HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL AGOSTINO CASAROLI

After so many beautiful speeches in good America, I will try to deliver to you my modest address at least in English. But, I fear that you, yourselves, will wonder--and Mrs. Margaret Thatcher will too if I am speaking in English, or for example in Scottish, or perhaps in Italian. But, I will try to do my best.

I will begin by thanking Rabbi Schneier for his wonderful words. He said what he had in his heart was sincere. I am not quite sure that the portrait that he made of me is correct. But, friendship can do very much, even in the face of reality. (Laughter)

Ladies and gentlemen and dear friends, I am very appreciative of the honor which has been accorded me by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

Although I would not wish to examine the reasons which, perhaps too generously, prompted this award, nevertheless I have to admit that it means a great deal. As a man, as a priest, whose vocation it is to serve God and his neighbor, and as someone who has dedicated the whole of his active life to the service of the Catholic Church and the Holy See, I am deeply moved.

The human person, his or her dignity, the sanctuary of the human conscience, and what it most jealously guarded and sacred in the depth of that conscience (I refer to the attitude--or the torment with which every individual confronts the mystery of life, its meaning, and its destiny, in other words, the question

of man and of God): to uphold the inviolability of this sanctuary and to defend from every form of oppression and external threat, especially on the part of public authority, the human rights of those who have found in religious belief answers to the questions which their own conscience has raised. This is the noble aim of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. Your Foundation has valiantly pursued this aim on many fronts, aware that, in this way, also the interests of detente and of international peace are promoted.

Back in 1963, following my designation by Pope John XXIII and its immediate confirmation by his Successor, Paul VI, I began my visits beyond what was then called the "Iron Curtain." Throughout the years that followed, further contacts were established with those Governments, and, to the extent it was possible at the time, with the Churches in those countries. As I look back on those years, I can not help but realize how the aims and efforts which I carried out in the name of the Apostolic See were inspired by a fundamentally similar ideal.

In the face of inviolable human rights, and especially, in the face of the demands of religious belief, peoples' attitudes in their dealings with each other, and the attitude of societies in regard to their own members had not always been attitudes of recognition and respect.

I have no intention of reviewing past history at this point. Instead, let us concentrate on the present or on the recent past, which we ourselves have experienced. We can never

overlook those visually documented crimes which were perpetrated against the dignity of men, women, and children in the course of the past seventy years in Europe and other parts of the world. Our vision must be more directed to the present and the future than to the past, but it remains imperative to draw from this past history, so recent, and yet, already so distant, the lessons which it leaves us. We need to do this before the rapid passage of time and newly emerging problems transform our immediate memory of injustices and the still open windows into vacant memories when we think those generalizations with which (to quote and eloquent Frenchman of the last century)--"the chastity of history enshrouds what it does not dare to express."

Less well-known in its full extent and in its details is the tragic situation of the Churches and other religious communities throughout a long period which, in various parts of the world continues even today. Only a few illustrious victims clearly stand out in most people's memory: like peaks which rise up from a sea of practically anonymous sufferings and continuous difficulties. The world has now become more aware of the sufferings, too. This happened once certain situation which had been firmly established for decades began to change. Previously they had aroused only casual attention. It was as if people had been lulled by the continuation of an oppressive and apparently stagnant state of affairs, one which had been going on without any new and dramatic changes.

Although the history of humankind has periods of harsh struggle between different religions and fierce persecutions and

oppressions against religious groups, it is only in our time that it has witnessed the organized and systematic effort by public authority which has managed to gain absolute control of the State and its social organization to eliminate, as far as possible, all forms of religious life and of faith. This, at least in theory, was not necessarily due to hatred for concrete persons or institutions (although such hatred naturally came about in the course of heated struggle). Rather, it was due to an ideological conviction, a conviction lived out with the passion of a faith.

In my years of experience, I have never heard of a case where measures against religious persons or institutions (and in the past, such measures went so far as condemnation to death or suppression) were justified for religious reasons. Instead, they were always presented as depending on political reasons: on anti-social activities or activities against the state.

Prescinding from individual, concrete cases, we must admit that there was a certain logic in this.

Consequently, every attempt to defend religion--in its activities and institutions--was viewed, in reality, as an act of opposition to a Party-State founded upon ideological presuppositions which were hostile to religion.

