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WORLD BROTHERHOOD

Address by the Honourable L.B. Pearson, Prime Minister, on Receiving the "Family of Man" Award at the Award Dinner of the Society for the Family of Man, New York, November 17, 1965.

I am deeply grateful to the Society for the Family of Man and the Protestant Council of the City of New York for the very great honour you have conferred on me tonight. I accept it with pride and humility.

I accept the award also as a tribute to the country which it has been my privilege to serve for many years now, in one capacity or another....

Let me assure you - and I have had a good deal of experience with this - that my Government... will continue to do all in its power to maintain and strengthen close and neighbourly ties between your country and mine. In that closeness, in that neighbourliness, we share more things - more progress and more problems - than any other two countries in the world. We share a continent where our economies and our interests are closely related. We share, to a lesser degree, a continental culture and way of life....

We in Canada, however, do not share any desire to lose our own national identity through a continental amalgamation of our two countries. We do not wish close and friendly co-operation, which is essential, to lead to absorption, which is undesirable for both of us. In stating this as a fact, I should add that provincialism and regionalism are very strong in Canada, for historical, economic, geographic and other reasons. We recognize increasingly the danger to national unity from trends in this direction and we are making progress in combating them. For this purpose, paradoxically, the United States is one of the strongest forces making for our unity and we thank you for it. Our desire to avoid continental absorption is a great national asset in our effort to remain Canadian.

The relationship between our two countries is also the best witness to the fact that, in the world Family of Man, two states -- one the most powerful in the world, the other much smaller -- can live alongside each other as good neighbours and as the best of friends, with mutual respect and understanding....

We share many things, I agree, in our two countries, even though we are not Siamese twins; not least, a concern for the whole human family. Both our countries - you in an unprecedentedly massive way through aid and assistance - have shown that concern in the last two decades.

The Family of Man, exemplifying the brotherhood of man, is an ideal as old as society itself. True acceptance of the family as an ideal does not mean that there is always peace and harmony among its membership. The first family in the Book of Genesis is a witness that "family" doesn't always mean "fraternity".

But a family normally reflects a cohesiveness, a solidarity of interest and sentiment which makes for friendship and understanding. It is an ideal which, even though not always realized in peaceful conduct, remains valid in the larger relations within and between political societies; especially today, as we all live under the shadow of a nuclear missile.

Your Society, dedicated to the promotion of brotherhood among the Family of Man, has laid down certain admirable guide-lines in the realization of this ideal.

The first is the practice of ethical, moral and democratic principles in living together. The only question that might arise here is the identification of democratic principles with peace and goodwill. Is it vox populi, vox pacis, as well as vox dei? I hope so, and I try to resist the doubt that history and contemporary experience at times throw on that hope. Many crimes can be committed, many mistakes made, in the name of popular democracy; through the counting within a nation of heads which have become hot, or of delegates in an international assembly who have become irrational by emotion. The rule of 51 per cent is not necessarily a golden or divine rule, especially when it can be achieved mechanically by a slide rule.

The second guide-line to peace you have laid down is the pursuit of individual excellence as a spur to social progress.

I am impressed by your Council's identification of the four areas of human endeavour in which excellence gives hope and direction to our society. Only by developing, in a creative and responsible manner, the art and technology of communications - the first such area - can we raise world levels of education. Second, only through the right kind of education can we bring about those improved human relations on which world peace can be securely based.

You have chosen, as recipients for awards of excellence in these four fields, men whose achievements are outstanding. I pay my own deep and sincere tribute to what they have done. But, even more, to what they have stood for and still stand for. It is an honour for me to share the distinction of being your guest tonight.

The third guide-line you have laid down is community service - local, national and world - in the interest of security and peace. We are a long way from securing peace, but we have made some progress.

On the tenth anniversary celebrations of the founding of the United Nations I said: "I can only hope that, when 1965 arrives, I shall be discussing with you prospects for 1975. Should this happen, we shall have escaped the worst." Well, at least this much has happened.

It is a privilege to be associated tonight with a Society which is trying to help in the realization of such admirable principles as laid down in your guide-lines.

In that realization, the Society stresses the "need for better communication between world leaders".

As one who has had an opportunity to meet many contemporary world leaders, I should not wish to minimize the importance of this kind of contact. But I should not, on the other hand, wish to exaggerate that importance or even ignore the danger of relying too much on such contact as a basis for sound policy.

More than once the air has been cleared at the summit by what seemed to be fruitful and useful encounter, when, down in the valleys and lowlands, where the people lived, there remained fogs of suspicion and mistrust and misunderstanding. The leaders, exposed to this on returning, had, therefore, quickly to adjust themselves to their own national public opinions and the adjustment has, at times, led to international recrimination and misunderstanding.

So, even more important than communication between leaders, is communication leading to understanding between peoples. Technically - with our miraculous modern media of communication - this is easier to do, and with an impact more immediate, broader and stronger, than ever before in history. But this very technical ease and efficiency in communication makes the possibility of its exploitation for wrong purposes a very real one, with results which can be as far-reaching as they are bad.

