

**Conference: presentation of book "Letters to my friends"
(Mapocho station cultural centre, Santiago, Chile, May 14, 1994)**

I thank the institutions which organised this First Gathering of the Humanist Culture, the invitation to which I was opportunely forwarded for presenting this book, *Letters To My Friends*, in its Chilean edition. I thank the words pronounced by Luis Felipe Garcia, representing Virtual Editions.

I thank the intervention of Mr Volodia Teitelboim, whom I would like to reply in the future and comment, with the detail they deserve, on many of the brilliant concepts he expressed on this occasion.

I thank the presence of remarkable personalities of the culture, of the mass media, and, indeed of the numerous friends who accompany us today.

In this brief exposition, I would like to give a context to the book which is today launched publicly by pointing out that it is not a systematic work, but a series of comments presented in the known, and so many times utilised, epistolary style. Since Seneca's "Moral Epistles", a farrago of expositions have reached these days which got disseminated throughout the world and which had, for certain, unequal influence and unequal interest. Today the "open letters" are well known which, although they seem to be addressed to a person, an institution, or a government, they are written with the intention that they reach large publics. The latter is the sense in which we have thought out our present work. The complete title of the volume is *Letters To My Friends On the Social and Personal Crisis in The Present Time*. Who are these "friends" whom these missives address? They are, undoubtedly, those people who coincide with or differ with our ideological stance, but who, in any case, do it with the genuine intention of reaching a greater comprehension and a better adequacy of the action for overcoming the crisis in which we are living. This is as regards the addressee. As regards to the subject matter, the field of crisis within which societies as well as individuals are inscribed has not been left without stress. We have considered the concept of "crisis" in its most habitual sense of end of a happening that unravels in one direction or another. A "crisis" makes one leave a situation and enter a new one that offers its own problems. Popularly, a "crisis" is understood as a dangerous phase out of which something beneficial or pernicious may result for the entities experimenting it; and these entities are, in this case, society and individuals. For some, to consider the individuals is redundant since they are implied while speaking of society. But from our point of view, this is not correct; and the pretension of making one of the terms disappear is based on an analysis that we don't share. With this, I consider the comment on the book concluded.

Well then, the reasonable order of the discourse indicates that one should enter the subject by studying the contents of the work. However, we prefer not to follow that school sequence, but to delve into the intentions that have determined this whole production. These intentions are those of getting the thought of New Humanism together, and of stating its pronouncement on the situation we happen to live in. New Humanism is putting forward a warning on the general crisis of the civilisation, and is advancing some minimal measures to be taken in order to overcome this crisis. New Humanism is aware of the "apocalypsism" of the end of the century and of the end of the millennium, according to what History teaches us. We know well that in these epochal turning points the voices of those who proclaim the end of the world are raised which, translated into a different folklore, point either at the end of the ecosystem, or the end of History, or the end of ideologies, or the end of the human being trapped by the machine, etc. Nothing of this sort is sustained by New Humanism. It simply tells: "Hey, friends, we have to change course! Is it that nobody wants to listen to us? Is it that we are wrong?"

Then, well and good! For if we are wrong, things go along the right path, and we are travelling along the way towards Paradise on earth. Some structuralists will tell us that the present crisis is just a simple reaccommodation of the system, a necessary reordering of factors in a system that keeps on feeding back the progress. Some post-modernists will affirm that simply the 19th century's narration got disarranged, and that the social "decision-makers" are offering an increase of power and pacification, thanks to technological and communication transparency. Ah, well friends! We can rest assured that the New Order will look after pacifying the world. No more Yugoslavias, no more Middle East, Burundi or Sri Lanka. No more famines, no more 80 per cent of the world population on the line and under the line of subsistence. No more recession, no more firings, no more destruction of employment sources. Now, yes! Each time cleaner administrations, growing school-going and education rates, decrease of delinquency and citizens' insecurity, decrease of alcoholism and drug-addiction... In sum, conformity and growing happiness for all. That is all right, friends. Let's be patient, Paradise is very near!.. But, were this not so, should the present situation keep on deteriorating, or should the control be lost, which would be the alternatives to follow?"

This is the discourse of *Letters To My Friends*. And we do not believe it to be offensive to consider, in the form of a shy opinion, the possibility that a pitiful unravelling may take place. Nobody gets offended because buildings count on their emergency staircases, because cinemas and public meeting places are equipped with fire extinguishing equipments, with emergency exits. Nobody protests because the sport stadiums are compelled to install supplementary exit gates. And, of course, whenever one goes to the cinema or enters a

building, one is thinking neither of fires nor of catastrophes, since everything is understood within the context put by prudence. If neither the building nor the cinema catch fire, nor a tumult takes place in the stadium, well and good!

