

Banquet Address



G. ROBERT GADBERRY
Fourth National Bank & Trust Co.
Wichita, Kansas

The late Bennett Cerf reported that in visiting the west he had seen the weather forecast in a small dairy—from which had been omitted one word. The forecast read like this: “Less than 5% chance of tonight and tomorrow.” If one follows much of the depressing news of the day he might believe ours is a nation of dropouts, fallouts, copouts and sellouts; an over-crowded, under-nourished, outraged, uptight society of pornographic, profit-grabbing, polluting, pompous parasites. This is the trouble with our land and our people—we have lost faith in our personal purpose and our national destiny.

We have become like “Nader dolls” which someone described as the kind of doll you wind up and it runs down everything. I’m not here to knock Nader, but he’s not my number one hero. He has helped us to develop the nagging notion that there is something inherently wrong about the people and the products, the industries, ideals and institutions of America.

To be sure, we have problems, but we’ve concentrated on consumer crises, we’ve developed a pollution paranoia, and we’ve attached ourselves to all sorts of purely negative causes. Of course, I would be wrong to whitewash our abuses, our excesses, and our irresponsibility. America is not perfect and you would pity me if I told you it was.

Many of you may join me in my concern about our shortcomings. I’m disturbed that despite a gross national product at the trillion dollar level, we refuse as a nation to live within our income. I deplore the fact the rate of increase in crime is ten times the growth rate of population over the past decade. I am concerned that a nation built on political liberty and free enterprise yields constantly to control and dependency. Every day you look up and see the soaring scavengers of socialism hovering over this land. Daily, too, the prostitutes of a free press spew forth their filth and pornography trying to convince us that filth is a part of our culture. So, I see much in America that worries me. But no genius is required to find our mistakes. Genius is required to build on these mistakes. But if we are only conscious of our mistakes and busy ourselves with bad-mouthing America, our efforts become counter-productive—we lose faith in the system and in ourselves.

Too many of us are like the couple who had been married but a few months. The new bride complained to her husband, “Before we were married I thought you said you were well off?” He replied, “I was; I just didn’t know it.” We, too, forget how well off we are in this country.

Let me tell you about a lad I met recently in Turkey. His name was Moosa—a personable and intelligent 23-year-old college student who served as our guide in Izmir (the ancient Biblical city of Smyrna). As the day progressed, Moosa told us that contrary to popular belief, the Turks are not friendly to the Americans. Then I asked about our invoking the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to save them from Communism. Moosa replied, “You did us no favor.” Then I reminded him of the billions in foreign aid we had given his country. He said, “You gave that money to exploit us.” And then, Moosa berated us for our racial problems and Vietnam. Then a strange thing occurred. As we left Moosa, he reached out his hand to tell us good-bye—this boy who had bad-mouthed America all day. He said, “Sir, I hope to see you again some day.” When I told him I had no plans to return soon to his country, Moosa said, and with great earnestness, “Mister, I didn’t mean that. I meant that if it’s the last thing I ever do, I want to come some day to live and work in the United States of America.”

After we had left Moosa I expressed my disgust, I told my wife, “The kid’s a real phony—talking us down all day and then expressing this heartfelt desire to come to the U.S.” But was Moosa so different from the most of us? Like him, we say everything bad about our country when in our hearts we, too, know it is the best thing that ever came along.

And Moosa spoke from an experience that made his conviction ring true. The economy of Turkey is restricted. I gave an 80 cent tip to Moosa and he passed it on to a gate-keeper explaining the man had six children and made only \$25.00 a month. In Izmir, people were sleeping on the sidewalks for many are homeless.

We visited in other countries. In Yugoslavia, people had to have a permit to travel farther than ten miles from their homes. The control and indoctrination of the Soviet Union is known to many of you. All of these visits and these observations reinforce my conviction we have been abundantly blessed in this country.

We need to invite honesty and common sense to our appraisal of an America we say has failed and has no ideals. Sure, we have polluted our waters but there’s some sense of responsibility and skill for I have heard of no cases of typhoid recently. We say 12% of our people go to bed hungry without being reminded that 88% are not hungry and those who are well fed assume great responsibilities for the undernourished. Six percent of our people are unemployed and that’s bad but 25% were unemployed during the depression and we somehow survived that. And don’t tell me we have no ideals. Remember, we are a nation that has spilled its blood on several continents and we’ve never exacted any territory from the defeated. We spent over 200 billion in foreign aid. We tax ourselves heavily at home to defend the freedom of people and add a like amount for health, education and welfare. And then every day in your community and mine we are voluntarily giving to churches, hospitals, schools, united funds and other charitable and cultural pursuits. No, don’t tell me we have no ideals. So, my friend Moosa was right!

How did it happen. Well, it didn’t happen. Generations of Americans “put it all together.” People—living and dead—with ideas and ideals, with genius, guts and gumption. They were individually responsible for their future and that of this nation.

The crime of this country today is not pollution, or politics, or pornography.

The crime of us all is inertia—our indifference of colossal proportions. But we are as involved by our inaction as by our action.

Somehow, we must rekindle the fires of faith. Individually, we must be seized with the conviction that what I believe and what I do can change the course of history.

I must have faith in my fellow man. There are so many good people on this earth, and there isn't a thing we couldn't accomplish if all the hard-working, tax-paying, law-abiding, God-fearing people stood shoulder-to-shoulder to wake the town—your town and mine—and the tell the people—all the people—what we believe, and what we'll work for and die for.

And we need faith in Almighty God. I think of a guide we had in Leningrad who proudly boasted "the Soviet Union had won the international tractor competition," but looked at a picture of Christ in a museum and couldn't tell you who He was. The tragedy of a twenty-one year old who knows about tractors but nothing about the Great Teacher. Alexis de Tocqueville once said, "America is great because America is good; when America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

On the battlefield of Gettysburg is a monument to the memory of a hardy band of color-bearers who were separated from their regiment in the fury of battle. Miraculously they held their ground as their regiment retreated. The next morning they got a message through to the color bearers, "Will the color-bearers please rejoin the regiment." The color bearers sent back this message, "Will the regiment please rejoin the color-bearers?" It is time for us, "the corps of the committed," to stand our ground in faith and conviction and wait for the hodge-podge regiment of America's downgraders to rejoin us in the preservation of what Lincoln called, "the last best hope of earth."