

The Commonwealth provides an opportunity for men of goodwill to discuss with one another, both in plenary session and in the many bilateral meetings, their problems and their hopes for the future; to learn from the wisdom and experience of others. The Commonwealth Conference is a forum for men who are as different as God has made them. It is a meeting-place where men are able to demonstrate the advantages of dissimilarity, the richness of diversity, the excitement of variety. Is this not what life is all about, to learn, to share, to benefit, and to come to understand?

I think it is. I think Canadians agree with me, for in our own country we exhibit a multiplicity of character, a diversity of climate, of topography, of resources, of customs, of traditions, of peoples, which is a segment of the wide world beyond. We accept almost instinctively the view that, of the many challenges offered by the twentieth century, none is greater than the aspiration of men to live in societies where tolerance and equality are realities. The Commonwealth is a means toward such a goal. To suggest, as some do, that the Commonwealth must be more than a forum for discussion or a clearing-house for economic assistance from the few rich nations to the many poor ones is to miss the vital point of the exercise.

Is Canada any less strong, and less united in understanding, because Canadians and their leaders engage in constant dialogue, because the wealthier provinces accept the principle of tax equalization? I think not.

So, too, in the broader international community of the Commonwealth. Human inequality is a political fact of great potency. The most effective means of reducing the explosive potential of discrimination is to meet other persons as political equals and to assist them toward economic equality. That is what the Commonwealth does. I believe these are useful exercises. For these reasons, I assured the London Conference that Canada firmly supported the Commonwealth principle....

At the close of the Commonwealth Conference, I went to Rome where, after a most cordial interview at the Quirinal Palace with His Excellency the President of the Italian Republic, Mr. Saragat, I was received at the Vatican by Pope Paul VI.

We spoke of peace in the world, the difficulties of maintaining it, for instance in Vietnam and in Nigeria, and of the importance of promoting it more particularly through the respect of human rights and international aid.

In the course of the conversation, I informed the Holy Father that Canada was considering setting up diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The Pope welcomed the idea, stating that the Vatican would be honoured by such relations. But he added that he would leave it to Canada to decide on taking that initiative.

Pope Paul VI spoke very warmly of Canada, the problems and the tremendous possibilities of which he is well acquainted with. Speaking of our fellow-countrymen, the Holy Father said he was convinced (and I quote): "What unites them is stronger and more important than what divides them."