In the sixth Letter, the Document of the Humanists is gathered, in which they expound their most general ideas, their alternative to the crisis. It is not a Document of party-spoilers, it is not a pessimistic set of ideas; it is an exposition on the crisis and a presentation of alternatives. While reading it, even those who may not agree, should tell; "Well, it is an alternative. We should look after these guys; societies need fire staircases. They are not our enemies, they are the voice of survival".

The Document of the Humanists, gathered by the sixth Letter, tells us: "Humanism puts in the first place the issue of labour before big capital; the issue of real democracy before formal democracy; the issue of decentralisation before centralisation; the issue of anti-discrimination before discrimination; the issue of freedom before oppression; the issue of meaning in life before resignation, complicity and absurdity." "Humanists are internationalists, they aspire for a universal human nation. They comprehend the world in which they live globally, and they act in their immediate environment. They don't want a uniform world but a multifarious one. That is, multifarious as regards ethnicities, languages and customs, ideas and aspirations, beliefs, atheism and religiosity, work, and creativity.

Humanists don't want masters; they don't want leaders or bosses, **nor do they feel themselves anybody's representatives or bosses.**"

And, at the end of the Document, the conclusion is: "Humanists are not naive, nor do they rejoice in declarations characteristic of romantic epochs. In this sense, they do not consider their proposals as the most advanced expression of the social conscience, nor do they think of their organisation in absolute terms.

Humanists do not claim to be the representatives of majorities. In any case, they act according to what they consider more just, aiming at transformations that they find adequate and feasible at this time in which they happen to act."

Is it not moulded in this Document a strong sentiment of freedom, of pluralism, of self-limitation? This may be well called an alternative proposal, and, in no way, an overwhelming, uniform-making, and absolute proposal.

And how is this process of crisis? Where does it aim at? **In the different Letters, examples are given on the same model: the model of a closed system.** This started with the rise of Capitalism. The Industrial Revolution went on adding power to it. The national States, in the hands of an every time more powerful bourgeoisie, began to dispute the world among themselves. The old colonies passed from the hands of the crowned heads to those of the private companies. And banking began its task as intermediaries, making third parties indebted, and taking possession of production sources. Already banking financed the military campaigns of the ambitious bourgeoisies, lent to and made the warring parties indebted, and almost always came out profiting from every conflict. When still the national bourgeoisies were conceiving growth in terms of merciless exploitation of the working class, in terms of industrial growth, in terms of commerce; always acting as a reference point, like a centre of gravity, for their own country which they managed; already banking had leapt over the administrative limitations of the national State. Socialist revolutions, the share market crack, and the reaccommodations of the financial centres, but these continued their growth and concentration. After the last nationalistic death rattle of the industrial bourgeoisies, after the latest world conflict, it remained clear that the world was one, that the regions, the countries, and the continents remained connected, and that industry needed international finance capital in order to survive. Already the national State began to be a hindrance for the shift of capital, goods, services, people and globalised products. Regionalisation began. And, with it, the old order began to get destructured. The old proletariat which, in its time, was the basis of the social pyramid rooted in the primary extractive industries, began to lose uniformity. The secondary and tertiary industries, the every time more sophisticated services went on absorbing labour in a continuous reconversion of the production factors. The old trade unions and syndicates lost class power, orienting themselves towards immediate revindications of a salary and occupational type. The technological revolution provoked new accelerations in an uneven world in which vast postponed regions went on moving every time more apart from the decision centres. Those colonised, despoiled regions, destined to occupy sectors of raw supply in the international labour division, every time were selling cheaper their production and every time were buying at a more expensive prize the technology necessary for their development. Meanwhile, the debts entered in order to follow the development model imposed, went on growing. The time came in which companies needed to become flexible, decentralised, agile to compete. In the Capitalist as well as in the Socialist world, rigid structures began to crack, while every time more overwhelming expenditures were imposed in order to maintain the growth of the military-industrial complexes. Then, one of the most critical moments of human history befell. And it is there, the Socialist field, from where the unilateral disarmament starts. Only future history will determine whether that was a mistake, or, precisely, what saved our world from the nuclear holocaust. All this sequence is clearly recognisable. And so we arrive at a world in which the concentration of financial power has every industry, every commerce, every politics, every country, every individual, prostrated. The stage of the closed system begins, and in a

closed system there is no alternative left other than its destructuring. In this perspective, the destructuring of the Socialist field appears as a prelude of the world destructuring that gets accelerated vertiginously.

This is the time of crisis in which we are placed. But the crisis tends to unravel in different variants. Due to a simple economy of hypothesis, and, besides, to exemplify in broad strokes, two possibilities are outlined in the Letters. On one hand, the variant of the entropy of the closed systems, and, on the other, the variant of the opening of a closed system thanks to the non-natural, but intentional, action of the human being. Let's see the first one lightened with a certain descriptive picturesque style.

