

From the *Collegium Lucis* to the International Baccalaureate

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Monsieur le Président,

Votre comité a eu une heureuse inspiration en instituant les « Conférences sur l'Éducation internationale à la mémoire d'Alexander Duncan Peterson », car elles devraient contribuer à faire mieux connaître l'homme et son œuvre novatrice. Elles devraient aussi permettre d'ouvrir un plus large débat sur tous les aspects de l'éducation internationale : sa philosophie, ses valeurs, ses méthodes, mais aussi ses structures, ses institutions et son financement (qui n'est pas le moindre de ses problèmes !). Car force est de reconnaître que le vrai débat n'a pas encore eu lieu, ni parmi les enseignants ni parmi les responsables politiques. Et les organes directeurs de l'Office du Baccalauréat International (OBI) naturellement préoccupés par le quotidien, n'ont que trop rarement l'occasion de situer le Baccalauréat International (BI) dans un contexte plus large et d'envisager le plus long terme.

Je suis flatté, cela va sans dire, que le Comité exécutif ait songé à moi pour inaugurer cette série de conférences, mais je me sens bien humble devant la tâche. Si j'ai accepté l'invitation, c'est que je reste attaché à l'entreprise et que je suis convaincu que le BI n'est pas seulement une idée généreuse mais aussi une réelle nécessité pour la société contemporaine. C'est également par amitié pour Alec Peterson que je suis ici aujourd'hui. Je voudrais qu'ensemble nous rendions hommage à sa mémoire, car c'est grâce à lui que l'idée est devenue réalité, c'est lui qui a donné forme et contenu à une chimère. Ce doux humaniste avait une volonté et une persévérance inébranlables. Ce sont ces qualités, alliées à la compétence et à l'enthousiasme, qui nous ont permis de construire cette maison. Ce n'est ici ni le lieu ni le temps de raconter des anecdotes –bien qu'on en accumule en travaillant ensemble pendant près de vingt ans ! –mais je voudrais, pour être personnel pendant un instant, dire combien notre collaboration a été heureuse et enrichissante. Alec a eu la gentillesse de dire, dans son dernier livre, que ce sentiment était réciproque ; j'en suis fier. L'homme, cependant, était trop modeste, ce qui fait que son œuvre reste méconnue. Les « Peterson Lectures » devraient, en partie, y remédier.

Et maintenant, pour respecter une règle non écrite de l'Office qui perturbe parfois les interprètes, je poursuivrai mon exposé en anglais.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

Pacifists—and I am using the term in its broadest and most noble sense—although convinced of the importance of education for their cause, never devoted much attention to international schools, not to mention examinations. Andrew Carnegie, whose Endowment for International Peace I served for many years, believed in the merits of “international intercourse”. In using the expression I am sure he had nothing improper in mind! The Carnegie Endowment promoted international law and arbitration, sponsored the study of intergovernmental agencies and, in general, contributed to

the teaching of international relations, but it never came to grips with the practical problems of international curriculums at the secondary level. But fortunately they did not object to the fact that one of their far-flung staff members in Geneva should spend his evenings and his week-ends on the IBO.

If dedicated and well-informed idealists never came up with a blueprint for a workable system, neither did the philosophers, the school reformers or the teachers until the early 1960s when the IB was conceived. Through the centuries only one name stands out as an extraordinary forerunner, whom we should adopt as our patron saint: John Amos Comenius, or Komensky as he was known before he latinized his name. Specialists of seventeenth century Europe and historians of education will be familiar with “that incomparable Moravian”, as one of his biographers has called him, but to the general reading public he is an unknown figure. So, let me share with you some of my enthusiasm when I discovered, almost fortuitously, his pioneering work.

