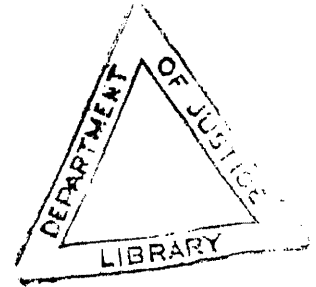




Department of Justice

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WELCOMING REMARKS
OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY
TO THE
ITALIAN CONGRESS OF FORENSIC MEDICINE



AMERICANA HOTEL
NEW YORK CITY

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1963

It is an honor for me to welcome you to this country.

I doubt if ever before we have been privileged to receive, in one gathering, so many of the finest minds in contemporary European civilization.

As an American -- and particularly as an American lawyer -- I find the underlying concept of your academy both strange and inspiring.

It is a strange concept to me -- and also, I suspect, to most Americans-- because ours is a nation of specialists. Our lawyers tend to be preoccupied with law, our doctors with medicine, our theologians with religion, and our writers with literature.

In fact, the specialization is narrower than that, for each profession contains an infinite number of sub-specialties that are all too likely to claim the whole attention of their practitioners.

An American doctor whose specialty is the human eye, ear and throat will have very little basis for intelligent discourse with a psychiatrist. The same lack of communication is apt to exist between a patent attorney and a labor lawyer.

Small wonder, then, that the American doctor and lawyer can find little of mutual interest or benefit in each other's profession; and less wonder still that both are inclined to feel uneasy in the presence of a poet -- not to mention the poet's discomfort in trying to hold up his end of the conversation.

But this is our loss. This is the price we have paid in America for our concentration on expert technique at the expense of general learning -- and that is why I find your organization an inspiring idea.

There is, of course, nothing new in an American's being inspired by Italian ideas. Throughout our brief history, we have always looked to the rich and ancient heritage of the Italians for cultural values we have not had time to develop on our own.

The very buildings that surround us here in New York -- this magnificent forest of skyscrapers that has come to symbolize America all over the world -- would not have existed if it weren't for the genius of Italian builders and artisans in stone.

And just as New York is indebted to Italy for its skyline, so all America is indebted to Italy for the high skyline of its cultural imagination.

In all of the learned disciplines represented by the gathering here today -- the law, the sciences, the humanities and the arts -- America and the whole of the western world will be forever indebted to the classical innovations of Italian thought.

It is entirely fitting, then, that the innovation, the concept of correlating these disciplines for the greater good of each, should spring from Italian minds.

The work of your academy can only be described as a noble effort -- an effort from which more enlightened concepts of human justice may well be born, and from which new and higher plateaus of wisdom may well be attained for the benefit of all mankind.

Albert Einstein saw the modern world as "characterized by perfection of means and confusion of goals." No conscientious man alive today can deny the truth of that observation, or fail to be disturbed by its implications.

In the very process of perfecting our means -- of attaining greater and greater expertise in our specialized approaches to knowledge -- we are all too likely to settle for false and arrogant assumptions of wisdom. And it is this arrogance that gives rise to the confusion of our goals.

"Our firmest convictions," said Ortega Y Gasset, "are apt to be the most suspect. They mark our limitations and our bounds. Life is a petty thing unless it is moved by the indomitable urge to extend its boundaries."

One of our own great scientists, Robert Oppenheimer, put the same thought a different way when he was asked to define exactly what it was that scientists of his caliber did all day. They sit around, he said, explaining to each other the things they do not know.

I believe that wise men through the ages have always done just that -- for surely the end of true learning is not to establish certainties but to achieve humility in the face of the unknowable.

And so it is the humility of this Congress -- the openness and willingness of each of you to learn from each other -- that gives it the most significant value as a lesson for intellectuals everywhere.

If the goals of our age are ever to become less confused -- as clearly they must if our civilization is to survive -- I believe that achievement will come about through discussions like yours.

I know I can speak for the President, and for the American public in saying we are proud that you have chosen the United States for your third Congress. I am confident that the American intellectual community will follow the workings of this Congress with all the interest it so plainly deserves.

I only wish that all of you could stay longer, that you could travel more widely, and converse with American scholars in all parts of our country.

But however brief your visit to America, I hope you find it profitable ---and I sincerely hope it won't be your last.

The United States is honored by your presence here.