

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the 16th Annual "University for Presidents" of the Young Presidents' Organization, Phoenix, Arizona, April 25, 1966)

THE FOREFRONT OF TOMORROW'S KNOWLEDGE

I come to you today as one having great longevity in your society of the young. The date of my presidential rank was 1952 - the age was 35, and it takes no mathematical genius to calculate that I must leave your ranks next month after attaining the horrendous age of 49. So you will excuse me, I trust, if my remarks today have some of the serious and sober lineaments of a last will and testament. Once before many years ago, I spoke to the YPO at our annual meeting here in Phoenix. That talk was a clarion cry of young hope. This is a swan song - more critical, more mature, more soul-searching perhaps, but still hopeful. One cannot shed the scars of the passing years, but one can at least learn from them. If I pass judgment on our YPO history as a whole, not this or that officer or staff member past or present, then I am a part of that history too, and, I must add, not a very constructive part. Some things are difficult to say until you can open the back door and run for the hills.

In the early days of YPO, a number of us were possessed by the great hope of a possible new accomplishment on the part of this organization. YPO

seemed to have everything that all other older business organizations lacked. Its members had the freshness and imagination of youth, generosity of spirit, openness of mind, vigor of inquiry, and spontaneity of judgment. There was a liveliness and lilt to the conversations, whether they took place around the swimming pool on sunlit days or in a hotel room jam-packed with eager discussants during the wee hours of the morning. Here was a group already successful and, therefore, reasonably fearless and secure. The world was their oyster and they were eager to get at it. They were ready to go. What a pity that our early discussions did not begin by asking where.

Optimism, energy, intelligence -- these are great qualities if they are directed to a great goal, to reach out to a distant shore, to sail an uncharted sea or sky, to experience the great thrill of accomplishing what has as yet not been done.

There was some of this sense of anticipation in the early days: hope ran deeply, the light shone brightly, horizons were unlimited. YPO was something really new, truly great, and there was a real anticipation of YPO doing great things. So a number of us believed; not all, for YPO had not been founded with any missionary zeal.

Has YPO indeed accomplished those early dreams of some of us? I think not. Maybe the arrow was aimed too low. Anyway, the trajectory was too flat. Instead of the members using what they uniquely had to do something they could uniquely do, YPO'ers gave most of their energy, intelligence, and competence to the perfecting, rather than the using in a broader context, of what they had to offer.

I grant that there is nothing wrong in learning how to be ever more successful in business, especially when this is done in a very energetic, sophisticated, and self-conscious way. A "University for Presidents" is a very useful exercise -- enjoyable too if it happens at a delightful spot in the company of so many personable, talented, and already successful people. It's great to be a member of an ever more successful club. But there is a difference between polishing a new car and using it to drive somewhere really worthwhile.

Excuse me if I liken our organization to an engine of accomplishment in realms perhaps only peripherally related to business. YPO can justify its existence by what it started out to be and what it is. I am speaking of what YPO might have been and what YPO might yet become. You may still say, as many of you have, as in the recent survey, that you are perfectly satisfied with YPO

as it is. If so, then the thrust of my remarks is to challenge this satisfaction, and to question whether YPO can stand up to the stark reality of today's world and honestly be satisfied with what it is and nothing more.

The old adage, business is business, certainly has applied traditionally to business organizations. Perhaps what I am saying somewhat sadly is that one might have expected something more of the YPO than this self-conscious turning in upon its members' main concern, namely business, because it is precisely this self-centeredness that has dogged the business fraternity since the first moment of its organized existence. It takes strong medicine to exorcise the historic image of the Robber Barons, the stuffiness of the NAM, the drabness of the Department of Commerce, the self-serving rhetoric of many Chambers of Commerce. These others may be excused in some instances because their leadership has often been monopolized by senior citizens who carved out their business careers in a different social context than that of today. But the YPO'ers were the generation of World War II, of the age of a new frontier, of scientific revolution and technological innovation. You arrived with the computers, the social revolution of Civil Rights and human development, the new world of exploding knowledge and extraordinary new power.

