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Villa  
Villa Serbelloni  
Bellagio, Italy  
10 Oct 59 1959

Dear Dean:

I have felt that — as it used to be said in Minnesota — I have "owed" you a letter ever since we left Newfak and especially since we arrived here. For the first few days, I couldn't think of anything to say to you, except what the World War I song said: "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they have seen Paree?" But this clearly would not have been interesting enough to you to be worth the 120 Pira minimum air postage.

But after we had been here about a week, before the other conferees arrived, and I had looked and had gotten the "feel" of the property, I decided to write a statement of my own tentative thinking for my own guidance, and to provide some points that I, at least, wanted discussed. After a couple of days of pretty desultory talk, I showed my memorandum to Lindsay, and he urged that I read it to the conferees the next day. I did so, and after a couple of more days of discussion — John Marshall having had the thing typed meanwhile — it was settled that my memorandum represented pretty closely the conclusions of the group present here now — M. Cain, Professor Löwith, M. Wriston and myself. I'll let your officers speak for themselves.

Hank Wriston — who is absolutely first-class here — was then delegated to "depersonalize" my memorandum; and this depersonalized document is now in the typing works. You will, I suppose, get a copy of it in course. However, I know from my own experience, while distance may in certain situations lend enchantment, it does not usually lead to getting information promptly. Hence, I shall send you herewith a

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copy of my original memorandum.

Lindsley and Pomerat - and these are two first-class minds in their different ways - had the idea that, yesterday, it might be better if the three RF officers absented themselves from the parley - with the thought that the conferees might let their hair down and talk more freely about some aspects of things. This happened and I have outlined to Lindsley what was said. As soon as I have a chance - more conferees are arriving today - I shall write a memorandum for you and Lindsley about what was said - chiefly about the operational aspects of things, if the approved plans be adopted.

That's about it for the present: more will come forth when I see you in New York City.

Meanwhile, and all the while, Edith and I thank you for giving us this opportunity.

Sincerely yours

For

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Mr. Dean Rusk  
The Rockefeller Foundation  
New York City.

(NEW REY NEW ROE)

3 October 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR DISCUSSION

It has been suggested that a principal use of the Villa Serbelloni by the Rockefeller Foundation should be for scholarly planning conferences and for other kinds of "get-togethers" in the interest of scholarly progress, international understanding and friendship. In my opinion, the purpose will not do. For, for example, if RF were to ask itself this question:

"Would we - if we were on our own without having received the Princess" gift - choose the Villa Serbelloni as the place we would rent for such purposes?"

— the answer clearly would be "No". The Villa is too hard to get to for comparatively short stays, it is too expensive to operate, and too unwieldy. Many other properties, elsewhere, would be better adapted to conference purposes, at less cost.

Besides, while it is easy to come up with, say, a dozen suggestions for conferences, it is impossible to conceive that the Villa could be well-used for conferences only throughout the many years ahead.

At this point, I think I should say, straight out that while I concede that scholarly conferences sometimes

justify themselves in terms of costs and use of scholars' time, such result does not often occur. Most scholarly conferences are wastes of money and of time. And furthermore they - often enough not to be ignorable - hinder the development of new lines of scholarly approach by putting the seal of approval - the seal of approval of respected minds - on one line of approach. It does not help much if several lines of approach be approved; for the vice remains the same. And that vice, inherent in all group planning in respect to scholarship and the arts, is this, as President Griswold of Yale said in his 1957 Baccalaureate: "Creative ideas do not spring from groups. They spring from individuals. The divine spark leaps from the finger of Adam, whether it takes the ultimate shape of a law of physics or of a law of the land, a poem or a policy, a sonata or a mechanical computer. Groups may exploit, change, in some cases even improve upon this creative essence: without it, they would have nothing to do."

Hans Zinsler said it even more sharply, for present purposes, in his Brown University lectures of some twenty years ago: "Research councils and foundations organize co-operative researches, thinking that the shy truth can be snared by the noisy advance of well-drilled companies of technicians - forgetting that discovery was ever a solitary



task, in which cooperation must be spontaneous, asked as the need arises, by one lonely seeker from another."

Having thus paid my respects to conference planning for scholarship - and the arts, too - I go on to say that I am by no means against the use of the Villa, occasionally, for conference purposes. Certainly such conferences could be very useful to RF officers; but to use them, even occasionally, only or principally for such purposes would be an impertinence in respect of the participating scholars.

