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A DIALOGUE WITH REALITY

Cook Carillon Dedication Address

The Honorable Ruud Lubbers

This really is a privilege for me to be “back home” to receive an *Honoris causa* in this University here in West Michigan. It is good to be here, especially here, because there is Dutch tradition on both sides of the Atlantic ocean, in the United States of America and in Europe, already for many, many generations. My grandparents saw, around the beginning of this century, many sailing to the west, to America, from Rotterdam, where my grandparents lived, where my parents lived, where I was born. But already long before that, in the time of the Pilgrim fathers, they sailed from Delfshaven and Leyden. Dutch farmers, Dutch agriculture on both sides of the ocean, but not only that: we find them in many trades. It was not only craftsmanship and entrepreneurial energy they brought; it was also—even more important—tradition, conviction, religion: the typical Dutch blend. The Dutch here contributed to the United States of America; the Dutch who remained in the original homeland, to Europe. And both have done so, proud of their own identity—as individuals and as Dutch together—and at the very same time with the ability to join forces with others, with other traditions, religions, peoples. We Dutch on both sides of the ocean never saw a problem in being Dutch *and* American, in being Dutch *and* European.

1994—we look back to a century in which the United States was further developed after the foundation of democracy, and the end of slavery, after going west and becoming the powerful America, a melting-pot of the capabilities of so many people, and for Europe an ally in difficult times. In Europe, we look back to a century of which the first half saw so many disasters. 1914—the First World War, at that time called the Great War; 1917—the revolution leading to communism in East Europe, at that time called the Great Revolution. Was it “great” because “the single human being” did not count? Shame; because the roots of our civilization are that every single human person matters, has to count. Then while communism became more and more grim and inhuman, our gay twenties ended in economic crisis, massive unemployment, and the rise of fascism. That brought us the Second World War. Yes, we were liberated; but the darkness of communism was extended. In Central Europe, up to the Iron Curtain, it became very, very dark.

Thus we entered the second half of this century. The Marshall Plan, the creation of the European Communities, NATO, all designed to defend ourselves against communism, and to prevent a Third World War, to invest in peace. And eventually we succeeded: 1989—only five years ago, the end of communism. Now in Europe we have the potential to give shape and substance to peace by going east to Central Europe and beyond, to heal Europe.

This healing of Europe, this going east, is about settling for democracy, for freedom and responsibility, for social market economy and civic society. It is also about opening up the market of the European Union, of West Europe, which has to be done generously. And it is about Partnership for Peace, our alliance, our common defense organization going east, here again together with the United States. Yes, we do live in the post-communist era. The healing of Europe is not any longer day-dreaming; it is a possibility, a duty. The end of communism coincides with the end of the Third World as it developed in the post-colonial era, when many former colonies, preferring to be non-aligned, had to choose between East and West. But that's all over now. Now, all over the place, we see the potential to make a choice for the market economy. Of course, in those countries the stages of development are different. But it is going fast, especially in Asia.

1994—six years before the end of this century—we face a really new world. Post-communism and the globalization of the economy: those two phenomena are inter-related. After the end of communism, the then-President, George Bush, introduced the expression “the New World Order,” a plea—after the end of the East-West conflict—to join forces, to prevent future violence together, to push it back where it occurs, and simultaneously to overcome the outdated Third World concept. A common New World Order: a dream, maybe, but also an inevitable mission. The globalization of the world economy, the consequence of new technology, of market economies, of free trade, and integration of financial markets have set in motion an inevitable process of enormous consequences.

There are tremendous opportunities, but concerns as well. We are concerned about unemployment because of international competition, with the tendency to blame others. We are concerned about violence of all kinds all over the world. Modern mass media confront us with it all day. And we ask ourselves: When it is “out of area,” is it our business? Why is it that our government, that governments together, do not act? Or why is our government so naïve, so stupid as to think that they can act successfully? Let's be honest; we are confused. Globalization of the world economy provokes in many countries, for that same reason, a growing need for religion, sometimes even up to fundamentalism. People are scared of losing traditional values, and of being overwhelmed by a more and more materialistic world. People are scared, and in many countries they sense the loss of integrity, in politics and in the professions. This is a key problem. Integrity is a precondition for democracy and for a civilized society.