Comenius was born in 1592, in Nivnice, a small town in what is now Czechoslovakia [now Czech Republic], into a family belonging to the *Unitas Fratrum*, Moravian Brotherhood, a protestant sect in the Hussite tradition. He studied in Bohemia and later at Heidelberg. The Counter-Reformation obliged him to seek refuge in Poland. In spite of the troubled times he travelled extensively. The Swedish government invited him to Stockholm as what UNESCO would call an educational consultant. In London, where he spent a long afternoon with Descartes, he contributed to the founding of the Royal Society, that venerable academy, whose first president was Sir Isaac Newton. He died in 1670 in Amsterdam, which was then one of the most brilliant cultural centres of Europe. His tomb can still be seen in the Walloon church in Naarden. He was first and foremost a schoolteacher and a pedagogue. He was also a bishop of the Bohemian Brothers and a prolific writer. His view of nature was closer to that of Aristotle than to the scientific and experimental approach that was current at that time, and his philosophy was influenced by Roger Bacon, the “admirable doctor”, rather than by his great contemporary Francis Bacon, whose *Novum Organum* (may I remind you?) was published in 1620. Yet his views on education, its content and methods, its social function and indeed its international organization are surprisingly modern. These thoughts permeate all the writings of Comenius but they are mainly developed in “The Great Didactic” (*Opera Didactica Omnia*) on which he worked between 1628 and 1632. Education he claimed should be universal and free “for all men about all things, in all ways”, and I should add, for both sexes. Remember, we are in the first half of the seventeenth century!

“Let all people of all nations, he wrote, learn all things; no impossibility and no difficulty will be able to stand in their way if the bounds of the order of things imposed by God are observed and its laws kept.” I quote from Comenius again: “Just as the whole world is a school for the whole human race, from the beginning of time until the very end, so the whole of his life is a school for every man, from the cradle to the grave.” Then, this remarkable observation, at a time when scholarship was often an end in itself: “...some people have no books, while others have too many, not to help their minds, but to swamp them.” He devoted considerable attention to the teaching of foreign languages and to ways of making the learning process easier. Constantly he has the interest of the student in mind. His textbooks, the first ever with illustrations, became quite popular, while his more conceptual writings made few converts. Of course, Latin was for him the instrument of international communication and he devised new ways of teaching it. In his “Treatise on the Universal Improvement of Human Affairs” Comenius envisaged the establishment of a *Collegium Lucis*: a universal academy, an international ministry of education, and a court of justice in which all nations would be represented. This may seem utopian in the tradition of Thomas More or Tomaso Campanella, yet for Jean Piaget, whose

views on such matters cannot be taken lightly, Comenius is an extraordinary pioneer. Comenius "... must be regarded", he writes, "as a forerunner of modern attempts at international collaboration in the field of education, science and culture. It was not incidentally or by accident that he conceived such ideas, fitting in fortuitously with certain modern achievements, but as a consequence of his system, which fused nature, human activity and the educational process into a single whole." But Piaget, typically, concludes that "... the supreme merit of the great Czech educationalist lies in the fact that he raised a series of new problems." (*)

Alec Peterson and the founders of the IB also raised a number of new problems. Perhaps too many problems and not enough solutions, some would say! The problems we raised were not theoretical ones; they were, to be sure, formulated with a better, more peaceful world in mind, but they were practical, concrete problems, posed by the changing structure of international society. This international society, or "system" as political scientists would call it, was characterized by shrinking distances and growing mobility. A new political system calls for a new educational system.

The post-second-world-war years were as tormented and as strife-ridden as those John Comenius lived through during the thirty years war when he was writing his most revolutionary books. As we all learned when we were at school, between the battle of the White Mountain to the treaties of Westphalia, Europe was being torn apart, religiously and politically; nevertheless, from the cultural point of view it was an exceptionally creative and innovative period. Descartes, Kepler and Rembrandt were contemporaries of Comenius; the greatness and intellectual tensions of the late 1940s and 50s could likewise (very subjectively) be characterized by: Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Becket and Francis Bacon (another F. Bacon), whose tormented vision and painterly skills place him, to my mind, among the period's greatest artists.

In November 1946 UNESCO came into existence. Its task was to promote cooperation among its Members—120 at the time—in the fields of education, science and culture. Was it to become the *Collegium Lucis* that John Comenius had envisaged three centuries earlier? Would it be the embryo of the international ministry of education that he had in mind? Could it provide a model for education in the new worldwide political system? This was not to be. From the start, all the world's conflicts and all the conflicts inherent to academia merged and proliferated in the new organization. As early as the General Conference of 1947, Jacques Maritain, the eminent Roman Catholic philosopher who was serving on the French delegation, observed that: "However deeply one may delve, there are no longer common bases for speculative thought. There is no longer a common language for it, ...UNESCO should therefore base its action not on a shared conception of the world ...but on common practical ideas." Unfortunately this sound advice was not heeded.