What I do say is that the "conference" purpose is totally inadequate for the magnificence, the isolation, the beauty, the history that IS the Villa Serbelloni. The question is what might be an adequate purpose - or rather, adequate purposes - for the use of the Villa.

On this date, in advance of consultation with others who will come to the Villa during the next two weeks, I shall set down certain of my ideas for the Villa's use. I do not have dogmatic views, however. What I shall set down are certain lines of thought, running in my mind chiefly, at this stage, in the hope of clarifying my own thinking. It is a part of that thinking that the times in which we live do not really permit of rigidly fixed opinions - and this goes also for fixed opinions with respect to the Villa Serbelloni's use.

The Princess' gift lays upon the RF the duty of using the Villa Serbelloni for purposes of bettering international understanding. In short, by accepting the bequest of this Villa we have put ourselves into the midst, in a new form - are up to our necks, indeed! - of the most difficult and perplexing and complicated human situations that have confronted the world for many generations. Anybody who thinks that he has the answers now for dealing with these problems must either be (as General Smuts once said) sub-human, or think of himself as being super-human.

George Santayana referring to the Fellows of King's College, Cambridge, of his day (1896-97) — says in his rather flip, but nevertheless accurate way, this: "my feeling at King's was that the birds were not worthy of the cage." Per contra, he had views that "the birds" at Trinity College, Cambridge, were worthy, and he was right. For the Fellows of Trinity then included Henry Jackson, Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore and Mac Taggart - to mention only those in Santayana's own field of philosophy.

Isn't the problem of the Villa Serbelloni's use simply to find birds worthy of the cage? And having found them and designated them, to give them their heads? And with the whole world to choose from is that an impossible ideal or task? I do not think so.

(This was Lindsay)

Someone remarked the other day, in effect, that what the RF would have to do before it could make effective use of the Villa Serbelloni would be to accomplish a revolution in its own thinking - a revolution as radical as the revolution of thinking that was accomplished before the Foundation's Mexican Corn program was inaugurated. And this is correct: nobody can do great new things unless he can think in new ways.

The first guest I met at the Villa Serbelloni, Dr. Ahmed Emin Yalman of Turkey, wrote in his book, Turkey in My Times, "... The essential measure is to shorten the time of 'travel' from reliance on the status quo to comprehension and adoption of practical innovations. The ability to discard the old and accept the new saved Turkey, and it could save the world."

Conferences for planning, etc. are, so far as RF is concerned, just reliance on the status quo ante Serbelloni, and constitute no revolution in RF thinking, neither operational thinking nor conceptional thinking. So I ask myself what might be a high-minded and operationally feasible and revolutionary approach to the problem of the use of the Villa Serbelloni.

Given my own bent of mind, my answer begins to develop as follows:

In my view, the only possible justification for the use of the Villa by RF could come by development of great works of the mind and spirit here, or under the aegis of the Villa. By great

works, I mean only those that truly are great: here I am not interested in lesser manifestations of the mind and spirit.

Admittedly, there are not many men and women in the world at any onetime who are capable of accomplishing great works; but there always are some and many are not needed for the accomplishment of the Villa's purpose, as I conceive that purpose. And, besides, the Villa cannot accomodate many.

And to the extent that the RF officers know their jobs, the officers either will know or could find out who in all the world, have greatness in them. And ~~lest~~ this be thought to be a plan for supporting the old at the end of their careers, I recall that manifest greatness does not reside only in the old. It should be remembered that Raphael showed his quality of greatness at twenty, Erasmus and Thomas Jefferson in their early thirties, Shakespeare at twenty-eight. And it should also be remembered that Michelangelo, Titian, Santayana for example were great into their eighties.

The Villa has no libraries and no laboratories; and it would be impracticable to try to provide them. Hence, the Villa must be thought of as primarily a place for thought, for writing, and for the creation of works of art. But not wholly so; for as the Natural History of Selborne is a great work



based on observation by one man in one English village, so also can one envisage great work of natural history, of cultural geography, of linguistic genetics, etc. done here, right here.

And with the great physics laboratory of CERN not far away in Switzerland, and the great genetics laboratory at Pavia close at hand, and the Universities of Milan, Padua, Bologna, Pavia, etc., nearby; and the unique and vast historical materials of Italian and French and other European libraries not far away by North American standards - it seems clear to me that here, or under the aegis of the Villa, could be accomplished works in practically any fields, except straight experimental science.