These bad results can come about by the direct control - exercised in totalitarian societies - over the media of communication; by censorship in the interest of those in charge of the state. Or they can come about in open societies by irresponsibility, and a misuse of power on the part of those who have full freedom within the law to propagate news and opinions. So communication between peoples becomes a complicated and tricky business, with national interest and self-interest at times getting in the way of the promotion of a friendly, human relationship and understanding. It can as easily result (or is this too pessimistic?) in eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation, as in heart-to-heart contact.

At times, the communication between both leaders and peoples can be merged in that town meeting of the world, the United Nations Assembly. This, too, has had its good results as well as others which are less good. How could it be otherwise when the United Nations is, as we are so often told, merely the reflection of its separate governments and peoples in the tense and unruly world in which we live?

Yet the United Nations is also more than this. It is the place where, slowly and at times agonizingly, an international consensus can, and often does, emerge. One result of this emergence is that on occasion, decisions have been made that confound those who tend still to think of the world in the terms of the Congress of Vienna or the Conference of Versailles. The UN has, with a vengeance, called in the new world of Asia and Africa, to challenge the power and pretensions of the old. We should not be surprised if there is a resulting confusion - or worse - which brings about a negative reaction among the older and more powerful states. I should be surprised, however, if the newer and less secure states that have recently emerged from subservient status ceased to realize how vitally important to them is the United Nations; how it gives them their only real chance to play a meaningful and effective political part in the Family of Man and how, if they overplay this part and allow their grievances, their prejudices and their emotions to run away with them, others will react in a way which could end, or at least make impotent, the UN as a forum for international discussion and decision on a broad, world level.

The United Nations can be destroyed by the impatience of its new members, quite as well as by obtuseness or obstinacy of its old.

The United Nations is also the place where we have all been made most conscious of fact - as President Kennedy so eloquently reminded you on receiving his award from you in 1963 - that the Family of Man is not limited to any race or nation or creed.

We should remind ourselves that it is three billion strong and that we, in our white affluent society, fall far short of mirroring its make-up. For its predominant colour is not white; and, far from being affluent, most of the members of the Family of Man today are more deeply engulfed than ever before in the search for survival against hunger and destitution and disease. Those who are striving today to be free, or remain free, not illogically crave also to be fed.

I have often spoken, as your President and others have, about the widening gap in wealth and resources between the white Western nations - largely those rimming the North Atlantic - and virtually every other member of our Family of Man. I know that no country is doing more to close that gap than the United States. But the gap is still widening, with results that could become tragic.

Today, the great danger facing all of us is that, in our relative ease and affluence, we of the West are becoming bored with being continually reminded that more must be done. After two decades of economic assistance there is a "weariness with well-doing". The mood is not so much to ignore the problem or deny the need, but to rationalize a growing "weariness" by pleading the impossibility of effective action. So we lapse into the complacency of the comfortable.

But to withdraw our concern and slacken our effort on behalf of the whole Family of Man just because now the "going is getting tough" would be both a political mistake and a human betrayal. It would be a denial of the

deepest imperatives of Western civilization, which we like to think is distinguished from other human cultures by its profound sense of social and moral obligation.

The question we are driven more and more to ask ourselves is whether, in our two-car homes, with our cradle-to-the-grave security, our frenzied efforts to amuse and excite ourselves - our "North American a-go-go" - whether we are betraying the sources of our real strength for the future in favour of immediate material satisfactions which themselves soon fail to satisfy us.

We are confronted today by tests more crucial than any that challenged our forefathers. Have we the moral fibre and a sufficient sense of social responsibility to meet them?

The answer will certainly be no, if we are unable to resist the pressures - which have succeeded over more than half the world - that would make man a digit in a table of government statistics.

The history of man is his slow growth from a place in a tribal group, huddling together for protection and survival, to membership in a society of self-reliant individuals, each with a soul and an existence of his own.

Are we reversing - or at least slowing down - this evolution in order to escape from the duties and responsibilities that flow from it as life becomes more complex and challenging. Are we coming to feel that government is not something maintained by the citizen to protect and promote his dignity and worth, but merely something to increase his pension, give him "bread and circuses" and free him from his own civic responsibilities?

If that happens, the Family of Man will become nationally a flabby affair and, internationally, a cockpit of confusion and division.

The remedy? It is not in our stars but in ourselves, in the individual's heart and mind and the impact he can make on the mass.

I conclude with a story which tells what I mean:

A Canadian diplomat once reached a boundary barrier between two Asian countries in a tense and sensitive area. There was a chain across the road and, on the other side of it, a sentry who carried a rifle and, around his waist, several cartridge belts. He looked belligerent and formidable.

The Canadian was not too sure what would happen if, in spite of his diplomatic credentials, he crossed the frontier. So, standing firmly on his side of the chain, he held out his hand across it. The sentry was only a youngster and, in face of the smile and outstretched hand, his military bearing collapsed. He put his rifle on the ground, broke into a broad grin and invited his new friend to step over the chain; he did and shook the young sentry warmly by the hand.

When the time comes that this sentry would be commended by his superiors for a warm human gesture, instead of punished by them for dropping his rifle, the world will have become safe for the Family of Man.