WELCOMING REMARKS

by

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

To the Opening Session of the

INTERFEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF PAX ROMANA

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Monsignor Storero, Bishop Hannan, Father Bunn, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Delegates:

It is my great honor to welcome you, from more than a hundred student federations in more than 70 countries, to this country and this conference, on behalf of the United States Government. I want to offer you our best wishes for a satisfying and productive conference.

Your organizations have a great capability and potential to work for good in your universities and in your countries and I hope this meeting can add to your accomplishments.

I can think of no more important task than the one you are carrying on. The ambitions, the sensitivity, and the responsibility of university students in every country today will soon shape the success or failure, war or peace, prosperity or misery of your countries and our world tomorrow. And, as is recognized by the theme of this assembly, "Christianity in an age of transition," tomorrow grows ever closer.

In the early years of universities, it was possible to wrestle for decades with the deep and divisive problems of the reformation. Later, mankind could take a century to digest the astonishing revelations of Copernican astronomy. But today, there is no such time. The number, importance, and rapidity of the problems that bedevil mankind increase by the day. They are larger. They are more urgent. And they are incomparably more numerous.

Yesterday, we sought telescopes good enough to see all the planets. Today, we seek vehicles good enough to reach them.

Yesterday, we fought wars which destroyed cities. Today, we are concerned with avoiding a war which will destroy the earth. We can adapt atomic energy to produce electricity and move ships, but can we control its use in anger? Automation provides us with wondrous increases of production and information, but does it tell us what to do with the men the machines displace? Modern industry gives us the capacity for unparalleled wealth -- but where is our capacity to make that wealth meaningful to the poor of every nation?

These are not problems to be mulled over and adjusted to for a century; they must be solved in a single generation, in this generation -- or even sooner. How we respond to those problems -- and the new ones that surely will come hard on their heels -- will determine the shape of the world.

These problems are not for individuals to solve. They are not even for individual nations to solve unaided. As our problems grow more complex, our world grows smaller, and our need for solutions becomes common.

Satellite communications connect television screens in Japan with television cameras in England and the distance of half a world loses its meaning. The supersonic airplanes now under development will make it

possible to fly from New York to many of your countries in the interval between breakfast and lunch. But the resulting need for increased international sensitivity is not a problem for Americans alone. The same planes will fly you to America with the same speed, and we will call on you to understand us, also.

Just as distance comes to be measured in hours and even minutes, ideas must come to be measured by their merit, not their national origin. As the framework pulls together, so must its occupants. We become, whether we choose it or not, citizens of the world. What we can choose -- and what you as men and women of learning and faith have a responsibility to choose -- is to become world citizens who can make tolerant and educated judgments concerning problems not only of our own lives and lands, but of men everywhere.

In my country, as in yours, I think there is substantial cause for optimism about how youth will fulfill this responsibility. In the United States, young men and women are increasingly concerned with the society around them -- both at home and abroad. Thousands work on behalf of civil rights or the underprivileged. Large numbers are constructively involved in politics and public service. And you all know of the idealism and the dedication of the young Americans serving in the Peace Corps.

In my travels, I have observed similar idealism and similar involvement by students elsewhere, whether in spirited activity for their own countries or in the work of the Peace Corps established by other countries.

These concerns, by young people in your countries and in mine, stem in part from the intensified concern of our countries as a whole for the problems of society. And these concerns also stem from your training. You seek education not merely to become intellectual tradesmen, but to become humane and thoughtful men and women. I know you will continue to feel these concerns as part of the legacy of your education and your faith.

So there is no need for me to come and exhort you to develop such concern for your fellow men. What I would like to do instead is ask whether you will continue to act on behalf of those deeply felt concerns. There is a danger, growing out of your university experience, that you will not do so. The very education which has helped expand your awareness of the problems of other men is the same education which prepares you for a place in society far removed from those problems.

The carpeted office of the medical specialist in the United States has little relationship to the ailing peasant child in Latin America. The philosopher's study in Europe is a century away from the hovels of the Asian poor. The research laboratory does not produce concern over militarism in a faraway country.

As the skilled and professional people of your nations and the world, you will be escalated out of contact with the large number of people in the

world whose principal worries are hunger and hope. You will be equipped to live, work, think and travel in the very latest day of the 20th Century. You will read and hear about poverty and tyranny; you will be aware, concerned, and sympathetic. But will you also work to lend your talents to the service of your society -- and of all societies on this shrinking planet?

One of the most energetic figures of my country's history, Theodore Roosevelt, declared in 1899 that, "our country calls not for the life of ease, but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The Twentieth Century looms before us, big with the fate of many nations."

That prediction may be even more valid and even more far-reaching now than when it was uttered. There has, perhaps, never been a time in the history of the world, when the gap between college and community has been smaller, when the need for active involvement by young people has been stronger, and the opportunity for them to do things of significance has been greater.

This was a point which President Kennedy recognized and emphasized. "I ask you to decide," he was fond of saying to university audiences, "I ask you to decide, as Goethe put it, whether you will be an anvil or a hammer."

The opportunity is greatest in public service. The governments of our countries need and deserve the enlistment of the best minds of the coming generation. As problems grow, the challenge of leadership grows.

But even if you choose a private profession, there is still broad opportunity for participation in the affairs of your society. The English word "idiot" comes from the Greek for a person who did not participate in public affairs. But the word "university" comes from the Latin for "all together."

The point is there is a need for individual participation. All of us have to participate. All of us are needed. The question is whether to be a critic or a participant. The question is whether to bring a candle to the barricade or to curse the darkness.

At this great assembly, devoted to social responsibility, I think the choice must be for light.

Let us go forward to make that choice, as President Kennedy once said, "asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth, God's work must truly be our own."