

Doctor Beat Richner: Celebration address to the 175th anniversary of *Real-Gymnasium Zürichberg*; given on the stage of *Schauspielhaus Zürich* (main theater) on September 4, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being asked to give a celebration speech at today's occasion, of course, I felt honored and touched. Fully aware of how tricky this might be, I accepted gracefully. Because some might state that "he again uses or abuses the forum to his own advantage". Such as the *NZZ am Sonntag* (separate Sunday edition of *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) commenting on a recent visit of the Kantha Bopha Childrens' Hospitals of Cambodia by the Swiss President Calmy Rey (fall of 2007) with the typical journalistic disesteem: "Calmy Rey travelling to Cambodia for handshaking with local High Priest of self portraiture" (Beat Richner)". This is irritating. But since the school should rather be the opposite of a breeding place for complexes, I dare give this speech today.

This doesn't go without saying: thanks to the generosity of our teacher of mathematics who, for graduation exam (*Matura*), scored me not with the lowest but with the second to lowest qualification, I passed. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here today. At the oral *Matura* test I was confronted with an equation. And the question was: "How do you solve this?" It was the time of the escalating Vietnam war in 1965. And I answered: "According to the law of Vietnam" (instead of "law of Vieta"). I remembered this episode at a recent encounter

with the Minister of Health from Laos who called me “Mr. Ho Chi Minh of South East Asian Health Matters”. Yes, how do you solve this: the vital problems of childrens’ health and survival? The Minister from Laos meant to say I would do it the way Ho Chi Minh solved the political repression – according to the “Law” of Vietnam.

Initially an excellent student, I felt, during the third school year, that I was undergoing a crisis. I was afraid that my soul would turn crippled due to the excessive state of studying natural science matters and the permanent scoring circus. I was concerned about my soul. That it would become impoverished by numbers, definitions, laws of mass and mass effects. I was afraid of spiritual emptiness. I believed that all these laws of mass effects and surface tension would lead to some scurvy of mind and spirit: The gross bubble devours the small bubble.

This is as I perceived it then. Paradoxically, it is thanks to some of the teachers that I saw it so clearly then. There were some good teachers, outstanding personalities, some of them probably unaware of the fact that they promoted these ideas which soon would take roots in my mind. The school even brought us to this very theater for the annual special performance. From this stage we heard for the first time “to be or not to be, that is the question” (the performance was directed by Leopold Lindtberg). Yes, how do you solve this?

I was ready to leave school and take up musical studies instead; in harmony with the harmonies of the beautiful

and humane sound of the cello. I was, of course, kept from doing this and, toward the end of the gymnasium school period, I was even happy about the way things went. More and more I came to think that music and art were just luxury and of little real use.

The great works of Tolstoi seduced to such assumption which to this day didn't completely leave me. Even today I remain ambivalent with regard to the so-called art, and especially the art business. Some of our good teachers introduced us to the works of Tolstoi and Dostojewsky. Toward the end of gymnasium the idea to study medicine grew within me. I thought this might be more useful, more humane. However, I might not be smart enough. A complex, possibly? (this was probably a proper reasoning given the second to lowest score in mathematics as well as an insufficient score in physics!).

This stage of development of my psyche and the described ambivalence, both reached at the time of graduation, remained unchanged. Righteously you might think: he is retarded! And this is how the psychologically trained chief of personnel of a profit oriented firm would probably call it today.

Tolstoi's world and thinking, his political and consistent activities fascinated. Had the tsar and the church taken their orientation from his creative achievements and steadfast admonitions, there would have been less suffering during the 20th century. Instead, he was excluded from the church and sent to exile. Tolstoi was inspired by Heinrich Pestalozzi, especially with regard to Pestalozzi's social and political writings. It is an

acknowledged fact that Tolstoi knew and discussed these writings. Gandhi and Tolstoi, on the other hand, exchanged numerous letters. These letters are available. And Gandhi's thoughts were crucial to Martin Luther King, jr. and Mandela and many others. This line of thinking fascinated me. One can track it back to the thinking of Pestalozzi. It carries the common seal of justice and human kindness. It does not persist as ideas and words, but becomes relevant in its realization. The most difficult, as Gandhi told, is the way that leads from the idea to the doing (realization).