UNESCO became progressively bogged down in ideological disputes that prevented it from establishing clear priorities; and its cumbersome bureaucracy became the target of generalized attack. This ultimately led to the withdrawal of the United States and the United Kingdom who were among the main contributors to its budget. Pierre de Senarclens, Professor at the University of Lausanne and a former UNESCO senior staff member, wrote a few weeks ago in *Le Monde*, that if [UNESCO] could not, during the General Conference assembled in Paris, manage to amend its ways, Governments should seriously consider putting an end to its very existence. It is disheartening, but perhaps not surprising, that of all the specialized agencies of the United Nations family, it is the one devoted to culture and education that has had the most difficulty in carrying out its mission. It

is a popular misconception that in these areas international cooperation is easy. In fact culture and education concern the essence of national identity.

In UNESCO, as in all international organizations, Member states pay the bill, they therefore call the tune. And, governments are very sensitive about their own educational systems and are unwilling to relinquish even a small part of their sovereignty over them.

With the extension of education to broader classes of society, particularly since the beginning of the nineteenth century, schools everywhere became instruments of nation building. They praised “King and Country” or “La République” and sang the glory of national heroes. They taught national values and opposed them to all others. Even today many schoolbooks are culture-bound, not to say chauvinistic. Perhaps the most extreme example is the twenty-year battle M. Saburo Ienaga has been conducting against the Government of Japan to obtain permission to publish a reasonably objective account of recent Japanese history in his textbooks.

To teach the young is, obviously, a highly political activity because schools mould the collective history of a nation and transmit its values to tomorrow’s citizens. Education can also be a divisive political issue within states. The whole history of Belgium, since 1830, is conditioned by “la question scolaire” and France has been plagued periodically by outbursts of the deep conflict between the concept of “l’école laïque” and the confessional schools.

The recent hullabaloo about the right of Muslim girls to wear a shawl on their head in class, is just another manifestation of the same dispute.

One can understand that parents have strong feelings about the education of their children, but this concern can become very passionate and lead to irrational behaviour, even in an international school. Those who were involved in the reforms introduced at Ecolint in the sixties, merely to adapt the institution to the changing needs of the Geneva community, will remember what I have in mind. The political nature of education is, therefore, deeply rooted in society.

Another characteristic of those who govern us, in matters pedagogical, is their conservatism, a reluctance to adapt structures and programmes to changing circumstances. Alec Peterson campaigned vigorously, but failed to reform the British GCE/A-levels which he considered too narrowly specialized.

For these reasons UNESCO has not been willing or able to tackle seriously concrete problems of international education. Even at the European level where there is much more homogeneity, the twelve members of EEC have made more progress towards a common agricultural policy (and heaven knows how expensive that is!) than towards a common policy for secondary education, or the establishment of a truly European Baccalaureate.

So it is not surprising that, in general, governments have taken a rather dim view of the IB. They perceive it as a threat to their monopoly of training the young; it disturbs them because it does not fit into a standard pattern or into a niche of the political spectrum. The IB was, of course, never intended to compete with national systems; in the best of circumstances, it could only cater for a small minority of students throughout the world.

There have fortunately been some happy exceptions to this stand-offish attitude, but they have more often been due to the openness and good will of individuals than to decisions of the establishment. M.

van Keemenade, education minister of the Netherlands, invited us to hold our first intergovernmental conference in The Hague, which gave us much encouragement. Shirley Williams, when she was secretary of state, hosted the Lancaster House Conference, which marked an important date in our history. The splendid support the Italian government has given to the United World College of the Adriatic in Duino, and continues to give in the form of scholarships, is very gratifying also for the IB.

Still, on the whole, contributions from governments remain modest—much too modest—in view of the fact that the international schools and the IB are performing a public service not otherwise provided for.

The crux of the matter is that the “establishment”, in all countries, lives with an outdated model of world order: an order of sovereign nation-states. But this no longer corresponds to reality. National sovereignty is being progressively eroded by technology, world trade and cultural interchange. There is no need to elaborate, it is obvious: countries are more and more interdependent. When national symbols like the Rockefeller Center in New York or the Jaguar Motor Company fall into foreign hands, I can’t help feeling that we are closer to “One World” than when Wendell Wilkie [US presidential candidate in 1940] made it his electoral slogan. Jean Monnet, the pragmatic father of European integration, concludes his memoirs with words much truer today than when they were written in 1976: “Les nations souveraines du passé ne sont plus le cadre où peuvent se résoudre les problèmes du présent. Et la Communauté elle-même n’est qu’une étape vers les formes d’organisation du monde de demain.”

