

**Peace: The Challenge to Religions**  
**Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.**  
**St. Jerome's University Convocation**  
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I wish to thank St. Jerome's University for this great honour. I accept it not as a trophy but a spur to further action to build the conditions for peace in God's world.

I congratulate warmly all those graduating today. This is a day of great joy for you, your parents, family and friends. Everyone is proud of you, and surely you deserve a day of celebration that ought not to be interrupted by a speaker challenging you once more, as if you haven't overcome enough challenges on the way to your degree. But I cannot rest without giving you a one-word message: Peace.

In a few moments, the celebrant of this Mass will intone the words of peace that are at the heart of Jesus's message: "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you." Those words were foreshadowed by the prophet Isaiah, who said: "Peace, peace to the far and near, says the Lord; and I will heal them."

Peace is at the centre of our faith, the longing in our hearts, the greatest need in the world. You can do something about peace

and indeed you must if your lives are to be fulfilled with the potential St. Jerome's has opened up for you.

A culture of peace is more than the absence of war, though that is a strong element. It rejects violence of all kinds and fosters respect for life and the dignity and human rights of all people. It seeks social justice, or at least a more equitable distribution of the world's resources and goods than now obtains. This is the peace you should work for in your own way.

I do not believe that God created the world in order for it to be blown up by nuclear weapons, sullied by environmental degradation, or huge numbers of its inhabitants denied the fundamental requisites of human life and dignity. The God of my vision inspires me to seek social justice and the peaceful resolution of conflict. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers..." he enabled me to feel a union with God, and it is in that spirit that I dare to come before you today with my own theology of the street.

For me, a theology of the street is all about the global conscience, a way to reach out for something greater than myself. Working on the human security agenda -- nuclear disarmament, sustainable development, protection of the environment and advancing human rights -- is the way I relate to God, the way I

think I understand better His plan for creation. He has left us free to choose creativity or chaos. My theology of the street is not just about God and me; it is about God and the world.

The new global conscience challenges us – it challenges you – to deal with the over-arching questions of our time:

- Why is there so much starvation when there is so much food in the world?
- Why are we polluting the atmosphere and waters and producing global warming when we have the technology to avoid this?
- Why do we tolerate the existence of nuclear weapons, which threaten to destroy the processes of life?
- Why do we have the United Nations and then refuse to empower it to stop wars and end starvation?

The answers to these questions are not yet sufficiently strong to overcome an unjust world economy, world disorder, and the undermining of human rights and the rule of law. Perhaps the world will still have to endure yet more wars, more religious extremism, and a wave of nuclear proliferation. But the very forces of nature, business, communications, and world politics are building up a single society. The chief characteristics of this society are its common humanity and the need for a common law.

Today, all religions, in a spirit of humility and service, should, with a united voice, loudly proclaim their support for the U.N. global strategies of disarmament, development, equity, and justice – which are the basis for the culture of peace. Religions should remember that here on Earth, we have the responsibility to continue and protect God’s plan of creation. The preservation of the planet must be assured as a first step in the expression of our love for God. Religions will not lose by joining enthusiastically with secular humanists in the promotion of a global ethic that centres on the well-being of humanity. Religions will then truly be in the service of God.

A global ethic to solidify the culture of peace cannot be achieved by either secular humanists or the religions talking only among themselves. It will take an enormous push by the combined forces of civil society. Religions have a duty to work alongside the representatives of politics, business and the financial world to foster the recognition that a global ethic is necessary for the survival of the planet.

What a challenge lies before you. The technical and communication resources are at your fingertips . You have the skills no generation before you has ever had.

Congratulations again and – Peace be with you.