That you should have voiced some of the same old, tattered, and faded business slogans, should have slicked up, rather than cast out the old image of business, is, for me at least, a worrisome thought.

What was and what is needed today is a new world for business, a new concept of the total business career, a bright image of what the young business man can be in the total world in which he lives. What we have instead, I fear, is a tidied-up, more efficient, computerized, chrome-plated version of the same old weary world of the business man. Business is still business, and nothing more.

Perhaps what I am saying will come through more clearly if I project it in the most far-out perspective possible. To this end, I would like to quote to you the words of a Hindu mystic-poet, Rabindranath Tagore, addressed to Chinese university students, on the shore of the Yangtze River, back in the middle twenties: (How far out can one get?)

"We should know that truth, any truth man acquires, is for everyone. Money and property belong to individuals, to each of you, but you must never exploit truth for your personal aggrandizement; that would be selling God's blessing for a profit. However,

science is also truth; it has its place in the healing of the sick, and in giving more food and leisure for life. When it helps the strong crush the weak, and rob those who are asleep, it is using truth for impious ends. Those who are thus sacrilegious will suffer and be punished, for their own weapons will be turned against them.

..... Know that no organization, however large, can help you, no league of prudence or of power, but only individual faith in the infinite, the invisible, the incorruptible, the fearless.

The great human societies are the creation not of profiteers, but of dreamers. The millionaires who produce bales of merchandise in enormous quantities have never yet built a great civilization; it is they who are about to destroy what others have built. Come to the rescue and free the human soul from the dungeon of the machine. Proclaim the spirit of man, and prove that it lies not in machine guns and cleverness, but in a simple faith." (A Tagore Reader, p. 209, Macmillan, 1961)

I grant you that these are both mystical and poetic words -- but there is a basic truth lying beneath them, if you care to dig. I could quote you

more modern words of a young Latin American student who bitterly lists the results of an unbridled free enterprise in his country: "The concentration of land, and wealth, and power in the hands of the few to the many-faceted degradation of the many." He is anything but mystical and poetic. His are burning words with the quality of acid and hatred. But this is his image of the contribution of American business and free enterprise. Rightly or wrongly, this is what he and many of his fellow Latin American students think of us today.

Where does all of this leave us? Rather far from our title and the subject of this year's "University for Presidents" you may think. You may also remember at this point the story of the Texan who pulled out two guns in the middle of an unpopular speech. "Don't shoot me", cried the speaker. "Don't worry", said the gunman, "I'm just going to shoot the bum who invited you here."

While Bob Galvin takes cover, I shall look at our precise subject against the background of what has been said thus far.

What is the forefront of tomorrow's knowledge? You all know that knowledge which has taken centuries to accumulate in man's long history is

now doubling in less than every twenty years. No one can conceivably keep up with the knowledge explosion, today's much less tomorrow's. But we might live with it more productively if we could see this expanding knowledge under a different aspect, namely, power. Knowledge is power, power to do many things hitherto impossible to man. If I were in a different business than the knowledge business, I might tell you that knowledge tomorrow will bring you the power to operate your businesses better, to produce better, to market better, and, of course, to make more money, thus to acquire even more power. But instead I ask you: knowledge for what, money for what, power for what? These questions are not unlike the thrust of my earlier question: YPO for what?

These are uneasy questions. The real test of any responsible American today is how he answers them. The American business man, young or old, must answer them with special care, for the assumption all over the world is, in large measure, that he really does not care, that he is mainly interested in himself, his affluent society, his success, his fun and games, his prosperity, even while 80% of the world's population earns less than \$500.00 a year, and 50% of mankind earns less than \$100.00 a year; even while a third of the human beings on earth are completely cut off from the knowledge explosion because

they are unable to read or write; even while hundreds of millions of men and women today face a hard, cruel, and inhuman life and the prospect of an early death without hope. And what really agonizes this wretched, faceless mass of humanity is that whatever wonderful new knowledge and power are beyond the horizon tomorrow, their hopelessness will equally afflict their children and probably their children's children -- unless the few knowledgeable, the few powerful, and the few affluent of this world rejoin the majority of the human race today and begin to care about what happens to this vast majority tomorrow.

