

AMBASSADOR THOMAS R. PICKERING

Thank you, Mr. Agnelli, Rabbi Schneier, ladies and gentlemen. First, let me begin by saying congratulations to all on this Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation which has done so much to promote human freedom, human dignity, and human rights. I want to join with all of you, too, in passing warm and hearty congratulations to Mr. Jay Pritzker--a man whose career speaks for itself, whose contributions are legion, and whose special work in the service of human dignity and freedom is honored here by the Foundation tonight. And, I particularly want to mention his gift of an architectural prize which we know is producing inspiration, intellectual achievement, and great work in that particular field.

But, it's a special honor for me tonight to join in a tribute to someone whose work and contributions I have long admired, but never had a chance to meet until this evening. Paying tribute to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, a man whose life has spelled devotion, not only to his faith, but to enduring spiritual and human values is a special privilege. The labor union of diplomats is small, but we stick close together.
(Laughter)

And, just as important as the contributions I have just mentioned is his devotion, hard work, and sacrifice--and his dedication, which has been required to translate those values from the realm of ideals to the enduring kingdom of reality and practice.

We are living through one of the most exciting and promising and challenging periods of human history. The commitment of numerous individuals, famous and unknown, to human rights, to freedom, and to dignity is now paying off. The way is opening to new perspectives in human endeavor and cooperation--perspectives which we could only dimly perceive just one year ago. Building a world which is more peaceful, more free, more democratic, and more just, is not just an ephemeral task, it is a real one with real prospects, and I am afraid, real dangers.

Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, as a leading figure of his Church, as a statesman, and as a diplomat, and as a human being, has played an important personal role in perceiving and creating the new opportunities before us.

Your Eminence, you have been a pre-eminent spiritual and political figure on the world landscape for decades. Yours has been an insistent and persuasive voice calling for recognition of the human spirit and for support for religious freedom. Your talents played an important role in bringing light, even if only a pale ray of hope at the beginning, into the places in the world which were the darkest. From you special vantage point at the Holy See, you have been able to see perhaps even better than most historic shifts in international affairs developing as the forces of freedom have been building. Events of the past ten years have demonstrated that with lucidity, with firmness, and with vision. The unrealistic can become reality.

We have made tremendous progress in overcoming the divisions of Europe, in East-West relations, in disarmament, in settling regional conflicts, in restoring peace throughout the globe, in fostering democracy and freedom, in energizing the United Nations, and in bettering the human condition. Ideologies and systems which pervert the human spirit and thwart human aspirations are failing (as they must). And, therein lies the essence of the historic opportunity before us.

The world we have known for the past forty-five years has changed as we wanted it to. We are coming within reach of making international collective security a workable proposition. But, we have much work together still to do. Now we must have the wisdom and strength to build.

The coming years will be times of great difficulty, challenge, and risk. With greater freedom, we face even greater need to meet the real problems of the world--and the Gulf Crisis reminds us (if we had need to be so reminded) that not all share our vision of a world of freedom and peace. And that, while the values of this Foundation are triumphant, they are not yet universally applied. The world is not yet a safe place, but we are getting there--and I know that we will be able to continue to count on the invaluable contribution of our Guest of Honor and our Honorees to this most significant work. Thank you all very much.