

## PEACE THROUGH EDUCATION

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*In almost all nations, it is now recognized that the community that serves as the basis of nationalism and peace is to be produced primarily by education. There is a need for a comprehensive and dynamic educational system in Muslim Mindanao that can: (a) develop the Muslim people's knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship in the field of manufacturing and agri-business; (b) prepare them to assume responsibilities and jobs in the government, and (c) develop proper attitudes and intellectual knowledge that can lead to an understanding between individuals and groups. Elements of this system of education must be based also on the realities, and the cultural and religious values of the people of Southern Philippines.*

The promotion of peace and understanding amongst all peoples irrespective of their political ideology, religious creed, history, culture and traditions has been of great concern to everyone. For unless we begin to understand one another and insist on the promotion and maintenance of peace, we, and even humanity as a whole, might yet perish from this earth.

Every now and then, we hear and read about people belonging to different ethnic groups engaged in the calculated effort of eliminating each other. Consider the situation in Cambodia, Rhodesia, Lebanon, Afghanistan, to name just a few. This situation reinforces the fact that everywhere today, man's existence is threatened. There is therefore an urgent need for a concerted effort to reform human relations and promote peace.

From ancient times to the more recent past there was no lack of great political plans and strategies aimed at establishing peace through a system of military protection and alliance, through an international police force or through peace pacts and treaties. All these strategies, however, have not prevented man from entering into war—in some cases, aggressive, unprovoked war. In other words, in most of such cases, the

signing of pacts and treaties had meant little or nothing. Realizing the futility of such previous strategies, men have organized themselves to promote methods to secure other solutions.

The new feature in any attempt to promote peace is the recently formulated conviction that it is primarily through education, and only through education, that the readiness and ability to live in peace, which are prerequisites for ensuring it, can be engendered.

In almost all nations, it is now recognized that the common unity that serves as the basis of nationalism and peace is to be produced primarily by education. That "the disarmament of the mind must precede the disarmament of the nation" is a truth that has often been emphasized by leaders of different nations as well as by peace advocates in our own and in other countries.

There is no doubt, of course, that the disarmament of the mind depends upon goodwill to all other people; that this in turn depends upon the understanding of other peoples—their character, their situation, their ambitions, their objectives, their needs, their fears; and that with such understanding comes the informed citizenship upon which will in turn be based true nationalism and valid patriotism, as well as lasting peace. It may be posited further that

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all these can be established only through the process of education.

The term "education" is, of course, to be understood in its widest sense: as any systematic influencing of people's knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Such definition of education not only serves obvious utilitarian purposes; it also—perhaps, most imperatively—cultivates and strengthens the will and the capacity of all peoples to accept nationwide responsibilities and to escape self-destruction in this world of multiplying challenges and menaces.

The role of education, then, becomes manifold. It enables people to choose their own direction, instead of having it chosen for them by dominant influences from outside. Through education people are given the opportunities for their own self-advancement and enabled to participate actively in national affairs. At the same time education safeguards appreciation of certain traditional values—and there is a wide margin for such values—so that no one way of doing things can be claimed to be evidently more rational than any other—whether you wear *malong* or western suit, play the piano or the *kulintang*, create Gothic vaults or Moslem mosaics. Education helps the candid choosing of values in this sphere by fostering self-assurance, and we must never deprive people of pride in their own. Education certainly will not stifle this pride. It simply allows the choice between various means of satisfying social needs, while it gives ample room to faithfulness toward the traditions that can survive this test.

At this point, I must in all honesty pause and confess that there are still some people who do not agree with the thesis that education is a prerequisite for attaining enduring peace and economic prosperity. One of the most popular lines of criticism holds that investment in human resources is too slow in maturing and that it cannot therefore be given primary attention. Only after a generation or two, it is argued, could society benefit from an extensive educational program. Economic devel-

opment and the promotion of peace should, therefore, first rely on certain shortcuts for achieving immediate peace and progress; and therefore, emphasis should be given to infrastructure and economic development; and thereafter, resources should be more and more devoted to education.

Any such discussion of priorities can sound like another variation of the chicken-and-the-egg theme. But I venture to dissent from this kind of thinking which seems to strive to bypass—or—race around—the factor of education. In general, economic development has to be planned and initiated, and infrastructure has to be built. But education is needed for both. As for the time factor, the building of a fairly efficient educational edifice does not require an extraordinary long period in comparison with the building of dams and railroads, or steel mills and oil exploration devices or irrigation and electrification schemes—for all of which some ten or even twenty years must be often envisaged. Besides, all these may not prove beneficial to society if the people are not first helped to means applying the experience of other more advanced countries who have long since discovered the crucial advantage of a rising standard of education for all their people.

