1-10-1990

40th Anniversary Speech, delivered at the University of Sarajevo on January 10, 1990

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches

Part of the Archival Science Commons, Education Commons, and the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/185

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
I am honored to be invited to address you today on the occasion of the University of Sarajevo's 40th anniversary. My first visit to this city was in 1951 and subsequent visits to the university and Sarajevo over the past fifteen years attest to my strong appreciation and affection for the people of Sarajevo and my colleagues who comprise this distinguished university.

I must remind you scholars in attendance at this symposium that our American system of higher education allows a President of an American university to remain in office for so long as he or she can survive. I have been a survivor for nearly 30 years, and I enjoy the work of an administrator. The price I pay for that enjoyment is the time required to pursue a scholarly field. As a consequence these brief remarks about the mind of the 21st century are not based on legitimate research, but are the opinions of one who works actively in a mid America provincial setting to keep his university current and pointed in the right direction as it moves toward the 21st century. Those opinions may be peculiarly American, but, of course that is what I am; a midwestern American, and I share with you thoughts that spring from the ground and intellectual climate where I have been nurtured. That ground is not quite so isolated as it once was just as the lands each of us trod are bound more closely together and the earth is becoming a collection of neighborhoods. I believe, therefore, that there is some legitimacy in speaking about the mind of the 21st century rather than minds of the 21st century because people throughout the planet are likely to become more interactive and more inter-
dependent though not necessarily more agreeable, less competitive, nor ready to act in the best interests of themselves and others.

I. Democracy

In their first issue of the New Year one of the United States news magazines, TIME, selected Mikhail Gorbachev as the man of the decade. Of course some Americans disagreed with TIME'S choice, but I am not one of them. In fact, I believe he may be the man of the century, even when compared to one of my favorites Winston Churchill, or to Adolf Hitler whose energy, neurosis, and peculiarly self centered view of history unleashed more destruction on the human race in a shorter period of time than that wrought by any previous warrior or disease. Stalin, Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, Roosevelt are other candidates. Perhaps a scientist should be selected in this most technological of centuries, but for now I go with Gorbachev, because he understands that individual freedom of thought and expression will be the "bed rock" for any truly successful society in the future, and he had the courage to act politically on that understanding. Others in Eastern Europe had the same beliefs and were pursuing them. When he acted the "freedom cat" was out of the bag, and one of the mental preoccupations that will continue into the next century was openly identified. How to govern democratically will be the question asked by people throughout the world. Democracy, government structured to reflect the will of the governed, will be on the minds of people now and in the 21st century. There will be few if any societies where the issue will not arise, and every autocrat and oligarchy will have to contend with the movement towards
The issue of democracy will be raised with intensity and force. Whether or not it will become the standard form of governing in the 21st century is an open question. That question will be answered in the 21st century, and the quest for that answer will be one of the consuming issues of the time. In nations with no or little tradition for democratic government, will the growing freedom amongst the people carry with it the discipline and sense of justice necessary to sustain democracy? In free states the transition of power is peaceful or the freedom is lost. In free societies people live through economic difficulties without violence or the surrender of their freedom for a quick economic fix.

In eastern Europe the transition taking place has an enheartening aspect. With the exception of your neighbor Romania the bloodshed has been minimal, there are many who can claim some of the credit for this unexpected response to demonstrations that were unusually peaceful. I surmise that some formerly in power and others who led the opposition are responsible for this step towards civilization. And of great importance was the temperate speech and careful politics of Mr. Gorbachev, not only for eastern Europe but for the response elicited from the countries of the west. In Romania where blood was spilled the desire for freedom, intensified by what was happening, became so strong that the beleaguered people of that nation were willing to pay the price. Can anyone question that freedom and democracy are foremost on the minds of Romanians these days.
What roads will people follow with their new freedoms? Will ancient grievances and attachments to tribe and ethnic group be stronger than the desire to live in a pluralistic, multi-ethnic society. If they choose the former, will freedom survive, will ethnic enclaves function in a global economy? Can the diverse interests of people living within the present national boundaries be subsumed by the will of people to live in freedom, a freedom that can only survive if everyone is ready to give as well as take. That is much easier for a homogenous country such as Japan and even Hungary than it is for the Soviet Union.

