

## Last thoughts

My relatives, cousins, nieces and nephews, and possibly some of my friends, will be surprised that this farewell gathering is not presided over by a minister of the Protestant church to whom Marg and I have always remained faithfully attached. Despite this formal attachment, the fact is that we were for many years now no longer actively involved in a Parish. My family would have therefore had to call upon a Pastor with whom I would never had any personal contact.

This should however not create unease or ambiguity in the mind of those who were dear to my heart. I would like to make myself clear by reading these words that I wrote a long time ago for those who would care to join me in this final farewell.

Life makes us what we are and my faith has undoubtedly been deeply affected by the intense life I lived in an extremely diversified world, in which beauty comes in many shapes and sizes and in which human beings, depending on their own circumstances, have very different destinies. This vision of the world never undermined my faith in the existence of God, a faith that I lived actively in my youth, and I can bear witness to His goodness in the life that has been bestowed upon me. I had only just met Marg in 1943, when during one of my first conversations with her, we came to realize that we both knew of the Centre évangélique in Vennes. This may well have been to me the clearest expression of this goodness that was to have a deep and lasting impact on my life.

My interest in the world, which my work allowed me to discover in its present and its past, however also made me fully aware of the devastation and the suffering too often caused by the affirmation of one's faith, the prejudice it has fuelled and the violence perpetrated in its name. It resulted in the deeply held belief that the assertion of possessing true faith, and of being the only one to possess it, cannot in any way be God's design for any human being. True enough, God works in mysterious and unfathomable ways, and I want to believe that He revealed himself to men in different ways that should all be respected with tolerance, without each and everyone's faith being weakened in the process.

It is this vision of faith that for many years made me wish to share a bibliographical reference with those who would join me in this final farewell. *The Book of Sapphire* by Gilbert Sinoué, a fantasy novel set in medieval Spain, tells the story of three human beings searching for divine supreme truth enshrined in a Sapphire, hidden in the depths of a castle. Due to circumstances that are immaterial to us, Samuel Ezra the Jew, Ibn Sarrag the Muslim and Rafael Vargas the Christian join in their quest, each of them being self-confident and deeply convinced that the sapphire will reveal that his is the true faith. This cabalistic story is at times long and sometimes a bit tedious, but its ending is dazzling. After over four hundred pages of adventures, the three men finally came to face the Sapphire, the gem sets itself ablaze and gold letters appear on it. Each in turn, the three men read a text whose first lines I shall reproduce here. Ezra the Jew was the first one to move forward and read: 'I am your father's God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. I shall bless those that shall

bless you...'. When Sarrag the Muslim, sceptical and shocked, bends towards the sapphire, he read: 'Here is the Koran! It is without the shadow of a doubt for those who fear Allah, those who believe in mystery...'. Vargas the Christian, incredulous, in turn came forward and for the third time the Sapphire sets itself ablaze: 'Truly, truly I tell you, I am the door. Whoever believes in me does not believe in me but in the one who sent me...'. In one last message, the Sapphire progressively turns from blue to red, until this colour prevailed and it looked like a frightening bloodstain. They did not need to exchange a word, the three men knew that the same vision just ran through their soul and that this vision carried the absurdity, the madness, the intolerance and the pride of man. Finally, the stone was restored to its initial appearance, floated in the air for a second and suddenly turned to dust.

This is the beautiful story and beautiful message I wanted to have the privilege to share with you. May God bless each and every one of you!

*(Text written by Paul Berthoud, October 2005. This text was in an envelope, meant to be read at his farewell gathering. Paul had also chosen to play for us Schubert's piano trio and Adagio in e flat, and Scriabin's piano concerto, second movement, andante).*

## A tribute to Paul Berthoud

As you have understood, Paul was raised by his family with strong Christian values and in the Protestant Youth movement. A young disciplined man, Paul spent his summer vacation helping his mother's family, farmers in the Bernese Oberland region, spending exhausting days cutting hay on the ruthless slopes of the family farm. The little free time he had was spent playing the cello or riding his bicycle. He rode through most Swiss mountain passes on several occasions on his bike which did not have gears. At the time these passes were not tarred and his long rides undoubtedly taught him to fall without hurting himself too much, which was to come in handy when much later on in his life, Parkinson's disease insidiously invaded and wrecked his massive and solid body.

Paul belonged to that generation that was deprived of a carefree youth by the threat of war. First the Spanish War broke out in 1936 but he was too young then to join the International Brigades. Then came World War II that equally affected Switzerland through multiple deprivations. At the end of this very long tunnel of horrors of Nazism, new hope finally came with the Soviet victory in Stalingrad in 1943.