On a still deeper level, every attempt to defend or claim freedom of religion necessarily was a threat to the very foundations of a system where "freedom" (in the authentic meaning of the word) had no place. Ideologically aimed at

creating a "new" man, a "new" society, the system could not help but view every demand for freedom, especially in the realm of the spirit, as a danger. Every attempt to claim freedom was in effect an attempt to escape the centripetal force of the system's effort to "create" a great and complete new historical reality.

These considerations--and many others besides--occurred to me when I took up the work entrusted to me and prepared to enter into negotiation with the authorities of Communist countries.

Such considerations hardly inspired great optimism as to the result which could be achieved. Nevertheless, the difficulty of the undertaking could not hold the Holy See back from taking it on--with prudence, certainly without naivete; with courage and I dare say, a certain magnanimity; and with trust, not only in God, also in the innate power of rightful claims and man's natural thirst for freedom.

Then too, Pope John XXIII had observed in his Encycyclical "Pacem in Terris" (n. 159) that although a philosophy, once it has been formulated and defined, does not change, the opposite is true of economic, social, cultural, or political undertakings--even if they are inspired by erroneous philosophical theories, they cannot help but be influenced to some extent by the changing conditions in which they have to operate.

Could this principle not also be applied to the Communist systems? Many people doubted it; some denied it completely.

But the principle, as such, did have a universal value.

In reality, after the initial contacts, I began to notice some slow movement in what might otherwise have appeared as a monolithic block. Young people gave a special reason for hope: increasingly cut off from the official ideology, they were becoming more and more intolerant of doctrines imposed from above and were thirsting for freedom. Where would these symptoms lead? It was hard to say. It was even more difficult to foresee the time-frame and possible outcome of this kind of generation gap--whether it might have lead to a gradual evolution, or to a crisis which might even determine the collapse of the system. (That, in fact, is precisely what happened, with the help, however, of certain important factors which were not foreseeable at the time.

In any event, a restless desire for freedom was eating away at the foundations of an edifice which, from the outside, still appeared unshakable.

Thus in times and ways which varied according to individual countries and situations--Poland, for example, was not Czechosovakia--the activity of the Church and Holy See took on increasing importance and opened up broader horizons than that of the specific defense of religious freedom. Freedom, after all is indivisible. Therefore, every step forward, however small, in securing recognition of the rights of the Church and of believers, every extension of their freedom, came to signify a real contribution to affirming freedom in these societies.

The events of 1989 were the great, and in many ways, unexpected result of the growing appeal made by the conscience of peoples. That appeal, which became an outcry, was like the blast of trumpets at Jericho--it caused walls that until then had been proud in their power to crumble into dust.

Once the ferment of these events has calmed, history will be able to determine with greater objectivity the merits of the forces and persons which set them in play.

For my part, and in regard to the modest contribution that I was able to accomplish, I was really always guided in my activity not only by my commitment to serve the Church and the Holy See, but also by a great respect--I would even say a great love--for the human person, for his or her dignity, his or her rights and especially the rights of conscience. And I was guided as well by the certainty that, however many struggles might be involved, human rights would, one day, be vindicated.

To me, the way of dialogue--dialogue that is firm, yet remains polite and, if possible, even cordial--has always seemed preferable to the way of dispute; the search for understanding and agreement to controversies and polemics undertaken for their own sake; peace to war.

Consequently, I was also pleased to have been associated in some way with the which reached its culmination in the signing of the Helsinki Final Act on August 1, 1975, and in the various documents which followed that Act, especially the extremely important one which was signed on January 15, 1989.

Of course, much more could be said regarding this entire process, which was itself both the result and the catalyst of the gradual changes which took place on the world scene following the last World War.

In conclusion, I acknowledge once again my pleasure at receiving the Appeal of Conscience Award. I receive this honor with the conviction that it is due less to me than to the Holy See, and in particular, to the great figure of Pope John Paul II, that tireless defender of the Faith and of human rights. In expressing my gratitude, I express as well my hope that this worthy Foundation will continue the activity it has already pursued for over a quarter century. Despite the great advances made in the cause of freedom of conscience and religion, much still remains to be done in different parts of the world. All of us are called to work together for human rights, religious freedom, and peace in our world.

Thank you and God bless you. (Applause)