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Education for Peace in the Nuclear Age

Abstract

There are three main avenues to assure peace: force, law, and education. While in the short term most efficient, and sometimes inevitable, force has become outmoded. The unimaginable power of modern nuclear arms has practically eliminated the concept of a just war. Law, on the other hand, has progressively increased human rights and the climate of peace. It has its shortcomings. To be an instrument of peace, it must be the product of justice for all. Education, at home as well as school, can prepare people to work for peace. In schools, a broad basic education will, in the long run, produce gains far more solid and durable than will some of the more fashionable crusades of the day.

In my capacity as Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Science, it is an honour for me to participate in the inauguration of this International Conference on Peace and Security. I am all the more pleased to participate in the opening of the conference because the initiative for it comes from the Faculty of Education of one of Quebec's most renowned universities, McGill University. It is my hope that the key role of education in the promotion of peace will be the principal focus for your deliberations.

The Government of Quebec gave, some weeks ago, its official support to the objectives of the International Year of Peace. It gave this support without the least hesitation because the approach symbolized by the International Year of Peace coincides in all respects with that which has always characterized the Government of Quebec's actions throughout the political history of Quebec and Canada.

Canada projects on the international scene a merited image of orderly progress and institutional stability. We must not forget, however, that within its boundaries, the Canadian people must face formidable challenges. Linguistic and national duality; cultural and ethnic diversity; regional disparities in the area of economic and social development: those are but examples of the problems facing Canada today. These problems are sharper today because Canada no longer possesses, as in previous periods, an overabundance of resources which permitted it, without always going to the root of the problems, to soften their immediate effects through equalization measures.

Within the Canadian whole, Quebec occupies a special place. In the other nine Canadian provinces, English is the language of the majority. Quebec, on the other hand, is francophone by a proportion exceeding eighty percent. It is the home of a linguistic community which perceives itself quite justly as a distinct national community within the Canadian whole. By reason of its distinct character, Quebec has always claimed certain particular rights within Canadian policy. Even though these aspirations have often been frustrated, Quebec has never ceased to promote them by way of peaceful and democratic means. It has always responded with understanding and openness to its minorities. This attitude has placed it in the top position among Canadian provinces. Because it presides over the destiny of a society fundamentally an ally of peace and respectful of the law, the Government of Quebec is pleased to participate at this conference and to recognize that this is one of the most important initiatives to be taken on its territory within the framework of the International Year of Peace.

Familiar adages teach us that peace is much more than the simple absence of war. Saint Augustine has defined peace as the tranquility of order (*tranquillitas ordinis*). A pope who wrote a great deal on peace, Pius XII, defined it often as the work of justice, *pax opus justitiae*. These adages remind us that if war is a concrete act whose consequences must frequently be identified with cruel precision, the same does not hold true for peace which is an undertaking far more complex and demanding. The day after a war, we welcome the return of peace with joyful sighs. As soon as life returns to normal, we quickly discover however that peace is never completed, never fully satisfied, never definitively conquered, never resolutely implanted in the hearts of men. It will always be the ongoing and patient search of an ideal that will never be definitively attained. We can say of peace that we appreciate it more when war rages. In the absence of war, we live too easily at peace. In living with it in this manner, we end up by treating it with a familiar laziness. There is no greater enemy of peace than this passive, complacent attitude. Since peace is never definitively achieved, it will always be undermined by the numerous situations of injustice and inequality, that it too often appears to condone. So long as man remains what he is, he will never have complete rest from his efforts to achieve a community of peace.

If we think of the means which might be used to assure peace, three major avenues emerge before us: force, law, and education.

In the short term, force is the most efficient, the most concrete and the most spectacular of the three avenues. Under certain conditions, it is, alas, an inevitable recourse. We can never, in principle, reject force completely without situating it in terms of a concrete humanity. The power of the modern engines of war reminds us of the need to be extremely cautious in this matter. Relations between peoples in the past have been ruled by the principles of the just war. Faced with the unimaginable power of modern nuclear arms, we must ask ourselves, as did the American Catholic bishops recently: "Is a just war still morally conceivable in today's world?"

The number of politicians who are answering "no" to this question is happily becoming larger. It remains, however, that the actions of their respective governments must be deployed within a world where relations between peoples still rest largely on the weight of material force. The rejection of this recourse to force as a means of resolving conflicts between individuals and nations should be the first objective of those who wish to serve the cause of peace.

Beyond force, the law has become in modern times the privileged means by which people increasingly promote peace. Since the American Declaration of Rights at the end of the eighteenth century, people have evolved towards a greater recognition of human rights in legal texts. This movement has witnessed accelerated progress since the United Nations' proclamation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1949. Canada also sought to associate itself with this historical evolution when in 1981, it gave itself a constitutional Charter of Rights. Even if, for motives linked to its distinct character, Quebec did not adhere to the constitutional law in 1981, it has nonetheless possessed since 1975 its own Charter of Rights and Liberties whose orientations are generally similar to those in the Canadian charter.

