



The words of coexistence: experiences A MULTIFACETED HOPE FOR LIVING IN THE GLOBAL POLY-CRISIS

Introduction by Sandro Calvani¹ at the IFCA round table

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In a wounded world, as described in the story of the Good Samaritan, the reality of the salvation of the wounded is more important than the many ideas that fill our consultations. In order to maximise our discernment, the choice of the words of conversation is the essential key to reconstructing the paradigms of human coexistence. The Latin etymology of the word conversation reminds us that it comes from the very fact of living together: con-versare -to turn together from the other side- is a **behaviour and a form of collaborative living and dating, made necessary by being close, by living together, characterised by becoming familiar with diversity, by making diversity a valued habit**. The vision and experience of conversation includes putting two or more divergent verses together and continually seeing the other verse as well, and being willing to turn around frequently. Its etymological opposite is the act of averting, the opposition between two verses, opposing two ways of seeing a fact or a dispute.

'It's going to be OK': the most repeated words around the world almost three years ago at the beginning of the Covid pandemic expressed the common feeling of facing a profound social change, imposed by a serious global threat to public health. No one had prepared for that profound crisis, neither civil society, nor families, nor businesses, nor governments and international institutions. But the crisis was accompanied by the widespread certainty that the nasty shock would be temporary and that after a while everything would return to quiet normality. The abundant dose of optimism offered a bit of collective serendipity, which allowed many to go on with life smiling through all the hardships they had to face.

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But **the statistics of the crisis do not offer an optimistic balance and prove that that nice phrase was also false.** The total toll of the pandemic was 644 million people infected and 6 million 630 thousand dead. In addition, 40 million new unemployed worldwide, an increase of more than 20 per cent in two years, the largest in thirty years. 97 million new poor and a two-year setback in poverty reduction. The number of people affected by hunger globally rose to 828 million in 2021, an increase of about 46 million from 2020 and 150 million from 2019. 10.4 million new orphans, children who have lost a parent or caregiver. But, **in what history will remember of the first three years of the third decade of the third millennium, Covid will by no means be the only protagonist.** The main roles will be played by climate change, unresolved conflicts that are causing social unrest, financial instability, severe food insecurity, massive inequalities, denied rights, and unprecedented refugee flows. The end result is the systemic crisis that is now easy to glimpse. It is **a global poly-crisis, so messy and multifaceted that no one has yet found a macro-definition of it. A new civilisation is emerging from it and from below.** Political scientists and diplomats call it a 'cascading crisis'; sociologists and environmentalists speak of an 'eco-social collapse'; biologists see 'the great extinction': they have proof of this, since around one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction and biodiversity on Earth lost 60 per cent of vertebrates between 1970 and 2014. Fifty years ago, the 1972 Club of Rome report 'The Limits to Growth' predicted this. We did not listen to it. The first picture of planet Earth seen from space on 7 December 1972 showed us that we are all in the same boat. We looked at it but did not want to see its meaning and warning. We did **not hear the warning sirens.**

In mid-November 2022, the United Nations reported that there are **eight billion people on Earth** and the next generation will live with ten billion humans in 2050. In November 2022, **at the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, and the APEC summit in Bangkok, Thailand, astonishing analyses emerged.** The 19 largest economies among the world's 194 countries produce and enjoy 80% of the world's total gross national product (GDP) of \$85 trillion. The 21 Asia-Pacific (APEC) economies drive growth with 2.9 billion people and account for over 60% of global GDP. APEC partners account for over 75% of total trade in goods and services. Experts accompanying the heads of government have attempted to sketch the present and the immediate future with mind-boggling abbreviations, such as the acronym *VUCA*, the initials in English for **Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity.** In Asia - which represents more than the population and markets of the rest of the world combined - the economic, political and social transformations taking place are described by two other acronyms: *BANI*, meaning **Brittle, Anxiogenic, Non-linear, Incomprehensible,** and *RUPT*, meaning **Rapid, Unpredictable, Paradoxical and Tangled.** These twelve characteristics alone are enough to understand the order of magnitude of the challenges we face globally. **It is a whole lot more complex than the simplistic 'will-go-well' of three years ago.**

Many confuse what is complex with what is complicated. Complex systems are characterised by networks of multiple interactions, which cannot be distinguished individually; they must be treated as whole systems, they cannot be tackled in a piecemeal fashion; they cannot be

broken down into categories of problems to tackle them one at a time; small inputs create disproportionate effects; they cannot be solved once and for all, but systematic management is required and generally any intervention generates further problems; they cannot be entirely controlled. The best one can do is to influence them, to learn to 'dance with them' (Donella Meadows)². **The Rubik's cube provides an excellent 3D picture of complex systems.**

Whether we like it or not, we are forced to admit that **every COUNTRY system (Political, Environmental, Economic, Social, Ethical) in which we live, enjoys 21st century connectivity, suffers from mid-20th century concepts and management processes, based on 19th century political and socio-economic philosophies.** The inescapable change we are going through right now is greater than what happens in times of war; yet we think and live as if we were at peace with the Earth and other living systems. Moreover, the global pace of change is exceeding the capacity of national and international institutions to manage it, and they must therefore be reformed immediately.

Thus, **a new but essential dimension of the humanist commitment to progress, justice and peace must be to build greater antifragility**, that is, greater capacity to thrive through disorder and crisis. In contrast to strength and robustness, the antifragility of systems allows them to withstand shocks and remain effective, and even improve through shocks, as it happens in the evolution of living systems³.

To see the light at the end of the tunnel again, one must first abandon any temptation to preserve the past and close oneself to the novelties of the present, choosing instead a courageous openness and conversation with every difference and gem of the future, including innovations that seem to cause conflict. Conflict is not in itself diabolical. Only the violence that accompanies it is and must be rejected. Conflict is the main engine of creativity and innovation. **People do not learn by staring into a mirror; people learn by encountering difference. That is why an extraordinary dose of humanist neo-enlightenment is needed now:** 1. Regenerate not superficial optimism but rather a prophetic and proactive hope, which is careful to develop memory from past experiences, recognising that inclusive progress is made and measured by life, health, solidarity, prosperity, peace, freedom, security, knowledge, leisure and happiness. 2. Educating new generations and ourselves that life is better than death, health is better than disease, the availability of essential goods is better than need, freedom is better than coercion, happiness is better than suffering, knowledge is better than superstition and ignorance, and the public good comes before the private good. In an ecosystem approach, pollution, greed, unemployment, waste, inequality and poverty - among others - are human inventions. Therefore, they can and must be put out of our next model of life⁴.

² <https://bit.ly/357xBDY>

³ Nassir Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile, Il Saggiatore*, 2013.

⁴ Alexandre Lemille, *regenerative eco-systemologist*.

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Twenty-five years ago, Article 1 of the 1997 Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, passed fifty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stated that 'Everyone, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, social status, political opinion, language, age, nationality or religion, has the responsibility to treat all persons humanely. It **will only be OK if we treat each of the other eight billion human beings humanely**. And, of course, if we organise ourselves accordingly: enough *Homo sapiens sapiens* (wise and knowledgeable) to be able to become *Homo amans sollicitus*, capable of loving and caring for humanity.