The growing interdependence and the decline of national sovereignty added to the crumbling of Stalin’s empire to make for a radically new international system. Unfortunately, as Paul Valéry said, in the context of the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, UNESCO’s predecessor: “L’homme entre dans l’histoire à reculons.”

The lack of vision of those who govern us is disheartening. Doubt can assail even the staunchest believer, but there is no amount of discouragement concerning our approach to international education that cannot be overcome by a visit to one of the schools. A recent visit with the students of Duino College reconfirmed my conviction. Poor Comenius never had that opportunity to rekindle his faith: the *Collegium Lucis* never saw the light of day, if you will excuse the play on words.

So far I have only stressed the social necessity of the IB and of the network of international schools, but they are also—and perhaps principally—the incarnation of a wonderful ideal. An ideal of peace and harmony among cultures, demonstrating tangibly that rejection of “the other” (“le rejet de l’autre”) is not inherent in human nature, that races can work and play together without losing their identity. This is not just a pipe dream but a reality that could foreshadow a better world. However, if idealism had been an end in itself the venture would not have succeeded. Success is due to a healthy combination of true internationalism with a pedagogically sound curriculum and examination leading to a diploma that allows students to enter the university of their choice and to compete on equal terms with the best of their contemporaries.

After twenty-five years the IB has proved that it is an indispensable element of the international community, that it can conceive curriculums that are adopted to present day needs and that it is capable of operating efficiently an examination with the most complex logistics of any.

At this meeting the IBO Council of Foundation has clearly demonstrated that substantial progress has been made towards stability, but two major problems remain to be solved: recognition and funding.

Although the track record is good, there are still a few governments that do not give full recognition to the IB diploma. I know that the IBO executive committee, head office and the regional offices, continue to pay attention to this crucial problem. But, in the course of this year, there have also been encouraging signs from elsewhere. Everywhere, the need is being felt to bring secondary education up to date. In France, for instance, eight special commissions are now reporting to Lionel Jospin, the minister of education, and are recommending substantial modifications of content and method of upper-secondary education. This is not just another cosmetic operation as there have been too many. The thrust is to make programmes less encyclopedic and more flexible with a wider range of options, and to encourage interdisciplinarity. “Le professeur de français”, says one of the reports, “rencontrerait de façon privilégiée les enseignants de langues vivantes et des sciences expérimentales.” Further, there is more than an echo of our theory of knowledge course in the following passage on the teaching philosophy: “La philosophie devrait se considérer comme une de ses obligations et une de ses chances de faciliter la transition, l’interaction et la communication... entre les différents secteurs du savoir et de la culture.”

Swiss educators and politicians have, on the whole, been reticent about granting recognition to the IB diploma. Nul n’est prophète dans son pays ! But in the Canton of Geneva, Dominique Fölmi [then state councillor in charge of the Department of Public Education for the canton of Geneva] is laying the ground work for an educational system “that would prepare students and teachers to live in a complex and multicultural society...” And, at the Federal level, the OECD report on Swiss education policy, which is due out in April, may well suggest a convergence with IB principles. At the very least, it will open-up a useful discussion.

The intergovernmental organizations, about which I have made some rather scathing remarks, seem, at last, to be taking steps in the right direction. Next May, the EEC and the Council of Europe are sponsoring a conference on how to introduce more international elements into the secondary school curriculum in Europe. UNESCO is organizing the first worldwide conference on education in Thailand in the spring.

For some time now there has been a growing interest in the IB in Eastern European countries. I was happy to meet last month in Ljubljana teachers and students of the newly admitted Slovenian IB schools. In Budapest the authorities are considering introducing our curriculum in one or two of their bilingual schools. Now we have the news that the USSR is showing interest. This is most gratifying and I think that if the present trend continues the last bastions of resistance will fall.