It is highly likely the consolidation of a world empire which will tend to homogenise the economy, the Law, the communications, the values, the language, the usages and customs. A world empire used as an instrument by international financial capital which will not even take into consideration the very populations of the decision centres. And in this saturation, the social fabric will continue its process of decomposition. The political and social organisations, the State administration, will be occupied by technocrats at the service of a monstrous Para-State which will tend to discipline the populations with every time more restrictive measures in the measure that decomposition accentuates. Thought will have lost its abstract capacity, being replaced by a form of analytical and step-by-step functioning according to the computational model. The notion of process and structure will have been lost, resulting from it simple studies of linguistics and formal analysis. Fashion, language and social styles, music, architecture, plastic arts and literature, will become destructured, and, in any case, the mix of styles in all fields will be seen as a great advancement, such as happened in other occasions of History with the eclecticism of the imperial decadence. Then, the old hope of making everything uniform in the hands of the same power will vanish forever. In this dimming of reason, in this fatigue of the peoples, the way will remain free for fanaticisms of every sign, the negation of life, the cult of suicide, the raw fundamentalism. There will be no science, nor great revolutions of thought... only technology, which by then will be called "science". Once again the localisms and the ethnic struggles will arise, and the postponed peoples will hurl themselves towards the decision centres, in a whirlwind in which the macro-cities, previously overcrowded, will remain inhabited. Continuous civil wars will shake this poor planet in which we will not wish to live.

In sum, this is the part of the story that repeated itself in numerous civilisations which, in their time, believed in their indefinite progress. All those cultures finished in the dissolution; but, fortunately, when some fell down, in other places new human impulses rose, and, in that alternation, the old was surpassed by the new. It is clear that, in a closed world system, there is no place left for the rise of another civilisation, but for a long and dark world Middle Ages.

If what is advanced in the Letters on the basis of the model explained is utterly wrong, there is no reason why we should worry. If, otherwise, the mechanical process of the structures leads in the direction commented on, the time has come to ask ourselves how the human being can change the direction of events. In its turn, who will be able to produce this formidable change of direction but the peoples who are, precisely, the subject of History. Have we reached a state of maturity sufficient to understand that from now onwards **there will be no progress if it is not of all and for all?** This is the second hypothesis that is explored in the Letters.

If it takes roots in the people the idea - and it is good to repeat it - that there will be no progress if it is not of all and for all, then the struggle will be clear. In the last step of destructuring, at the social base, new winds will start blowing. In the neighbourhoods, in the neighbourhood communities, in the humblest working places, the social fabric will start regenerating. This will be seemingly, a spontaneous phenomenon. It will repeat itself in the multiple grassroots groupings which the workers, already independent of the tutelage of the trade union hierarchies, will form. Numerous political nuclei, without central organisation, struggling with the hierarchical political organisations, will appear. The discussion will begin in every factory, in every office, in every company. Starting from the immediate-type revindications, a new awareness will evolve towards the larger situation in which labour will have more human value than capital, and in which the risk of labour will be clearer than the risk of capital at the time of considering priorities. Easily the conclusion will be reached that the profit of the company should be reinvested in opening new labour sources, or being derived to other sectors in which the production keeps on increasing instead of deriving to speculative fringes which end up augmenting the financial capital, which produces the emptying of enterprises, and which lead to the posterior crack of the productive apparatus. The entrepreneur will start noticing that he has been turned into a simple employee of the bank, and that, in this emergency, his natural ally is the worker. The social ferment will start becoming active once again, and the clear and frank struggle will get unleashed between the speculative capital - in its net character of an abstract and inhuman force - and the forces of labour - true lever of the transformation of the world. Once and for all, it will begin to be understood that progress does not depend on the debt entered with the banks, but that banks should grant credits to the company without charging interests. And it will also remain clear that **there will be no way of decongesting the concentration that leads to collapse unless it is done through a redistribution of wealth towards the postponed areas.** Real, plebiscitary, and direct Democracy will be a necessity, because people will want to get out of the agony of non-participation and the constant threat of the popular outbreak. The powers will be reformed since the structure of formal democracy, depending on financial capital, will have lost every credit and every

significance. Undoubtedly, this second script of the crisis will present itself after an incubation period in which problems will become more acute. Then, a series of advancements and retreats will begin, in which every success will be multiplied as a demonstration effect in the remotest places thanks to instantaneous communications. It will not even be the case of the conquest of national States, but of a world situation in which these social phenomena, predecessors of a radical change in the direction of events, will go on multiplying themselves. In this way, instead of ending the process in the so many times repeated mechanical collapse, the peoples' will for change and for direction will start travelling the road towards the universal human nation.

It is this second possibility, it is this alternative which today's humanists bet to. They have too much faith in the human being so as to believe that everything will finish stupidly. And although they don't feel themselves the vanguard of the human process, they ready themselves to accompany this process in the measure of their forces, and there where they are positioned.

I would not like to take more time for commenting on the book which today we have in our hands. I would only like to acknowledge the patience and tolerance which you have shown while following this boring development.

Nothing else. Thank you very much.