

Silo's Speech at the Commemoration of the
30th Anniversary of the Humanist Movement
Punta de Vacas, Argentina, May 4, 1999

My friends, here we are again! Here we are together in this celebration, some of us the same friends present since the very beginning of our project, along with others who have joined us more recently in this difficult task of humanizing a world which, moving in a direction opposite to our aspirations, is becoming more dehumanized with each passing day.

First, out of consideration for those present who may lack sufficient information about our works and ideas, we believe it only fair to develop some points which, though greatly oversimplified, can give them an overview of the events that gave origin to this current of thought and action, which was expressed publicly for the first time in this same desolate spot, exactly thirty years ago today.

It was during the decade of the sixties. The barbarism of the second world war having long since passed, in some parts of the world a great process of economic reconstruction and social reorganization was underway.... Yet military conflicts continued, hunger and inequality spread across vast latitudes, and humanity's capacity for mass destruction grew unchecked. The world had become polarized between two blocs, with each side preaching the doctrine that the arms race was a vital deterrent to the aggression of its opponent.... Thus the globe was divided between ideologies, both of which were in a position to act as instruments of domination – but neither of which was in a condition to understand the historical moment in which they found themselves, much less to understand the process toward which events were carrying them. The crisis of civilization which began in those years was not an original or new phenomenon, however, it was simply the continuation and exacerbation of the same factors that had contributed to generating those previous monstrosities and global catastrophes. It was in that climate of general malaise that the phenomena of the youth movement of the sixties erupted. And in the midst of this a small group arose in these latitudes and began to spread to other places that were increasingly distant.

This was a group which could not express itself freely where it began, because by this time dictatorships had already begun to appear. When the militant activity of this group's members brought them to the need to communicate their proposals to more numerous groups of people, a conflict was unleashed which eventually led to the imprisonment and deportation of so many young people, whom we would like to remember on this occasion – courageous young people from Chile and Argentina who carried forward this emerging movement in exile. We also wish to remember in a special way the first members in Spain, Italy, and the U.S. who welcomed with a spirit of solidarity the exiles of those times. Many of these old friends, united by so many shared experiences, are here with us today... to all of them, our warmest greetings.

But let's go on with our story. By the 70s an organization known as The Community for Human Development had begun to form... this was a social and cultural group which, with the passing of the years would come to be recognized by the United Nations. During those years, more precise doctrinary parameters were defined and the characteristics of this new type of movement were established so that it could no longer be confused with the spontaneous kinds of groups that had already entered a situation of decline and disintegration. Starting with The Community for Human Development (whose logo is a triangle within a circle), a wide range of cultural clubs, neighborhood associations, and base organizations began to appear. In this way the Humanist Movement gradually took shape, until today it continues to spread through numerous expressions ranging from literacy campaigns in the Caribbean and Africa to public health initiatives in which doctors, paramedics, and volunteers work under serious limitations but with great spirit in various parts of the world. This Humanist Movement, which is so diversified in its

social and cultural activities, has also given rise to political parties which began to form in the 80s. By the 90s, this movement had attained full conceptual maturity, defining itself as Universalist Humanism or New Humanism, and differentiating itself clearly from the old humanisms, with which it has neither organic nor ideological relationships. In this year, 1999, the movement is preparing to carry out a complete evaluation of everything that has been done from its first steps, with the intention of defining its strategy for the century to come.

To complete our picture, we can say that what ultimately defines this movement is not a certain political action, or social action, or cultural activity – it is a set of ideas and a style of behavior. In simplest form, we can express the most general proposals of this movement by saying that first, it advocates placing the human being as the central value and concern, with nothing above the human being and no human being above any other. Secondly, this movement affirms the equality of all people, and therefore works to go beyond the mere formality of equal rights before the law, to advance toward a world in which there is true equality of opportunity for all. Thirdly, it recognizes personal and cultural diversity, and therefore affirms the characteristics of all peoples and cultures, condemning all discrimination based on economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. Fourth, it encourages any tendency that develops knowledge beyond the limitations imposed on thought by prejudices accepted as absolute or immutable truths. Fifth: it affirms the freedom of ideas and beliefs. And finally, it rejects all forms of violence, understanding that physical violence is not the only such expression, but that in addition, economic violence, racial violence, religious violence, as well as moral and psychological violence, are daily practices which have become deeply entrenched in every region of the planet.