As far as funds are concerned, the IBO still has to run on a modest budget, too large a proportion of which is contributed by the schools. With more generous resources a better job could be done, particularly in curriculum development to keep teaching abreast with progress and to keep in the pedagogical vanguard. What is the solution? The Twentieth Century Fund and the Ford Foundation enabled us to get started very generously, and others have made notable contributions, but it is clear that that source has now dried up. Where else to turn than to the governments? I agree completely with what Alec Peterson wrote in the last chapter of *Schools Across Frontiers*: “What will be important for the future will surely be that aid from individual governments should provide an increasing proportion of the costs. Together with that should surely go an increasing degree of influence over the policy of the voluntary bodies.” For a number of years now, ministries of education have been included in the IBO decision-making process, but obviously they have not been pulling their weight. In this increasingly free-trade world, where mobility is of the essence, governments have not yet

come around to realizing that, in the field of education there is a price to pay, in compromise but also in cash. The IBO operates so cost effectively that only small amounts of money would be involved, say, annually—the price of a modest Picasso still life.

A formula that was examined many years ago, was to transform the IBO from the NGO it was, into a fully fledged intergovernmental organization. This would have involved a lengthy and complex diplomatic procedure. If we had taken up this option and succeeded in our negotiations, we would have had a guaranteed income and no doubt lost a part of our independence and it would have cost member states at least three good Van Goghs a year!

I think we were right not to pursue that avenue then, but I am sure that the time has come to give once more careful consideration to the IBO's relations with governments. Great scientific laboratories such as CERN or EMBO operate as international organizations with massive funding by member states without losing academic freedom. The European Science Foundation, although an NGO, is regularly funded by the national research councils that provide it with a regular and adequate income. The IBO and the international schools are providing a public service of undisputed quality. It should not be beyond the imagination of lawyers and diplomats to devise an original formula that would guarantee the future of the IBO. It takes time, of course, for new ideas to be accepted and for new facts to be recognized, but today history is moving faster than ever, so fast indeed that it is difficult to keep track. But, as Gorbachev told Honecker, when he was in Berlin for the 40th anniversary of the German Democratic Republic: "Life punishes those who arrive too late!"

Francis Fukuyama, who in recent months has become a Washington celebrity on the basis of a single article, believes that we have reached "the end of history" with the triumph of Western democracy and market economy over Marxism-Leninism and central planning. In the same way, Hegel thought that after Napoleon's victory at Iena, the principles of French Revolution would spread all over the Continent and so bring an end to conflict. However spectacular the course of events in Eastern Europe, we have not yet reached the millennium. The effects of "détente" are tangible in the Northern hemisphere but the third world is still strife-ridden from El Salvador to Cambodia. Some people in the developing countries do not think that the end of the cold war will necessarily be to their advantage. There is an African saying that when elephants fight, the grass gets trampled, but that when they make love the grass suffers just as much! We should perhaps not be so pessimistic: "iron curtain" has become more of a myth than a reality, the "blocs" are disintegrating and the great powers are talking earnestly about arms reduction. When disarmament materializes funds should become available for more constructive purposes. With the economy of one stealth bomber the future of international education could be assured till dooms-day!

The bulk of this lecture was written before the collapse of the Berlin wall and the spectacular events in the GDR and in Czechoslovakia. We hold our breath, but the great powers are moving closer together and a sizable reduction of weapons of mass destruction seems possible. In any case the old bipolar system we have lived with for the last 40 years has changed into a more flexible and more open world system. In this new world system international education will become more indispensable than ever, but also more possible. This is why I am convinced that we should seize the opportunity to renegotiate our relations with governments. John Le Carré's men in grey, the bureaucrats, will still put spokes in our wheels—as they are doing in the field of disarmament—but now the tide is so strong that their objections will be swept away.

I have spoken freely and frankly as someone who no longer holds office, I only hope that I have not offended.

Before closing, I would like to pay tribute to all those who have helped to build the IBO, from Gérard Renaud and Ruth Bonner in the initial Geneva office, to Roger Peel, the present director general and his staff, to Desmond Cole-Baker and the teachers of Ecolint who conducted the first experiments, to the United World Colleges, which from the very beginning have been our staunch supporters, to all the IB examiners and to friends everywhere (too numerous to name) who have had faith in our endeavour. But, it is to Alec Peterson that we owe the deepest gratitude for his inspiration and his leadership.

In concluding I would like to associate the names of two great pioneers of international education only separated by three centuries: John Amos Comenius and Alexander Duncan Peterson, in quoting the words of Leibnitz: “May the time come, Comenius, when multitudes of men of goodwill shall pay homage to thee, thy deeds, thy hopes and thine aspirations.”

(*) John Amos Comenius, Selections, Introduction by Jean Piaget, UNESCO, Paris, 1957 p. 29.