

II. Schiller Seminar: What Kind of Peace Do We Seek?

'We Need Not Be Tragic'

The World Needs JFK's Vision of Peace

by Dennis Speed

Dennis Speed, a leader of the Schiller Institute, moderated the June 10, 2023 event that he discusses here. Watch the video of the symposium [here](#).

June 17—The symposium, “The World Needs JFK’s Vision of Peace,” conducted by International Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche on the 60th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy’s American University “Peace Speech,” is now available for viewing and study. Zepp-LaRouche’s keynote address to the symposium (included elsewhere in this issue), pursues the discussion she initiated last year with her [Ten Principles](#) for a New Security and Development Architecture.

Her interlocutors—the Hon. Donald Ramotar, former President, Republic of Guyana; Professor Pino Arlacchi, former Executive Director, UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention; Ray McGovern, co-founder, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity; Diane Sare, independent candidate for United States Senate in New York; and Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, founder and President of JUST International, headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia—advanced that discussion through their presentations and responses to questions fielded from around the world.

Contending that the world may be closer now to thermonuclear war than even at the time of JFK, Zepp-LaRouche had on May 17 issued an “[Urgent Appeal](#) by Citizens and Institutions from All Over the World to the (Next) President of the United States!” which states:

We, the undersigned, therefore express our hope, that the (next) President of the United States finds the greatness in herself or himself to adopt the viewpoint which was expressed by JFK in his historic speech.

Through the efforts of many organizations, some of which have joined in an International Peace Coalition recently proposed by Zepp-LaRouche, new,

deserved attention is being paid by the world to the nearly-suppressed John F. Kennedy Commencement Address (“[Peace Speech](#)”) delivered at The American University on June 10, 1963. Although known to academics, historians, and political figures—indeed, many have referenced it, and a considerable amount has been written about it over the six decades since it was delivered—its content was then and to this day remains largely unknown to the general public. Much like the creative nonviolent direct action practices of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., however, even for those who know of it, Kennedy’s thinking about how to achieve a durable peace in this world has, in practice, been ignored, if admirably so.

Kennedy’s speech is, for example, emphatically rejected as the obviously correct conceptual approach to negotiations with the nations of Russia, China and the Global South today, by the American and European presidential and prime ministerial administrations that righteously and routinely overturn governments, and even murder whole nations in the name of the “rule of law.” The essential suppression of JFK’s speech, delivered a mere eight months after the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 had placed the world on the brink of thermonuclear war—which is also almost unknown—permits American and European populations to be blithely clueless in allowing *their own* governments—not Russia and China—to recklessly toy with incinerating the world, while academic institutions and “responsible media outlets” incessantly prattle on and on about “saving the planet from global warming.”

The tragic, self-destructive societies of the Anglosphere, in which pessimism has become a form of universally negotiable moral currency, foster uninformed electorates that hopelessly complain about their regimes, which they perfectly well know they have the power to nonviolently replace, but prefer not to confront, out of fear, financial vulnerability, pragmatic compromise, or in some cases, outright agreement with

the imperial and racist ambitions of their oligarchical masters.

John Kennedy, with all his faults, chose to be better, and bigger, than our present-day America. In April 1963, he told Norman Cousins, who had just returned from a meeting, on JFK's behalf, with Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow:

One of the ironic things about this entire situation, is that Mr. Khrushchev and I occupy approximately the same political positions inside our governments. He would like to prevent a nuclear war, but is under severe pressure from his hard-line crowd.... I've got similar problems.... The hard-liners in the Soviet Union and the United States feed on one another, each using the actions of the other to justify his own position.

Rather than be contained by the political and military forces that he recognized were pressing him, whatever their intentions, into launching total war—"the Unspeakable," as writer James Douglass has called it, in his 2008 book, *JFK and the Unspeakable—Why He Died and Why It Matters*—Kennedy found an alternative. He knew he had to find an area of "coincidence of opposites" between the Soviet Union and its allies, and the United States and its allies. Norman Cousins, Ted Sorensen, JFK's longtime speechwriter, and others collaborated with the President in crafting what would have to be—and was—one of the most important speeches in the nation's history.

Thankfully, the dialogue for peace had been raised to a much higher level by Pope John XXIII and his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*), released during that same April. Breaking from the tradition of addressing encyclicals to the Catholic faithful alone, the Pontiff had included in his salutation the phrase "to all men of good will." Diagnosed with cancer in September of 1962, John XXIII's personal intervention that following October into the Cuban Missile Crisis, including his Vatican Radio broadcast of October 25, had a deeper resonance. He is said to have deeply affected both Khrushchev and Kennedy. It should also be noted that Kennedy's American University address was given one week after the Pope's death on June 3.

Pacem in Terris among other things, emphasizes the principle of the "General Welfare" in Sections 53 and 54:

Attainment of the Common Good is the Purpose of the Public Authority

53. Men, both as individuals and as intermediate groups, are required to make their own specific contributions to the general welfare. The main consequence of this is that they must harmonize their own interests with the needs of others, and offer their goods and services as their rulers shall direct—assuming, of course, that justice is maintained, and the authorities are acting within the limits of their competence. Those who have authority in the State must exercise that authority in a way which is not only morally irreproachable, but also best calculated to ensure or promote the State's welfare.