#### *The Need for Peace in Muslim Mindanao*

The need for peace and understanding finds expression in our country today, particularly in the MINSUPALA\* region. The relations between certain groups in this part of our country have for some time been marked by tension that threatens the peace of families, communities, and even the country as a whole. Too often, they are characterized by behavior grossly out of harmony with the values of democracy and the great religions. More recently, the situation seems to have reached such heights as to begin to threaten our very existence.

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\*Acronym for Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan.

There have been (in the course of our political history) different efforts undertaken to solve the peace and order problem in Mindanao but the problem remains unresolved. I venture to say that if past efforts have failed, the reason is to be found in the fact that our people have not been prepared to live in peace and accept peace as a national program. In other words, their minds and intentions had not been disarmed. At this point, it bears repeating that it is through education that the readiness and ability to live in peace can be engendered. It is my considered opinion that most, if not all, of what have been identified as deterrents to peace in Mindanao could be minimized, if not completely eradicated, primarily by education. Let me illustrate this.

One of the factors that gave rise to the present crisis in Mindanao is the economic imbalance that plagues the country. While the great portion of our population enjoys the attendant satisfaction of economic progress, the Muslims in the South—long misunderstood, neglected and deprived—do not. The Muslim standard of living remains extremely low. Using primitive methods of farming and fishing which are their main sources of livelihood, they do not earn enough to sustain even their barest necessities. This is indeed ironical since Mindanao is rich in raw materials that can be exploited to bring fast industrialization into the area. The problem, however, is there seems to be not enough people who can come forward to tap these resources—to convert these into stock of goods for local consumption, and for export.

Surely, this problem can be greatly solved through education. Everywhere in the world today, it is understood that social and economic development depends on the acquisition of knowledge and skills which are products of education and which alone provide the base for the determination of social pattern and economic growth.

One such country that has often been praised for its high standard of living is Sweden. The Swedes insist that the secret behind this is the

fact that they were fortunate enough to secure universal literacy half a century before they were seriously drawn into the orbit of industrialization.

Another example is Denmark which actually has fewer natural resources than Sweden—as a matter of fact, many times fewer than most of the now so-called “under-developed” countries. Denmark’s only asset is her soil—but she was able to carry through a remarkable “industrial revolution” in Danish agriculture, because the Danish population was already thoroughly prepared by education.

The facts of Danish and Swedish history, then, seem clear: nothing other than education could have liberated and fortified their people’s economic stamina, their rational insight, and their will to cooperate.

What we need, therefore, in order to improve the economic condition in Muslim Mindanao is a comprehensive and dynamic educational system that can develop the people’s knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship whether in the field of manufacturing or agri-business. Such education, to be practical and functional, should help the people increase their farm yields, control and eradicate plant diseases, and give the necessary skills and competencies in such cottage industries as mat-weaving, pottery, loom-weaving, and the like. Once properly trained and educated, the people can become materially secure and settle in peace.

Inequality in opportunities for participation in national affairs is another cause of frustration among the Muslims. They lament their lack of involvement in government affairs. Many feel that they are treated as mere second class citizens in this country. They feel they are not really given the chance to participate in the common task of nation-building; if at all, they have only token participation. Indeed, taken as a whole, Muslim representation in government affairs beyond the municipality is far from satisfactory. This lopsided representation of Muslims in important positions in

decision-making bodies has made many Muslims feel that there is indeed discrimination against them. I would like to think, however, that if the Muslims have not been tapped for important positions and responsibilities in the government, it is because there are not yet enough Muslims qualified for such positions. I know that many will disagree with me on this. However, if my guess is right, then education is the answer to the problem. Quality education can prepare our people to assume responsibilities and jobs in the government.

I would like to stress here that it should be quality education because it is only through first-class education that we can compete with our Christian brothers.

Another major hindrance to the promotion of peace in Mindanao is the sensitive relationship between Christians and Muslims. Fratricidal wars in the past between these two groups have segmented the country into two warring blocs and raised in the course of the centuries cultural and economic barriers, and fomented political disunity. Both segments developed prejudices against each other, with the Christians believing that Muslims are pirates and bandits and are treacherous, and the Muslims accusing the Christians of treachery, collaboration, and lack of patriotism. Although they are all Filipinos and despite the constitutional definition of the Philippines as a secular state, they classify themselves as Christians and Muslims, and the rest as "pagans." Such divisive thoughts, feelings, and attitudes may be resolved through an educational effort to foster understanding and tolerance.