In my business, the knowledge business, we have begun to take stock of ourselves. The International Association of Universities met in Tokyo last September where we agreed that beyond the classical role of our universities to push forward the boundaries of knowledge and to transmit to each new generation of students all knowledge, new and old, we have a new and unprecedented role to play in the modern world: to become involved in service to mankind, to collaborate in the development of a better day for human beings who are, in the numbers of hundreds of millions, ignorant, poor, ill, homeless, and hopeless -- here and all over the world.

Take the Poverty Program, for example. Most business men with whom I've discussed this program label it as wasteful, a political hand-out, a badly administered mess, a generally stupid enterprise, badly conceived and about to accomplish next to nothing, despite its extravagant cost. Let's assume all this to be true (which I don't), might there be something more positive to be done about it besides the voicing of empty criticism? Is there really a problem here for all Americans? Our University took a look at it more closely and we found that poverty in America has many faces, but three that are most easily discerned. There are the poor who will be always with us: the widows, the orphans, the mentally deficient, the crippled, the abandoned, the old people. Then there are those relatively few who are poor and enjoy being on relief without having to work. But thirdly, there is the largest mass of poor who would like to break out of the swamp and wasteland in which they have been trapped. These are the drop-outs, those obsoleted by automation and higher educational requirements for work today, the functional illiterates, those handicapped by the neighborhoods and schools of their youth, the lack of personal motivation and aspiration engendered by all the examples of wasted, empty lives all around them.

These are people who might be redeemed for a better day. But it won't happen if the most knowledgeable, the most intelligent, the most powerful people in our society, among whom are the members of YPO, aren't willing to get involved in solving the problem, in creating imaginative solutions, in breaking through the bureaucratic crust of present programs, in a word, by criticizing present programs constructively and lending a helping hand to get the job done better on the local scene where the problem exists and must be met.

Then take the problem of world poverty. Barbara Ward, in her brilliant book, The Rich Nations and The Poor Nations, has well illustrated the fact that the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped, the haves and the have-nots, the rich nations and the poor nations, is widening day by day, getting worse instead of better. The population of the West, 20% of the world population, last year consumed 75% of the world's income. In 1965, the West added sixty to seventy billion dollars to its income, a single year increase that was larger than the gross national product of all of Latin America, and twice the gross national product of India. Our country reached a gross national product of 640 billion dollars last year, an annual increase

of 45 billion dollars for our 190 million people, while all Africa, with 300 million people, had a total income of 30 billion dollars, one-third less than our annual increase last year.

While this has been happening, our foreign aid program has been going down rather than up. Ten or fifteen years ago, when American national income was not half of what it is today, some 2% of that income was devoted to foreign aid. Today, the figure is closer to 0.3%. Again, Barbara Ward has said: "A great society must live not only by mind and body, but by conscience and spirit as well. Surely if 0.3% of national income is all we can afford for those who starve, those without shelter, those whose children are dying and those who will certainly live at least thirty years less because we can do nothing, then we cannot say we are Christian or of the great Judaic tradition, we cannot say here is the fine product of a humane Western civilization, we cannot say we are the last best hope of mankind, we can say nothing that will not in fact be a mockery of our claims and a proof of our complacency."

The sad fact is that most Americans couldn't be less interested because again the knowledgeable, the powerful, and the affluent say in concert: put an end to these hand-outs, cut out these wasteful and badly-administered

programs, call home the dopey do-gooders who are squandering our hard-earned resources in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Again, granting for the sake of argument the validity of this criticism, how many knowledgeable, powerful, and affluent business men, old or young, have spent a day of their lives really studying the depths of this problem, trying to give of their talent to find some solution to this haunting specter of worldwide and super-abundant human misery. If ideas are needed, where are the knowledgeable? If better administration is needed, where are the good administrators? If power and affluence are in our hands, shall we put them to service in this most pressing of all human problems, or hug them to ourselves like selfish children with an expensive toy?