These proposals – considering the human being as the central value, affirming equality of opportunities for all, recognizing diversity and opposing all discrimination, promoting freedom of thought, and struggling against violence in all its forms – characterize our thought and our action in their most general aspects. At the same time, these proposals come to configure a style of life and a way of relating to others embodying the highest of moral values, which can be expressed in this way: “Treat others as you want them to treat you!”

Finally we must point out that, in order to carry forward the above proposals, a hallmark of our behavior is participation in all fields of human endeavor. For our movement, beyond being a recommendation, the act of participating in cultural, social, and political arenas with the greatest energy and tenacity of which we are capable becomes a vital need in these critical times we are living through. The argument that everything is in the hands of an infinitely powerful and violent system, that success belongs to the corrupt and the incompetent, instead of being grounds for acceptance of our condition as subjugated and humiliated beings, must be transformed into a fundamental stimulus to change the state of public affairs.

At the same time, we also place emphasis on the dimension of the strictly personal and interpersonal which, though inscribed within a social context, constitute the nucleus of our existence. Personal relationships, which today have deteriorated to such an extreme degree, reveal the growth of a callous violence in which the importance of *you* and the solidarity of *we* are fast disappearing, and from which the individual, thrown into isolation and dizzying confusion, no longer finds any way out. We must reaffirm in this field that all human beings have the right to ask themselves about the meaning of life, about love, about friendship... about all those things that make up the poetry and the greatness of human existence, and which that stupid and small materialist culture attempts to denigrate, dragging everything toward antivalues and disintegration.

And in this situation that we are living in, we recognize the provisional triumph of the culture of antihumanism, and we declare the failure of our ideals, which have not been realized. But the triumphant of today cannot be assured of their victory in the future, because a new spirituality is beginning to express itself all over the world. This spirituality

is not the spirituality of superstition, it is not the spirituality of intolerance, it is not the spirituality of dogma, it is not the spirituality of religious violence, it is not the ponderous spirituality of ancient tablets or worn out values – it is a spirituality that has awakened from its profound sleep to once again nourish human beings in their best aspirations.

If today we must declare our failure, we must also announce a new civilization that is being born: the first planetary civilization in human history. And therefore, the crises that now beset us and are still to come in the near future will serve, despite their misfortunes, to surpass this final stage of human prehistory... and each person will know whether or not they decide to accompany this change; and each person will comprehend whether or not they seek a profound renewal in their own life.

On the occasion of this 30th anniversary we are celebrating, I want to send my warmest regards to the hundreds of thousands of our friends throughout the world, and at the same time to convey my fraternal greetings to all those here with us today.

For all of you, Peace, Force and Joy!

Words of Dr. Salvatore Puleda on the Inauguration of the Commemorative Monolith
30th Anniversary of the Humanist Movement
Punta de Vacas, Argentina, May 4, 1999

I hope that all of you are having a very great day!

Our greetings to our friends who are here from the different regions of Chile, the different provinces of Argentina, from Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Nor should we overlook those who are here representing the various countries of Central America, or those who have come from Canada, the U.S., and Mexico.

We also greet our friends from Europe, who have traveled to this place from many countries.

And from here we send our warmest regards to our many friends on five continents, and especially to those in Colombo, Bombay, and Moscow, who will hold this commemoration for Asia and Eurasia, just as in Senegal, the Ivory Coast, and Togo our friends will be celebrating this commemoration for the region of Africa.

With this I would like to officially inaugurate this reference, this monolith which marks the place where Silo gave his first doctrinary explanation some thirty years ago, in a landmark event that signaled the arising of a current of thought and action that continues to develop today throughout the world.

To all of you, thank you very much.

Note: Revised May 14, 1999 by PT based on translations by Liz Medina, Suzanne Gepp, Godi Gutierrez and others. As in spoken language, in some places “their” is used for “his or her”. Notes from Liz: “para cambiar el estado de las cosas pœblicas” seems to be an allusion to the Latin *res publicus* which means “the things of the people” and is the etymological root of *republic*”.. “Tablets” refers to the tablets of the 10 Commandments.