Yes, there is the need for the New World Order, and there is the inevitability of the globalization of the economy. There are enormous responsibilities. But exactly that brings us home. If we really want a better world, an answer to growing evil in our world, then it begins here with us, with each of us. Responsibility, the ability to give an answer to challenges, to problems, does not begin with governments; it begins in the society itself, with individuals and people working together, realizing society. Also, therefore, I am gratified to be with you at this University. Education—as you all know—is not only about knowledge and vocational training. It is not only about becoming the smartest. In all countries individuals have to be responsible and less

dependent on the state. And they have to adapt to teamwork, and to rules of the community.

1994—as an economist I have learned to think in terms of growth; but there is more. The creation which is entrusted to us obliges us to protect the environment, to realize sustainable growth. In short, growth has to become a *qualitative* concept. As a politician I learned that my first task was to prevent violence, not only wars but all sorts of violence, and to push it back where it occurs. But in order to do that, we need respect, tolerance: in short, harmony. Harmony is about the quality of life, about the relations between human beings in each society and worldwide. Growth as a qualitative concept, and harmony as the instrument for a world with less violence, can flourish only when there is room to live, and respect for life, from the very beginning to the very end. The New World Order and living together on our globe harmoniously begins near home.

One last thought: that's about realism and idealism, about transformation and change, about being able to give answers—response-ability. In the course of history there is continuing change because of new facts, new technology, demographic developments, and so on. We speak about realities: "Let us face realities," we say, and I agree. Generation after generation realities change, and we have to respond to that. At the very same time, history, the history of the individual and that of mankind, cannot be reduced to facts, figures, and realities only. There is also growing awareness, the history of experience, of illusions and disillusion. Concrete developments, on the one hand, and growing awareness and the ideals of mankind, on the other, influence one another and that makes history; not only facts and realities, but also aims, dreams, and ideals. History, in fact, emanates from a dialogue between the two, a dialogue with reality. It is a dialogue which we should be conducting once again now as we approach the end of the century.

We are fast becoming more aware, more developed. This creates not only opportunities but also risks, and increases the dimensions of moral issues. The old question of good and evil is becoming more sharply defined as the individual becomes more educated, more aware, and therefore more responsible. And at the same time, good and evil acquire more and more a global aspect. It doesn't help if we just criticize others: our governments, other peoples, countries, religions, and cultures. It doesn't help if we become cynical or indulge in day dreaming. What we need to really change to the good is a dialogue with reality. We need discipline to face facts and realities, and patience in changing them, motivated sometimes by ideals, sometimes by being enraged by evil and injustice.

That's our mission, and this mission was not fundamentally different for our grandparents and parents, and it will be in essence the same for our children. Still now, in this period, more problems we see are global, and it seems that the potential for good *and* evil has been increased. The complement of globalization is that we become more and more convinced that protecting against the evil and investing in the good begins here, with us, near home. The New World Order begins, in fact, with you and me, here and now, and that's the same all over the world. Growth as a qualitative concept is the only way to mark our history as really human history.

Are moral issues involved? Of course they are. But we must be aware ourselves of decoupling realities and moral issues. All so-called realities have moral aspects, and to confine morality to puritanism is not the solution. Having said that, strong, educated people should never forget that people as a whole all over the world need protection and guidance based on social and moral codes. Progress leading to alienation and eradication of culture, religion, traditions, is no real progress. Globalization will be the new context for all of us. But let us realize that the future is linked closely with the calling on each individual. What does fulfillment in life mean to each of us?

A human being must be more than merely a human being. Mankind becomes truly human when there are goals in the agenda of one's life, when one's life consists of tasks and responsibilities which go beyond personal well-being. Beyond personal well-being because we have a mission together. Not day dreaming, but entering a dialogue with reality, in a world that will be for better or worse *one* world, belonging to *one* mankind, a world given to us by our parents, and borrowed from our children.

This generation again has to write an important chapter in the book of history, the chapter which brings mankind from the second to the third millennium after Christ. Each of us has to take part in writing a history in which every human being, strong and weak, old and young, wherever and whenever he or she lives, matters.

People, all people, are the words in God's story.

Ruud Lubbers' remarks were delivered at the University convocation on November 15, 1994, and were adapted for publication by Assistant Editor David Huisman.