There is no peace without justice! This is how I perceive it in reality, psychologically and physically over almost 17 years' time in Cambodia. At times, it is almost unbearable for a spoiled Swiss coming from the rich oasis of a lawful and orderly democracy.

Thirty years of war with three and a half years of genocide under the terror of the Khmer Rouge devastated Cambodia. Today, there is no war in Cambodia, however, there is no justice either. And without justice, there will be no peace. Therefore, each properly working infrastructure is a major contribution to peace.

Over the years, millions of children have been treated free of charge and 850'000 have been hospitalized free of charge within our five Kantha Bopha hospitals. These are places of justice. There is no corruption. The poor, this is to say 80% of the people, and the rich are both entitled to be cured, and to the right life. Without these infrastructures of justice, there would be 90'000 deaths per year. To create such infrastructures and to keep them

working involves hard work, perseverance, renunciation, and patience. This may be tough in the surrounding global madness of profit permeating almost every single aspect of life. Global profitomania does not even spare our safe and sound Switzerland from material and intellectual corruption.

It is only with the principle of justice, however, that such infrastructures make sense. Sense “to be” especially by the infrastructures which decide about death or life. Thus, the question from the stage “to be or not to be” no longer needs to be raised. Because the infrastructures are not foul. They are just. They are without corruption. They are effective. They render the daily life liveable.

In health matters, it is my daily experience, that the wealthy world, indeed, does not use measures of justice in dealing with politics of health and the question of survival of the poor in poor countries. The international community, including official Switzerland, promote the creed that medical facilities, medical procedures and therapeutic means must conform to the economical reality of a given country. To 80% of Cambodia’s population the economical “reality” is zero. If we would follow that creed, we were unable to cure any child with the Dengue fever and any child with tuberculosis. We would be unable to treat any child with severe trauma. Thousands and thousands of children would die every year.

The other creed of the international community is that the patient or the patient’s parents should pay for the

treatment. Eighty percent of Cambodians, however, have no money.

Over the past years the attitude of the health sector of the Swiss Department for Development and Cooperation (Departement für Entwicklungshilfe und Zusammenarbeit= DEZA) in Bern, of WHO in Geneva and of various NGOs has been disappointing. They all monopolize the pity for the poor world. However, the command is not pity, but fight for and implementation of justice. No so-called aid in complicity with the powerful! The poor is poor because one takes from him or does not allow him to share. Cambodia is poor because she has been exploited first by the French colonialism, then, during WW2 by Japan, then again by the French, then by the Americans, then by China, then by Vietnam together with Russia. Cambodia has been strategically abused as a mine field.

Our activity is not aid, but reinstallation of justice. As to the health sector of the poor world, it is contemptuously rejected by the WHO and the International Community.

By the very existence of the Kantha Bopha Hospitals, we demonstrate that justice is faisable at no high expense. In the end, it always comes down to money. Despite the fact that the medical infrastructure and practice are correct and, therefore, in many ways corresponding to Western standards, and despite the fact that all treatment is free of charge, the cost/cure rate has been shown to be on top of world lists. With the WHO' budget alone one could install 80 Kantha Bopha systems and run them sustainably. One could cover the pediatric needs of entire

Africa. ((Yes, say the experts; but where should one recruit the people who organize this? Today, the answer is obvious: from the Zürichberg Real-Gymnasium.))

Justice is paramount; justice in the ongoing struggle between right and wrong. If I may be allowed to make a suggestion at the occasion of today's 175th birthday celebration of the Zürichberg Real-Gymnasium, here it is: Do create a new subject for the curriculum of your school: Justice! Justice in the ongoing struggle between right and wrong. Only with established justice survival is acceptable and making sense; with established justice in all aspects of life. In order to aim for this, one must know and understand the term. One must study its various aspects and perspectives, its relations to history, to the great literature, to what actually takes place in the world, to economics. Infrastructures, state systems without justice as their supreme principle will fail, sooner or later. And the consequences are immeasurable sufferings with all evil that follows.

The time spent during gymnasium is an essential part of your lives. Make use of it to build your foundation of justice paired with human kindness. The latter will only grow and develop in the realm of the soul, and based upon a balanced growth of mind and spirit; not so much on the basis of the "law of Vieta" or some other law of mass effect and surface tension. Man is no bubble, and not predictable, and cannot, in the long run, be manipulated.

translated from manuscript by uvw, 9-08