

Point X. Democracy within freedom

A growing number of countries already recognise the right we all have to think, express ourselves and freely form groups, provided we respect the rights of others. But, likewise, every human being has the right to be able to live his or her own life in this world in accordance with what he or she sincerely thinks.

Democracies must therefore take a qualitative leap in order to defend and favour every person's opportunity to live in keeping with his or her conscience without ever, of course, curtailing anyone else's freedom, or causing damage to others or to oneself.

Today, democracy is the best form of government, the one in accordance with respecting the human person within the possibilities and limitations of the human being since it recognizes the dignity in all.

Point X of the Letter of Peace explores the evolution of democracy without ignoring its achievements to date. It does not address an alternative for existing democracies, it simply expresses another step within each democracy's evolution; one that parts coherently from the existing democracies.

In no way should we turn back the path of today's democracies or loose the magnificent achievements attained with such great effort! The greatest achievement being that most democracies support three basic rights addressed in the Letter of Peace: the right to think freely, to express ourselves freely, and to group with the same freedom, always respecting the dignity and rights of others.

Furthermore, we must highlight, as does Professor Josep Colomer¹, that "democracies do not prevent mistakes, nor can they impede the change of opinions and the peaceful toppling of leaders".

A Basic Fourth Right

In addition, to the right to think, express and group ourselves freely, the Letter of Peace points out a fourth right to be considered. This fourth right is "*the right to live in this world coherently*"

¹ Colomer, *El arte de la manipulación política*. Barcelona, 1990.

adhered to what you sincerely believe". This human right can not be ignored. If we fail to recognize or promote this right the number of deteriorated democracies will increase and some may even cease to exist.

It is important to stress the importance this right holds in the construction of peace. Present democracies enjoy many other values we will not delve into, for they are well known, (i.e. Direct and indirect citizen participation in political decisions), and because they are values that should not be left back as we set to take this qualitative leap; in fact they should be assumed within it.

Relationships between Point X and the Preceding Points of the Letter of Peace

In order to understand and experience the content of Point X, people must have a general notion of that which has been expressed in the previous sections of this book, a certain maturity regarding peace and coexistence, since all points of the Letter of Peace are closely linked. A parallelism may be established between the need for personal involvement in the suggestions included in the Letter of Peace and the need, advocated by some, to elaborate a complementary section to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or a Declaration of Human Responsibilities, (which we referenced in Point VI, page 43).²

Let us view some of the inter-relationships between the preceding points of the Letter of Peace and this Point X:

If one is not willing to engage in a friendly attitude toward other persons (Point III), one will not recognize the right to organize of those who think politically different.

If one does not perceive other persons as our "brothers" within this "treasure of existence" (Points V and IV) and that it is coherent to foster solidarity toward them; if one fails to acknowledge the need "to defend, favor, and develop a genuine liberty for all individuals", or if one does not engage in freedom (Point VII) and disregards the duty to "identify and respect the dignity and rights" of every person (IX), it is unlikely for one to perceive the fact that "each human being has the right to live in this world coherently adhered to what he sincerely believes", the very fact which supports Point X of this document.

² <http://www.valenciatercermilenio.org>

If the wish for “new social structures considered opportune today” to be based on “human geographic units” instead of “old structures prevalent today” (Point VI) is nonexistent, it is less likely that new political structures that may arise will be established based on organized units enjoying freedom of thought, freedom to associate and live conformed to an ideology. The socio-political intermediate bodies are those integrated by responsible people desiring similar ways of life.

If we don't accept the fact that “the contemporary people are not to blame” personally (Point I); for the ill events committed in the distant past and whose consequences affect us today “, by the same token if we disregard the fact that had those events not occurred, the contemporary people of today would exist (Point IV); If we dismiss that “harboring and fueling resentments due to those ills of the past is absurd (Point II and Point III) there will be no serenity or peace necessary to take that “qualitative leap” of living with greater liberty within our present democracies.

If we refuse to admit that we are all capable of committing errors and even evil deeds because of our human condition and to “publicly and prudently regret the ills and injustices” that resulted from our institutions throughout History it will be almost impossible to foster a nation where diverse ways of life, freely chosen by individuals can coexist as this point suggests.

In summary, one must ascend each of the prior nine points to be able to responsibly take a qualitative leap within the democracies mentioned in Point X.

Democracies Today

Democracies today face a series of limitations which they must try to overcome by taking the qualitative leap Point X proposes.

⌘ **The weaknesses found in democracies due to politicians.** The different anomalous situations such as economic corruption, traffic of influences and unyielding attitudes we live with in Europe and so many other nations are diminishing democracy. To this we must add the temptation of power and the desire to remain in power for as long as possible. Power, on its own, tends to preserve what is there because it knows things could improve; it also is

conservative, because it knows things could also turn worse, by avoiding initiatives from other groups or parties that might limit their capacity to act or out of fear of losing the level of power already achieved.

⌘ **The illnesses found in democracies.** The practical principle of Democracy is based on an abstraction: one man / one vote. While it is true that this has enhanced the importance of valuing every adult with the same dignity it makes reference to a number; one that does not consider political background or the cultural differences from one person to another. Not everyone shares the same capacity to understand the propositions managed by politicians or do they have any knowledge of real social, political, or economic problems and the international repercussions or conditioning of a historical moment. Yet, as they recount votes they all have the same value; it is impossible to distinguish a well thought out vote from a frivolous vote.