That year, aged 21, he decided to marry Marg and to commit to the service of the international community, instead of going into local politics within left-wing parties that were banned at the time.

Paul inherited a keen sense of public service from his father and adopted for the rest of his life the fundamental values of Peace and Justice. In 1951, with a Doctorate in Law, he did not think twice and left for New York with Marg and Daniel who was then six months old. He served this great universal project, the United Nations, that was meant to put an end to wars and injustices. Shortly after that Olivier was born in New York and Marianne was conceived there.

In New York, in Lebanon, Palestine, Chile, Kenya and Venezuela, where he lived with Marg, he widened his practice of law to cover social, economic and environmental areas. He formed his own personal vision of development, which he shared with the countless colleagues, diplomats and ordinary people he met. He developed his outstanding sense of listening, his ability to convince and unrivalled talent as a negotiator. We often heard his colleagues referring to him as having "an iron fist in a velvet glove".

Back in Geneva in 1965, at the request of Raúl Prebisch, he enthusiastically joined the project of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and was quick to weave a network of sympathizers, united in camaraderie among non-aligned countries. He felt very passionate about the Palestinian cause, the lawyer in him was outraged by the systematic and unpunished violations of the international law he believed in so much.

Following his retirement at age 61, and for nearly 25 years after that, Paul remained highly committed to teaching, one of his greatest passions. He happily went on many missions which allowed him to impart his vision and experience to young people in Asia, Africa and Latin America, deeply convinced and committed that he was to preparing the next generation.

Paul cared about everyone, he enjoyed sharing with and listening to the driver in Beirut, the President of Tanzania or the farmer in Nicaragua; to him, we were all truly equal, everyday

and everywhere.

He was determined without ever being aggressive, passionate but never blind. He had a genuine and deep interest in the little things and the big things in life.

Paul wasn't happy when on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, his two sons gave him his first computer. After a moment of hesitation he nevertheless became determined to try and tame the beast. This was how he came to write beautiful and important texts and kept in touch by email with, among others, his two sons, who then lived on other continents.

Paul would have never lived such a beautiful life without Marg, his wife; Paul always said so. These past few weeks, when Paul could no longer talk and Marg could no longer understand him, they spoke at length through their eyes.

Paul always said of Marg that she was the family's Ministry of the interior and Ministry of foreign affairs. But you could also add to that the Ministry of health, Ministry of finance and part of the Ministry of education. Since the family was never at war, we didn't have a Ministry of defence; you can therefore imagine what that left Paul with!

Paul indeed spent a considerable time working, but he loved his family deeply and tenderly and he was always there for his wife and children when he returned from work. The family went on weekend outings in the many wonderful countries where we lived. We had endless political or philosophical discussions; we used to correct together the papers we wrote as students and later on as professionals. He was also very present, generous and loving with his in-laws and grandchildren, Alain, Naya and Sofia.

With Marg, Paul found a haven of peace where they could recharge their batteries: their house in Chambeaufond where he became an electrician, gardener, lumberjack and tractor operator. He loved the peaceful and never-ending melody of the river and the brook, as well as the cool evenings spent in front of the house. He and Marg loved having people over - family, friends and colleagues.

Music was an integral part of his life, with first his cello, then through the many concerts he went to and finally through his large collection of LPs, CDs and finally MP3 music.

During his last posting in Venezuela, at the beginning of the 80's, Paul became enthused about José Antonio Abreu's new project, El Sistema, supported by the United Nations, which involved setting up classical music orchestras with young people from marginalized neighbourhoods.

Paul shared master Abreu's view that "music must be acknowledged as a social development factor in the truest sense of the word, because it conveys the loftiest values of solidarity, harmony and mutual compassion. Music can unite an entire community and express sublime feelings".

Driven by a Christian faith which he lived beyond churches, Paul dedicated his life to building peace and establishing justice. Paul was a righteous man, a good man and a link along the endless and anonymous chain of honest people who give meaning to our lives.

*(Paul Berthoud passed away on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. This text, written by his wife and children, was read at the remembrance ceremony held to honour his memory on 9 September 2013. To conclude this tribute, we have chosen El Danzón, by Arturo Marquez, performed by young members of El Sistema, a young people's orchestra from Simon Bolivar's Venezuela, directed by Gustavo Dudamel. Thank you to Valérie for the translation).*