

Public Talk in Madrid

Sports Pavilion, Madrid, September 27, 1981

Note: At the invitation of the Community for Human Development in various countries, Silo took part in a tour during which he spoke at a number of public events. His speeches were accompanied by those of his friends Bittiandra Aiyappa, Saki Binudin, Petur Gudjonsson, Nicole Myers, Salvatore Puledda, and Daniel Zuckerbrot. Since the core of the ideas presented by Silo in this talk in Madrid was repeated at similar events in Barcelona, Reykjavik, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Milan, Colombo, Paris, and Mexico City, in this anthology we have included only those speeches given in Madrid and Bombay

Some time ago I was asked, “Why don’t you explain your thinking?” And so I explained. Later, others said, “You don’t have the right to explain your thinking.” So I kept silent. Twelve years passed, and once again I was asked, “Why don’t you explain your thinking?” So once more I will speak, knowing beforehand that again I will be told: “You do not have the right to explain your thinking.”

I said nothing new on that first occasion; I’ll say nothing new today.

But what was said then? I said: Without inner faith, there is fear; fear produces suffering; suffering produces violence; violence produces destruction. Therefore, inner faith prevents destruction.

Today our friends have spoken about fear, suffering, violence, and nihilism as the principal examples of this destruction. They have also spoken about faith in oneself, in others, and in the future. They have said that we must modify the destructive course that events are taking by changing the direction of human actions. In addition, and most fundamentally, they have told us how to do all this—so I will be adding nothing new today.

I simply want to make three observations: the first with respect to the right that we have to explain our point of view; the second regarding how our world has reached this situation of total crisis; and, lastly, what it is that will allow us to make an immediate resolution and change the direction of our lives. This resolution should conclude with a commitment by every person who agrees with what is said here today.

All right, then, what right do we have to explain our point of view and to act accordingly? In the first place, we have the right to diagnose the current ills according to our understanding, even though our judgment may not agree with the established view of things. In that sense, we say that no one has the right to silence new interpretations by claiming to possess the absolute truth. As for our activities, why should some find them offensive, when we do not interfere with their activities? And if in any place in the world what we say or do is silenced or distorted, we can say that there we find bad faith, absolutism, and lies. Why not let the truth run free and allow freely informed people to choose what is reasonable for their own lives?

Well then, why do we do what we do? I will answer very briefly: We do it as a supreme moral act, and our morality is based on this principle: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” If, as individuals, we want the best for ourselves, we are required by that moral imperative to give our best to others as well.

And who are these “others”? Others are those closest to me, and it is there with them that my real possibilities of giving and changing things lie. And if my possibilities of giving and changing things should span the world, then the whole world will be “those closest to me.” But it would be absurd for me to busy myself proclaiming my concern for the whole world if my real possibility for changing things reached only as far as my next-door neighbor. That is why there is a minimum requirement in our moral action, and that is for each person to act and to explain things in his or her immediate surroundings. And it is contrary to our morality not to act in the world but instead to remain suffocated in a dead-end individualism. This moral imperative gives precise direction to our actions and also clearly indicates toward whom those actions are directed.

When we speak of morality, we refer to a free act, to the possibility of freely acting or not acting, and we say that this act is beyond all necessity and beyond all mechanicity. This is our free act, our moral act: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” No theory, no justification, is above this free and moral act. It is not our morality that is in crisis. It is other moralities that are in crisis, not ours. Our morality is not in reference to things or objects or systems—our morality refers to the direction of human actions. All the criticism we offer, all the communication we provide or attempt to transmit, is oriented to the direction of human actions.

There is another point that I should touch on, and it refers to the state of crisis that we find around us.

How did all this come about, and who is to blame for it? I will not make a conventional analysis of this.

There will be no science, no statistics. Instead, I will offer my answer in images that can reach the heart of every individual.

After an immense period of time had passed, human life began to flower on this planet. But with the passage of millennia, the peoples and the nations began to grow separate and distinct. There was a time to be born, a time to laugh, a time to suffer, and a time to die. Individuals, peoples, and nations, building and growing, succeeding one another until at last they inherited the Earth.

They ruled the waters of the oceans and flew faster than the wind, and they crossed the mountains. And in voices of the storm and with light brighter than the sun, they demonstrated their power. Then they looked back and saw in the distance their blue planet, their gentle protector, veiled by clouds.

What energy has moved all this activity, what motor has propelled the human being through history, if not rebellion against death? From earliest times, death has dogged humankind’s footsteps like a shadow. And since ancient times, death has found its way into the human heart and tried to conquer it.

What was at first an unrelenting struggle driven by the necessities of life became a struggle driven by fear and desire. And two roads opened: the road of Yes and the road of No. At that point, all thought, all emotion, and all action became torn by doubt over whether to choose the Yes or the No. “Yes” created everything that allowed humankind to surpass suffering. “No” added suffering to pain. There was no person, no relationship, no organization free of its internal Yes and its internal No. Then the separate peoples and nations began to connect one to another, until at last the civilizations came together, and the Yes and the No of every language was heard simultaneously in the farthest corners of the Earth.

How will human beings ever triumph over their shadow? By fleeing it? By confronting it in incoherent struggle? If the motor of history is rebellion against death, I say to you now: Rebel against frustration and revenge! For the first time in history, let us stop looking for people to blame. Everyone is responsible for what they have done, but no one is to blame for what has happened. If only with this universal judgment we could declare: "No one is to blame," and with this establish a moral obligation that every human being be reconciled with his or her own past.

This will begin here today in you, and you will be responsible to see that it continues, reaching those around you until it has spread to the last corner of the Earth.

If the direction of your life has not changed, you need to change it. And if it has already changed, then you need to strengthen this new direction. So that all this may be possible, accompany me in a free, courageous, and profound act that is also a commitment to reconciliation.

Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, "*Something great and new has happened in me today,*" and explain to them this message of reconciliation. Let me repeat this: Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, "*Something great and new has happened in me today,*" and explain to them this message of reconciliation.

For everyone, Peace, Force, and Joy!