As I have stated earlier, education is not only a means of acquiring skills and technical know-how; it is also, and primarily, a means of developing proper attitudes and intellectual knowledge that can lead to understanding of the heart between individuals and groups.

I have read somewhere that in the eighteenth century the whole of Paris looked aghast at an

Asiatic man and for months stood wondering. "How can one be a Persian?" Even until recently for some people certain large areas of the world remained largely mythical. The citizen of China was always a round-headed mandarin with a long plait, always smiling with sophisticated courtesy; and all Arabs could be imagined only as riding endlessly on camels in the desert. Now education has largely banished such fancies. The remote and the imagined have become near and real. And hence the feeling of involvement, of belonging, has grown and passed from the tribal group, the city, the state, the national frame—to a sense of the universal. In short, through education we can now study and better understand differences as well as similarities, and accept and respect them. As a great philosopher has said, "the fundamental purpose of education is to enable men to agree — if only to agree is to differ."

There are many other deterrents to peace here in Mindanao which can be remedied through education, but since this paper is not a dissertation on the entire Muslim problem I shall limit myself to the three that I have just discussed.

*Proposal: A New Educational System for  
Muslim Mindanao*

I have, up to this point, tried to stress that any major effort to speed up the progress and development of the Filipino Muslims, and the promotion of peace, must be anchored and centered on the field of education, not the education that has been formulated in the past or as it exists in the present, but on a new type and system of education based squarely on the realities and the cultural and religious values of the people of Southern Philippines.

We do not actually have to formulate an entirely new system—what we should do perhaps is reexamine and rationalize the system of education that presently exists in Mindanao. All elements that are viable and relevant to the life of both Christians and Muslims alike and at

the same time do not seriously conflict with the culture and values of either should be retained and made an integral part of the new educational system for the Muslim regions. The present components of education that are found irrelevant or inimical to the culture and religious beliefs of the Muslims in the region must be discarded and changed with aspects and values acceptable to the Muslims and in consonance with their needs. Furthermore, the new educational system should possess some measure of flexibility to allow instruction of both Christians and Muslims in their own religious and cultural values and at the same time allow each to achieve growth and development without creating friction.

All these clearly refer mainly to the content of the curriculum, and would require the following:

1. Revision and reorientation of the curriculum from the elementary grades to the tertiary level. The revision will have to be made on the basis of the needs of the Filipino Muslims. Courses that could help promote better understanding and peace should be included in the curriculum.

2. Revision of textbooks and other instructional materials, especially those which are used in the social sciences. All biases, untruths and statements derogatory to Muslim tradition and heritage should be deleted or corrected. As suggested by Dr. Edward Kuder (1975), these textbooks should be substituted with texts and reading materials that make use of the lessons and injunctions regarding manners and conduct tending to harmonious and peaceful human relations as contained in the Holy Koran. Books in history should be revised to contain the achievements of Filipino Muslim leaders and their contributions to the cause of the Motherland.

To meet the demands for an accelerated economic development of the region, the new

educational system must provide for an extensive and varied vocational and technical training for workers in fishing enterprises and in some other trades. It should also provide for quality education in the varied professions for the training of future leaders. A good start has been made along this direction with the establishment of Mindanao State University. However, there is still so much to be done.

To accomplish the goal of the new educational system, there will be a need for the construction of adequate school buildings and the acquisition of adequate equipment. Sufficient quantities of instructional materials and supplies have to be provided for the teachers and other personnel of the schools.

Since the success of the new educational system rests heavily on the teacher there will be a need to train and retrain the teaching staff. The new concept of the school program requires a new type of teachers with the insight and skills to meet the new challenge. The new teacher should have deeper understanding and appreciation of the history of the region and be possessed with favorable attitude towards the Muslim population.

Full implementation of this proposed new educational system will require time and money, but its worth depends upon how one looks at it. I must say, however, that if we really want to solve the so-called Mindanao problem and foster lasting peace, there is no other or better way to start than through education.

I would not want, of course, to leave you with the idea that I and the participants in this conference are hopelessly sentimental people. I myself would be the last to claim that education is the panacea to end all evil and that if we do adopt a new educational system and thus create a workable community, this will be the end of conflict and the coming of the perfect peace, of the millenium that incorrigible visionaries dream of. I do not believe there is such a thing as perfect peace, except in cemeteries.

No, there will always be conflict. But the essential truth is, I think, best expressed in Voltaire's *Candide*. Those of you who have read the book will remember the story where at the end Candide returns to Waldfield with his master Pangloss, who held that everything is for

the best of all possible worlds. And then Pangloss says to him, "Now let us sit here among the ruins and talk about perfect harmony, because there is no such thing." And then he adds, "But let us try before we die, to make sense of life."

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