Still - this argument for practicality must not be pressed too far; and there would not be much sense in it unless I explain what I have in mind by the phrase "under the aegis of the Villa". And this I shall do presently.

The problem, as stated earlier, is simply to find birds worthy of the cage, and then to devise ways to give them their <sup>scope</sup> heads, by which I mean that scholars and artists of the quality I have in mind must be assisted on their own terms, not on terms dreamed-up by somebody else. If the RF cannot do both of these things - find them and help them in ways of

their own choosing - then the Villa, in RF purposes and the world's cultural purposes, will be less than nothing.

Here, in planning for the use of the Villa Serbelloni the RF must be Renaissance men, of the scope of the Medicis. And if we cannot think with that scope, the RF may be entering upon one of the greatest foundations follies of all time - and that would folly indeed.

I am not thinking of any "fellowship" plan. I am thinking in a radically different way of continued, long-term support for the world's best scholars and artists. They should use the Villa Serbelloni as their base; but the support given them should be given with freedom to move freely about the world, to get the materials, - whatever the materials of their scholarship and their art may be. They ~~would~~ develop their materials here. There would have to be some minimum residence requirement here, but the most essential point to be agreed upon is that such scholars and artists must be assisted on their own terms.

Perhaps the closest present-day analogy to what I am thinking of is to be found in the All Souls (Oxford) competitive Fellowships. I am not now thinking of the Professorial Fellows of All Souls, which include the Regius Professors of Civil Law, Divinity, etc. Rather, I am thinking of the All Soul Fellowships awarded to younger men who give promise of

the highest future distinction. These All Souls Fellowships are granted for six or seven years, provide for a money stipend and rooms in the College and do not exclude the Fellows from other occupations, provided that they keep their eye on the ball of scholarship.

Doubtless the details of this All Souls Fellowship plan would contain some lessons if a plan for Villa Serbelloni scholars and artists be adopted. But as I conceive a plan for Rockefeller Villa Serbelloni scholars and artists, the All Souls regulations would have only a minimal application. For I am thinking of scholars and artists at a much higher level than the All Souls competitive Fellowship winners. Further, the subject-matters of the Rockefeller Villa Serbelloni scholars and artists would not be restricted as are All Souls Fellowships; and our scholars and artists might come from any part of the world. Hence, the plan I envisage would require even greater flexibility than do the All Souls Fellowships - in choice of Fellows and in administration, including amounts of stipends and all arrangements. A study of the life of Desiderius Erasmus would yield materials for thinking how free such a plan as I envisage would need to be.

Concomitantly with providing for Rockefeller Serbelloni scholars and artists in the Villa and nearby

buildings - at the highest levels of distinctions that the world might yield - I would then hedge my bet on greatness, as above outlined, by devoting the Sfondrata buildings and perhaps others to something else. These buildings I would use for students at about the level of American graduate students, to study under a master or masters, who also would be quartered in the Sfondrata buildings, unless they already were at the Villa. I would provide these students with adequate student stipends and with quarters and would serve breakfast to them; <sup>for</sup> but <sub>^</sub> their other meals they should use their stipends for meals in the Village of Bellagio. The Sfondrata buildings have a gate nearby which gives easy access to the village.

Obviously, this phase of planning for the Villa Serbelloni's use has analogies to the old-time Oxford vacation reading plan, whereunder Oxford students used to go to the Continent with a tutor - for reading, observation and foreign experience. But my plan would go much further than the old Oxford vacation reading plan: it would be international in scope both as regards masters and students, and would bring together as many of the world's most brilliant students as could be accommodated on the Villa property. They would come from all over the world - provided only that there should be no insuperable linguistic barriers to intellectual communication.



Obviously, there would have to be some grouping by fields of study. These students <sup>would live together, learn together, discuss together;</sup> and their learning together would include both subject matters and modes of thought. Such a plan would not be for vacation period only, but in most cases, the periods would, profitably, extend for a year.

And if my suggested plan for Rockefeller Serbelloni scholars and artists be adopted, the masters for my junior plan might well come, in part, from the Rockefeller Serbelloni scholars and artists.

There is at the Château de Lourmarin, near Aix-en-Provence, such a junior plan as I suggest in successful operation. Much may be learned about the working of the Château Lourmarin plan from its capable and perceptive director, Mme Juliette Lisle. But again, the Lourmarin plan is much <sup>more</sup> limited than the junior plan I envisage - because the Château is unheated, it can be used only in the summertime. Further, it is restricted to the creative arts and it is restricted to young French men and women.