It is a bitter and horrendous thought that we are spending about \$300,000 this year for every Viet-Cong soldier killed, in a land where the per capita income is \$93.00 a year. It is unconscionable that in a nation that spends annually more than six billion for cigarettes, twelve billion for liquor, twenty billion for gambling, and I spare you the tab for entertainment, we haggle over the two billion spent for hundreds of millions of people

in misery and, even worse, give so little of our own personal human talents to the sad plight of our fellow human beings. The ten thousand Peace Corps volunteers working, at \$75.00 a month, in the schools and slums and countryside of some 45 underdeveloped nations put our whole nation to shame. In a sense, they alone, in their youthful idealism and commitment, redeem us from our negligent unconcern and inhumanity.

There are myriad other challenges that I have not yet mentioned, but which are no less worthy of involvement by the YPO or its members: good government, which we get as much of as we deserve, by our interest, involvement, and participation; good discussion of the great issues of our day, both here and abroad; good education, the key to all the future, and something too important for you, your children, and the nation to be left to the isolated efforts of a few dedicated and underpaid people in each community; the moral climate of business, the image it creates among the coming generation, all too many of whom view it with distrust and cynicism; the good society and its values, something that cannot be bought or simply voted for, because it must be the fruit of a total human effort in a democracy, not just the effort of a machine, a party, or a few political hacks. I could go on listing issues

that have, unfortunately, had minimal attention and action from YPO, like Civil Rights, peace in our times, the ecumenical movement uniting heretofore warring religions and cultures, the urban jungles that are creating widening human garbage heaps in all of our major cities, air and water pollution, and all the rest.

You may say this is really none of our business as YPO'ers. Then I ask, whose business is it if not of those most endowed with the growing knowledge, the great leverage of local power, the affluence and security to govern one's time and the use of one's talent? If such as we, the young, the intelligent, and the energetic, are not interested, how will the problem ever be solved?

We need more Will Garveys building low cost housing around the world, and more Bob Galvins taking time out to back promising newcomers to the political scene. Perhaps as an organization we need more challenge and discussion about our personal responsibility to do more than run good businesses, promote our own personal interests, while the larger world in which we live needs desperately our vision, our intelligence, our knowledge, our power, our energy, our talent, our interest, and our commitment. I honestly believe that all we glory in today,

here in America and in the West, is riding for a tremendous fall if groups like ours do not rejoin the totality of the human race with all its agonies, and begin to be more attentive to the deepest hopes of the vast majority of mankind for such simple human needs as food, health, housing, education -- the basic prerequisites of human dignity. The greater part of the world today is one vast open wound. And it needs more than the band-aid we offer it. It needs you -- all of you.

I said at the beginning of these remarks that I would speak critically, but in hope. That hope is founded on the human potential of talent and energy and intelligence found among the men of the YPO, and that of the wives, too. There is too much potential power here to be used only for examining yourselves, your financial and administrative techniques, your business practices, your state of physical or mental health, or the current level of your financial successes. It makes a neat club, but the world will not be saved from the dead weight of its human misery and agonizing problems by neat clubs.

What I am calling for, as our knowledge grows and our power widens, is a greater compassion for the deeper human problems and a greater involvement in the current revolution of human development and human opportunity for a

better day. May I say one final word: we all need a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment as we pass through life, some sense that the world is better for our passing through it. This satisfaction and fulfillment can come to each of you superficially by your being deeply involved in the exciting drama of a growing business -- but man does not live by bread alone or by good balance sheets either. In the very heart of our humanity, we must, for real human satisfaction and fulfillment, touch life and hope on a deeper level, in serving God where He is perhaps best found and served today, in the pathetic lives of those who have none of our advantages, but who desperately need our hand of help if hope is not to die in their souls.

Ask yourself the ultimate question: What is the real image of the YPO in America and abroad today? What should it be?

Au revoir, arriverderci, auf Wiedersehen, hasta la vista, do wedienje, da szydana, sayonara, so long -- I've been a quiet, dues-paying, rather useless member of the YPO for many years, but at least we oldsters must show you youngsters that we go out in a flame of challenge - which was what brought us all to the YPO in the first place. As they say in show biz, you take it from here.