It is a fact that those who have power or desire it have the possibilities to manipulate those that lack the knowledge to critique their messages with help from the media. Leaders “stretch” their electoral programs hoping to reach the largest number of voters. If they achieve power, they become incapable of keeping the promises made during election time. The discontent it has generated is then used by the opposing parties, who fuel it with constant attacks regarding renewed and improbable promises for change, until they achieve the government positions they desire. History repeats itself and the discontent persists.

The democracies of today make up a subtle and hidden dictatorship among the majorities. Although relative, these democracies could appear less harmful since the majority wants them. As a result fewer citizens feel oppressed by it. However it remains a limitation when a democracy forces minorities to live limited lives, shortened by laws and decisions they do not agree with. Clearly it represents a frustration for a large number of citizens in a country, sometimes more than 50%, to be acknowledged as capable of thinking and of choosing a way of life only to be dismissed and disappointed after an electoral defeat.

⌘ Another limitation of today’s democracies lies within the **groups that lost the elections.** Instead of assessing the new system by working cooperatively with the newly elected leaders, these groups create obstacles and with their votes hinder the emergence of new initiatives. At times their actions seem good in the eyes of minorities. To tempt and uncover errors made by the governing forces with the objective to hinder the success of their programs, hoping to attain victory in the next elections. That in conjunction with any pacts or alliances they may have established, which generally upset many, they damage the

opportunity to objectively assess the efficacy of the governmental system in place by concealing important national data. This not only debilitates the country, many times it projects a dictatorship as a vehicle of salvation.

Z A more serious danger is that those **majorities** evolve into a subtle and concealed totalitarianism, which evidently can be achieved through new and successive elections which democracy must respect.

These majorities which enjoy a greater political, economic, and ideological power can continue to manipulate new elections.

Qualitative Leap

The democracies of today require that citizens accept the programs implemented by the newly elected party; programs which depict the way of life as they see fit.

So we ask ourselves: Can't various ways of living be mediated to exist simultaneously so that each citizen may adhere freely to the one of his choice, the one that is closest to his personal style and desires? This all happens much like one chooses a form of travel or with the freedom one experiences a religion. This would promote the possibility for each person to enjoy the previously mentioned fourth right, which states that every person is entitled to live adhered to that which he sincerely believes.

This maturation process within democracies is not an extension of their development or a "quantitative" step but rather a "qualitative leap". In other words, it is not a mere question of the "quantity" of democracy but rather an augmentation of its "quality"; without jeopardizing all that has been achieved over the centuries and with great effort.

Democracies desiring to consolidate their positions must address this challenge, as is expressed in the Letter of Peace:

"Democracies, then, must take a qualitative leap to defend and foster the right of every person to live in accordance with his conscience, never threatening the liberty of anyone or hurting himself or others".

A democracy consolidated in this manner is denominated by some as a democracy within freedom because it protects the freedom to think and live of the individual and the groups. This would eliminate many obstacles and would overcome most of the contradictions and weaknesses prevalent in today's democracies. An advantage of this would be that voters wouldn't choose political programs based on a political party's unscrupulous need to increase their list of affiliates; keeping in mind that politicians rarely are able to deliver all that they promised. Hence, citizens will be able to select programs they have assessed while in motion as well as change freely from one to another; a right guaranteed by the State.

Cyril Florez, a Philosophy professor at the University of Salamanca comments below on the subject³:

“The term “qualitative leap” within a democracy is one of the ideas that best expresses the wealth and importance of the Letter of Peace. In present times, it is becoming more evident that what matters most about democracy is not “popular sovereignty” or the “freedom to debate politics” although they remain important, it is about what some theorists call a “democratic culture”; one that defends the subject and groups within their social diversity just as does Point X of the Letter of Peace here: every person has *the right to live in this world coherently adhered to what he sincerely believes*”.

Following that line of thought

we can understand democracy as the “institutional space” *which* makes possible that the above mentioned right is carried out. This translates into the acknowledgement that every individual and group of individuals is entitled to live their lives according to their conscience, sense of independence, and responsibility.

Allow us to interpret this qualitative leap within democracy as the proposal of a new ideal which seeks to guarantee that all individuals and groups of individuals within our societies are able to create their own history, customs, and values which in turn enhance their individual identities. In this manner when a democracy engages in this qualitative leap it will not only be characterized by its own agenda but will include different traditions; traditions with roots that recognize every group and individual's part in a culture; a culture that will be understood as a pluralist entity. Democracy viewed from a qualitative point of view within this institutional space that recognizes a cultural pluralism is what will allow individuals and groups of individuals to work their way to an ideal peace.”

³ C. FLOREZ, *Entrevista*, en Revista RE de pensamiento y opinión. nº 40 p. 16-17.

Practical Application

The execution of this proposition lies in the competency of the politicians involved. It is not a matter that can be resolved in a brief period of time. It entails a multitude of large and difficult problems; which is why it should be put to work as soon as possible.

Earlier, the need to understand and accept Points I through IX before comprehending Point X was explained. Now the reverse can be said. The act of promoting a democracy within freedom signifies taking the consequences of the previous points addressed in the Letter of Peace to its limits. For example, an attitude of true friendship (Point III) should not indulge in the uniformity among friends but rather in the tolerance of plurality and diversity... In other words, being a friend beyond ideologies, religions, or political affiliations, etc. Another example to consider would be to value the individuals' liberty (Point VII), including the freedom to form political groups that exist differently to our own and many more.

This variety in simultaneous styles of living in a country can be properly applied to a multitude of entities and institutions such as: families, schools, businesses, and associations among others. In addition, this tolerance would augment the peace and happiness of its members.