In the United States we have a history of freedom and democracy in a multi-ethnic nation. Our democracy has survived a few constitutional crisis and the endemic corruption that accompanies human greed. Most Americans have commitment to and experience with democracy and personal freedom is our unassailable right. On this planet we are old hands at it. But we have our challenges. Danger to United States freedom makes us more vulnerable to excesses that a totalitarian regime can limit more easily. The phenomenal wealth of the drug cartel depends on a market. We practicers of democracy, in part, by virtue of our freedom have the wealth to provide the drug dealers with customers. And we in the United States are doing it to the point of national peril. Crime, decrease in productivity, and sapping of moral energy are a plague, and in the long run, if not abated, will threaten the freedom and undermine the democracy. If such decline were to set in, the answer to the question "Where is democracy in the 21st century?" will be different for the world than the answer will be
if the United States keeps its moral fibre. Another dilemma our old democracy faces in a world that is and will become more intent upon that form of government is illustrated by the United States recent invasion of Panama. That the dictator was the most unsavory of rulers, that most Panamanians rejoice at their deliverance from him, does not make it a favored way to bring about the transition of power. I support my government because Noriega should not be permitted to brazenly exploit his people nor threaten others with his drug involvement, but I regret the means that reminds us of days past. The irony is particularly poignant when such profound changes seem to be taking place in eastern Europe.

II. Global Economy - Markets Instead of Territory

The extent and health of democracy and freedom in the world of the 21st century will depend on the development and success of a global economy. Another feature of the 21st century mind will be its interest in and concentration on matters of international economics. Economic considerations have played a major role in wars of the past. Economics and world trade may become the war itself in the future. The shift from the desire for territory to the desire for markets may accelerate in the 21st century. Winners and losers may no longer be determined on global battlefields but on world markets. War is too dangerous, and when it erupts world powers will be more inclined to keep it localized. The exertion of power, the satisfaction of egos, and the thrill that accompanies action may well be directed to the world economic sphere. There is ample opportunity to be aggressive even nationalistic in economic matters so that those tendencies when necessary can be
exhibited there rather than on military fields of battle. We can hope that this will be the case, not only to spare human beings death and destruction from war, but because it offers opportunities for win-win situations. With the absence of major wars the peaceful economy of the globe can provide an increased standard of living for all who will actively participate. If people can use discipline in their national economies a beginning will be made towards a more healthy global market place. The "if" is a big one, but the rewards in the future are so great if this is done, the 1990's will reveal whether or not the national will exist within enough nations to accomplish this end. Whether it does or not, the 21st century will be the century of the global economy. What we do now will determine if we enter the century as an economically happy or unhappy world.

III. Communications Technology

The global economy will be shaped by the revolution in communications technology. The revolution is already happening in many places and has brought an overlay of communications technology to every continent even those with the most remote areas. I can predict that life among the Australian aborigines and the people in the dense Amazon forest will be profoundly changed by it before the end of the 21st century. Communications technology and how to use it will occupy the mind of the 21st century.

Where I come from the fax machine is replacing the postal service for all but mass mailings. In time everyone's telephone will have a fax machine or its equivalent. Computers in phones will permit common data to be used and manipulated by people at the
same time in locations distant from one another. Already we can see each other and talk with one another anywhere in the world if the proper equipment is available. Soon we may be conducting symposiums with you by communications satellite. At my university we have the equipment and are beginning to do just that within the United States.

The technology is available to put several book volumes on a micro chip to be read on the screen of your personal computer. The problem arises from legitimate copyright laws, and the present financial incapability to provide at least each scholar and student in the world with a personal computer. Think, however, of the long range implications. All journals may be stored in computer banks to be drawn on throughout the world. This is being done in some fields, and of course wide bibliographical data is available through this means. Books so difficult to secure in many countries will be pulled out of a computer bank half a world away. A book on a chip the size of a fingernail can be copied and distributed. All this can be done and in the 21st century a way will be found "to do it world wide". A golden age of world wide scholarship is coming with the communications technology revolution. The younger generation will adapt to the means better than most of us, and as they do our profession will be transformed. In the meantime I will always touch with reverence the hard covers of the books that I read in bed each night.

