and at the heart of all cultures. I have included several references to illustrate the universal nature of Ubuntu, including an article about His Majesty Sultan Qaboos of Oman and his annual ‘Meet the People Tour’ where he connects closely with the community with care and affection, earning the love, trust and loyalty of his people. There is also a description of the work of Prince Charles’ charitable organisation, The Prince’s Trust, as an ‘Ubuntu-style’ approach to helping disadvantaged young adults to integrate themselves into society with dignity and a sense of belonging.

Ubuntu in the Sultanate of Oman

I now live in the Sultanate of Oman. It has been a great joy to explore the concept of Ubuntu with Omani people, comparing parallels in their own culture, making connections with the values found in the Holy Quran, building bridges between generations and within the colourful tapestry of different nationalities that make up the unique community that is Oman.

The book ‘Ubuntu! The spirit of Humanity’

Full of creative activities and ideas for interactive workshops, the concept of Ubuntu is used in the book as a framework for exploring and experiencing the values essential for living together in harmony and for building bridges between people of all backgrounds and cultures. The book has been printed in English, French and Arabic and is available in Spanish in e-version. Italian and Konkany (Goa) translations are in progress.

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My first opportunity to experiment with a range of activities came when I was invited to conduct a weekend retreat in the beautiful countryside of Tuscany in Italy, with a group of professionals from different backgrounds. All were curious to know what Ubuntu is all about while some were sceptical about its relevance to their work in the corporate world. However, after exploring Ubuntu approaches to communication, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and consensus building, several participants concluded that Ubuntu is needed not only in their companies, but also in the government!

A few years later a friend asked me if I would write a chapter on the topic of Ubuntu as part of a book she was producing on practical approaches to working with values. I set off enthusiastically and the chapter grew and grew, to the point where my friend recommended that I create a separate booklet. The booklet then grew and finally became a training manual and resource book for teachers and trainers, titled ‘UBUNTU! The Spirit of Humanity’.
From our correspondent, Sonja KRUSE, South Africa

Together with a few like-minded individuals, we’ve registered non-profit organisation in South Africa, called ‘The Ubuntu Effect’, which will be the non-profit publisher of the book. It is of the utmost importance and in keeping with the spirit of the UBUNTU journey, that the families have a copy of the book and endorse it before it hits mainstream publishing. Our aim is to return to the families with a copy for each. If this book has healing power, it can only come from this foundation. The funders will all appear on the same page, regardless of the amounts invested. We are in this together. We carry one another, whoever has the strength on the day.

http://www.theubuntugirl.co.za

From our correspondent in Africa

From our correspondent, PRINCESS UKAGA OF NIGERIA, Nigeria, Africa

The project One Peaceful Africa

One Peaceful Africa, our International Movement Children of the Earth (CoE) Premier Project, coordinated by Princess Ukaga of Nigeria, is a call to unite young Africans in peace building, peace making, and peace living.

This past September, CoE held an initial leadership gathering in Ghana. Participants from Ghana, Togo, Liberia, Uganda and Nigeria have now gone back to their respective countries to catalyze new chapters, offer trainings and inspire local community projects. They will convene with other CoE leaders for a One Peaceful Africa summit in Kenya in 2015.

One big way to join hands in bring peace in Africa is by all African youths joining hands together to build a better Africa, and this can only be done by ‘We African Youths’. Indeed we are not only the future of Tomorrow, as people say, but we are first the future of Today.

Educational, Economic and Environmental Projects

Princess Ukaga, founder of the first official Chapter of CoE in Africa, is coordinator of One Peaceful Africa - a cross border crusade to unite African youth and make a difference in the lives of all through educational, economic, and environmental projects. She believes a prerequisite for world peace is to strengthen the dialogue between today’s and tomorrow’s decision makers. Princess aims for a dialogue between generations and emphasizes this within her activities for peacebuilding and clearing the environment within Nigeria. She believes that one of the principal aims of this initiative is to strengthen the dialogue between today’s and tomorrow’s decision makers.

“We are following our own path to true and lasting peace which we believe starts within our own hearts. To truly transform our communities, our countries and the world is to begin transforming ourselves which is the way to sustainable unity within our world. We need to strive to to prepare the ground for exceptional ideas and to inspire to concrete action, enriched by the critical voices of idealistic and courageous young people.”

Princess Ogechi Ukaga, Chapter Leader Children of the Earth Nigeria

Values of Sustainability and Holistic Education

Children and youth that are fostering the values of sustainability and have been educated in a holistic, conscious and spiritual way are trained and educated for the establishment of justice, peace and sustainable development within society. Nevertheless, they also need to be taught the skills to empower themselves, form global movements, participate within society and make sure their voices are being heard while at the same time making society more transparent and democratic one big way to join hands in bringing peace in Africa is by all African youths joining hands together to build a better Africa and this can only be done by we African Youths. We are not only the future of Tomorrow as people say but we are first the future of Today.

For Future Leaders in business, politics and civil society

Leaders in business, politics and civil society can create wealth while at the same time they can positively add value to the conservation and protection of the ecological world, having respect for other human beings and building on positive change in their own life. Socially responsible business can not only do well for the world around us but also for the development and the realization of the full potential of individual people. As it’s not always that easy to marry sustainability with making profits in order to develop socially responsible leaders within business and society we need to start teaching the youth of today already at a very young age about sustainable entrepreneurship and how to become a social and environmental engaged leader.

A Call to Unite Young Africans

One Peaceful Africa, Our CoE Premier Project coordinated by Princess Ukaga of Nigeria, is a call to unite young Africans in peace building, peace making, and peace living. This past September, CoE held an initial leadership gathering in Ghana. Participants from Ghana, Togo, Liberia, Uganda and Nigeria have now gone back to their respective countries to catalyze new chapters, offer trainings and inspire local community projects. They will convene with other CoE leaders for a One Peaceful Africa summit in Kenya in 2015.
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