54. The attainment of the common good is the sole reason for the existence of civil authorities. In working for the common good, therefore, the authorities must obviously respect its nature, and at the same time adjust their legislation to meet the requirements of the given situation. (Footnote 37: Cf. Pius XII's broadcast message, Christmas 1942, AAS 35 [1943] 13, and Leo XIII's encyclical epistle *Immortale Dei*, *Acta Leonis XIII*, V, 1885, p. 120.)

Mutual Collaboration

31. Since men are social by nature, they must live together and consult each other's interests. That men should recognize and perform their respective rights and duties is imperative to a well ordered society. But the result will be that each individual will make his whole-hearted contribution to the creation of a civic order in which rights and duties are ever more diligently and more effectively observed.

The Pope's ideas of the "Attainment of the Common Good" are congruent with the General Welfare Clause of the Preamble to the 1787 United States Constitution, but are stated from the standpoint of Catholic theology. That is because the "General Welfare" is a *principle* of human social organization, and not a mere feature of constitutional law. Earlier in *Pacem in Terris*, the Pope had written:

Order in Human Beings

6. ... Many people think that the laws which govern man's relations with the State are the same as those which regulate the blind, elemen-

tal forces of the universe. But it is not so; the laws which govern men are quite different. The Father of the universe has inscribed them in man's nature, and that is where we must look for them; there and nowhere else.

7. These laws clearly indicate how a man must behave toward his fellows in society, and how the mutual relationships between the members of a State and its officials are to be conducted. They show too what principles must govern the relations between States; and finally, what should be the relations between individuals or States on the one hand, and the world-wide community of nations on the other. Men's common interests make it imperative that at long last a world-wide community of nations be established.

John XXIII's ideas were a part of a much longer tradition of such Christian thought, and diplomacy. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, even prior to the Schiller Institute's founding in 1984, had brought the 15th Century Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1463) to the attention of the world, through a ground-breaking re-assessment of Cusa's work, free of the academic suffocation afforded it by other writers.

Cusa's notion of the "Coincidence of Opposites," particularly as reflected in his *De Docta Ignorantia* (*Of Learned Ignorance*) and his early statement of the concept of the General Welfare and the just relationship between the individual and the state in his *Concordantia Catholica* (*Universal Concordance*) were used by him to successfully organize the Council of Florence (1438–1445), an attempt to re-unify the Eastern and Western Churches. Today's Vatican, and its role in a possible resolution of the ongoing conflict in Europe; Brazil's notable peace efforts; China's crucial efforts, already proven successful in Southwest Asia; and the exciting efforts of several African states to advance the cause of peace in Europe, would all be well served by revisiting both *Pacem in Terris* and the works of Cusa.

The Schiller Symposium is a call to action, and a demand that mankind *not be tragic* in the face of what appear to be insoluble conflicts. In the introduction to the conference, this author, as moderator, pointed out that only three months after the American University speech, President Kennedy appeared on September 20, 1963 before the United Nations General Assembly and, after enumerating specific steps that could be taken in peaceful cooperation, made a [proposal](#) to the Soviet Union that to this day is virtually unknown to Americans:

Finally, in a field where the United States and the Soviet Union have a special capacity—in the field of space—there is room for new cooperation, for further joint efforts in the regulation and exploration of space. I include among these possibilities a joint expedition to the moon. Space offers no problems of sovereignty; by resolution of this Assembly, the members of the United Nations have foresworn any claim to territorial rights in outer space or on celestial bodies, and declared that international law and the United Nations Charter will apply.

Why, therefore, should man's first flight to the moon be a matter of national competition? Why should the United States and the Soviet Union, in preparing for such expeditions, become involved in immense duplications of research, construction, and expenditure? Surely we should explore whether the scientists and astronauts of our two countries—indeed of all the world—cannot work together in the conquest of space, sending someday in this decade to the moon not the representatives of a single nation, but the representatives of all of our countries.

Could that proposal be made by a United States President today? And if not, how much smaller has our nation, its leadership, and its people, shrunk, as demonstrated by this fact? Only through a complete reversal of the neo-con "unipolar" Anglo-American, "Kissingerian" geopolitics of the past 60 years, can the United States, and perhaps the world, hope to survive.

In the United States in particular, but throughout the trans-Atlantic world as a whole, the immediate dissemination and study of the American University Speech would be therapeutic—equivalent to the reading of Thomas Paine's stirring pamphlet, *Common Sense*, in the American colonies in the months prior to their declaring independence from England and their fighting a Revolutionary War to win that independence. No less than a revolutionary change in mind-set, consciously reversing course, is required. *We need not be tragic*. As Kennedy observed at The American University:

Our problems are man-made—therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable—and we believe they can do it again.