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The American Association for the Advancement of Science was founded in 1848 and incorporated in 1874. Its objects are to further the work of scientists, to facilitate cooperation among them, to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare, and to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress.

President Kennedy on Science

Excerpts from an address by President John F. Kennedy at the presidential convocation on 22 October 1963 honoring the centennial of the National Academy of Sciences.

... If science is to press ahead . . . if it is to continue to grow in effectiveness and productivity, our society must provide scientific inquiry the necessary means of sustenance. We must, in short, support it. Military and space needs, for example, offer little justification for much work in what Joseph Henry called abstract science. Though such fundamental inquiry is essential to the future technological vitality of industry and government alike, it is usually more difficult to comprehend than applied activity, and, as a consequence, often seems harder to justify to the Congress, to the Executive Branch, and to the people.

But if basic research is to be properly regarded, it must be better understood. I ask you to reflect on this problem and on the means by which, in the years to come, our society can assure continuing backing to fundamental research in the life sciences, the physical sciences, the social sciences, on natural resources, on agriculture, on protection against pollution and erosion. Together, the scientific community, the government, industry, and education must work out the way to nourish American science in all its power and vitality. . . .

I would not close, however, on a gloomy note, for ours is a century of scientific conquest and scientific triumph. If scientific discovery has not been an unalloyed blessing, if it has conferred on mankind the power not only to create, but also to annihilate, it has at the same time provided humanity with a supreme challenge and a supreme testing. If the challenge and the testing are too much for humanity, then we are all doomed, but I believe that the future can be bright, and I believe it can be certain. Man is still the master of his own fate, and I believe that the power of science and the responsibility of science have offered mankind a new opportunity not only for intellectual growth, but for moral discipline, not only for the acquisition of knowledge but for the strengthening of our nerve and our will.

We are bound to grope for a time as we grapple with problems without precedent in human history, but wisdom is the child of experience. In the years since man unlocked the power stored within the atom, the world has made progress, halting but effective, toward bringing that power under human control. The challenge, in short, may be our salvation. As we begin to master the potentialities of modern science we move toward a new era in which science can fulfill its creative promise and help bring into existence the happiest society the world has ever known. . . .

... I think that never in the . . . history of science has the time been brighter, the need been greater, for cooperation between those of us who work in government and those of you who work in far distant laboratories on subjects almost wholly unrelated to the problems we now face. . . .

... I hope that the people of the United States will continue to sustain all of you in your work and make it possible for us to encourage other gifted young men and women to move into these high fields which require so much from them and which have so much to give to all of our people. . . .