IV. Role of Women

The minds of the 21st century will be occupied for some time
with the role of women in the professions, and women will agonize and disagree, but they do and will have a place different from that in any previous century. Men will struggle to understand themselves in relation to the new territory women will claim for themselves. From my background I am unaware of the role of women in different societies. Only my own is familiar to me. When I am in Yugoslavia I am aware of the important role women have in the University and even in the government, but I have everything to learn about the subtleties of this important topic in your country.

Stimulated by more education and pushed by the need for two family incomes, women are in the professions to stay. In the American Association of State College and Universities there are nearly four hundred universities enrolling more than half of the nations students. The majority of those students are women. In the United States 52% of all college and university students are women. Not only do they compose the majority but at my university and the majority of universities the women are proving themselves as a group to be better students. Sex aside, quality will of itself eventually dominate, and women match and exceed men in academic performance. As the majority of women university graduates enter professions, many jobs held previously by males will be passed on to females. What this will do in professional and personal life is subject for another paper. Certainly the excitement of new frontiers to conquer that are now open is stimulating women in our society to excell. Many men surrendering a psychological worship in their profession as well as jobs are unsure often of what to do. The 21st century professional will
have this very much on his or her mind, and early on this will be an even greater preoccupation than now, balancing career and parenting, and safeguarding the rights of a woman in her profession who chooses motherhood along with her job. And one of the great choices in the later 21st century will be whether or not a woman will carry her own child or have it in a test tube and incubator. The century will bring greater changes, opportunities and choices for women than ever before and the male response to these inevitabilities will be equally as important in the determination of the harmony and quality of human life.

V. Environment

VI. Race Relations

VII. Values

There are many changes "blowing in the wind". Some have been blowing a long time, as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries. The church, both East and West as guardian of the truth in matters relating to life on this earth and in the next felt the first winds in the west when disagreement so intense caused the Reformation and a counter reformation to purge and cleanse. A stronger gust came with scientific discoveries from Copernicus and the scientific minds of the 17th century. The 18th Century thinkers carried the implications of the physical scientists discoveries into the social, political, and economic spheres. When the antidotes to the evils of the ancien regime, with its close alliance between the keepers of the truth and the keepers of the state reached the refinement of 19th century thinkers, most notably Karl Marx, organized and even unorganized religion was left in the "dust bin"
of history. Of course that did not lead to the demise of the church, but in eastern Europe and later in China, areas of vast population were officially discouraged from or prohibited from the practice of religion. In much of the west, particularly in the 20th century the church no longer dominates the world view, but is a retreat and assurance for the faithful and an anachronism to large numbers.

Dostoevsky said that man will insist on worshipping something. Now we see that the antidote philosophy of Marxism even with its significant insights may have overreached itself in its claim of understanding more than it did. There are many throughout Europe and North America who are ready for an in depth evaluation of values and their source. I wish I knew more about the climate for such an examination in the Far East and Latin America. The rigid orthodoxies that protect peoples identities still play a major role on the world scene. They are part religious, part political, part ethnic, and part psychological. They will fade slowly if at all. They range from individually helpful to politically destructive and they are not the future. The 21st century is waiting for those open minds who know that there is no final revelation, but building on the best of what was believed and the experience of those who believed it will seek to gather more insight into the life of the spirit and the nature of the universe. They may find their understanding in an old structure that transforms itself or outside the formal structures established to tend the values and the mysteries. It will not matter. The success or failure of life in the 21st century, however, will depend on people finding values in
common that will help them relate in spirit as they pursue their more temporal interests. They can come from the alienated or the devout. They can draw from past tradition or new insight, but what they find must be profound in order to effect and save life. These matters will be important to the mind of early 21st century people in North America and Europe at least, and the quality of the understanding of those who engage will determine how important the life of the spirit will be throughout the century. In turn the quality of life on the planet will be determined by it.

What an agenda we in the universities have! Charged as we are to lead in matters of the mind and I believe the spirit as well, let us take to ourselves the responsibility for a constructive laying before our societies the important issues in political choices, economic development, the technological revolution the role of the sexes, and search for values. I think my later years hold more interest than my earlier ones. The issues are so grand, the risks so great, and the potential rewards a vision for our lives.