

It is not often that a Canadian city is given an opportunity to welcome such a distinguished gathering from practically every continent except Antarctica, and with the recent explorations of that continent, I wonder how long it will be before there is a university there too. Reflecting the nature of the Commonwealth, this Congress represents many peoples, and many points of view. I greet you as emissaries of goodwill. An ambassador, observed Sir Henry Wotton, is an honest man sent abroad to lie for the Commonwealth. Let me disavow any suspicion of support for his definition, and greet you as honest men whose main concerns in having ventured abroad as ambassadors - or since you represent the Commonwealth, as High Commissioners - are not the devious diplomatic negotiations of three and a half centuries ago, but rather the candid exchange of views on matters of importance for the educational commonweal of the Commonwealth.

But the Commonwealth is not an exclusive association. Its membership rules are not rigid. Mindful of this tolerant diversity of views, I am happy to extend greetings to our good friends, the representatives from the United States of America and the warmth of our welcome to them is in no way diminished by the fact that they are ambassadors rather than High Commissioners. It is after all the result of one of those aberrations of history that they are not fullfledged members of the Commonwealth. And in any event, they represent the broader republic of learning which embraces the Commonwealth. May I be forgiven for violating the rules of formal logic in saying that in present circumstances the particular includes the general. But logical consistency never was one of the distinguishing marks of the Commonwealth bonds and if I transgress upon logic's prescriptions, it is only because I desire to make our guests from the United States quasi-members at least for this occasion. Even though they may not be card-carrying members, at least they know our game and they play by the same rules. Like the Commonwealth, this association of universities demonstrates that comprehensiveness is more desirable than exclusiveness.

The University Role

The most significant single characteristic of the universities represented here is independence, their freedom from compulsion to pursue purposes not of their own conviction. Their dedication to freedom of thought and the unrestricted flow of ideas is our surest safeguard, against restraining encroachments, of the right to differ and the most precious right of all, the right to be wrong. Our universities have cherished the ideal of independence and encouraged the individual who has the determination and integrity to stand alone if necessary in defending the values and principles in which he believes.