We should rejoice over this gradual enlargement of legal boundaries which permits, to a greater extent, the use of civilized means to resolve conflicts between individuals and governments. We should remember, however, that this development remains tainted with serious deficiencies which will prevent for some time the full blossoming of the rule of law.

The laws of national societies far too often express the economic, social, and cultural relations of the dominant group. In the name of noble principles, we frequently transcribe in the text of laws, objectives more closely related to the interests of these groups than to justice in the short term, or the needs of disadvantaged groups. Hence, we produce laws which

are unlikely to generate the fruits of peace as desired. The peace which the law procures is therefore but a fragile and ephemeral peace. It often risks becoming less in touch with daily reality, a reality which is too often comprised of inequities and injustices. The law can only become a true source of peace if it is the product of justice. In addition to being just, the law must also be freely observed by citizens and groups. We must recognize that we have an immense and perpetual educational task to accomplish in order to realize this objective.

At the international level, considerable progress has been achieved since World War II towards an enlargement of the frontiers of law. In a number of domains, international relations are now ruled by conventions or treaties constituting greater invitations to resolve conflicts through peaceful avenues. The development of these conventions represents a significant progress for which we should be thankful.

However, the most serious questions – the ones which deal with the major decisions regarding peace and war, disarmament, the development and deployment of nuclear arms – still escape all forms of supranational law or authority. Within these major areas, the most serious decisions rest with national governments, governments which firstly act in the light of the mandate they believe they hold from their respective populations. From this flow formidable consequences for the future of peace. The peril of a nuclear confrontation remains permanently suspended above our heads. The future for all of humanity continues to remain subject to the decisions of a limited number of governments and, for that matter, individuals. It will therefore be a long time before mankind will be equipped with a supranational political authority supplied with the means and necessary authority to prevent recourse to war between nations.

In a context such as the one in which we presently live, the key to our collective future resides in education in all of its forms, starting with education provided in the family and in the educational system of each country. In the years to follow, political leaders will be called to take decisions whose implications for peace and war will but intensify the improvement of machines of destruction and the refinement of communication strategies. In this context, it must be required of political leaders that they provide much more information and explanations to the population regarding their decisions and intentions. They must be obliged to account for their acts in a far more rigorous fashion than has been the case in the past.

There is also a great need for the general public to be in a position to react with speed and vigor to new information. This will be realized only by a long term program of education, encompassing the acquisition of knowledge and the active involvement in the political process. The

knowledge phase – stretching from elementary to post-secondary schooling – would give one the fundamental knowledge necessary for a sound understanding of the active world and practice in making critical judgments. The active involvement phase, begun as soon as one is ready, would involve the citizens in defending their rights and values, and intervening regularly in the political process.

The school – in particular I am thinking of the primary and secondary school – should firstly pursue its proper mission which is the development of the student's intelligence through the mastery of basic knowledge and culture, through the study of fundamental disciplines such as mother-tongue skills, second languages, mathematics and the sciences, and national and international history.

The school should also provide for personal training through cultural attitudes and behavioural practices which are in harmony with the fundamental values of each society.

Already, at its proper level, the school can contribute in one thousand and one ways towards the enhancement of peace. In programs, text books and other pedagogical instruments, in classrooms, in the organization of our common life, the school should contribute to eliminate prejudices of all types which have been embedded in the school system for too long. It should furnish to the student the opportunity to acquire a perception that is larger and more generous of his immediate milieu, his country and the world. It should above all cultivate attitudes of tolerance, of respect for others, of acceptance of the law, of engaging the service of justice, of openness to the foreigner, all of which will assist the student in becoming an efficient servant of peace in all facets of his existence. The fostering of a genuine and practical love of peace through the innumerable challenges of our daily lives should be the first priority of our teaching system. It is in this very large and demanding undertaking that we should invest the best of our energies and resources for the future of peace.

It seems to me as misguided and dangerous to seek to engage the school in the promotion of this or that particular concept of peace. Politicians of both genders in all countries are generally more often divided among themselves as to the concrete means to be applied in avoiding war. These debates should occur in the public arena, using the various platforms a democratic society offers for this purpose. We must avoid using the school for narrow or partisan propaganda purposes; we must avoid using the school for the diffusion of simple slogans and providing a forum for moralizers who do not have an understanding of all the complexities of the political world.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you of my active interest in the work of peace. Even if the questions relative to war and peace belong to the federal parliament of our Canadian system of government, I have always held an active interest in these questions which condition our future. I have always been convinced that the major questions have their source and will ultimately find their answers in the hearts of the men and women who make up our respective nations. More than ever, in this era dominated by the nuclear challenge, educators in all nations and under all conditions, have the imperative task of training citizens who are not only warned of the nuclear peril but are also resolved to engage themselves in the service of the enhancement, the defence and the illustration of peace between the individual and peoples.

