

Brigham Young University

Speeches

*The Moral Challenges
for the Next Century*

LADY MARGARET THATCHER

5 March 1996

Complete volumes of *Speeches* are available
wherever LDS books are sold.

Publications & Graphics
BYU, 218 UPB, Provo, UT 84602-1919
(801) 378-4711
<http://speeches.byu.edu>
speeches@byu.edu

The Moral Challenges for the Next Century

LADY MARGARET THATCHER

President Hinckley, President Bateman, distinguished guests, members of the faculty, students, ladies, and gentlemen—I hope that includes everyone. First may I say how greatly honored I am by this degree from your historic university, bearing the name of a person whose faith, courage, and leadership shaped the future of Utah. May I also thank the choir and orchestra for their wonderful renderings of these beautiful hymns and songs of praise today.

Music played such an enormous part in my life, in my family, and in our school—where I have to report that we were allowed to have an assembly every morning and sing hymns and read lessons. Indeed, it was compulsory. There are many young people who would never have known those beautiful hymns unless they had learned them at school. Yes, it was part of my life then, it was part of my life at university, and it has been a part of my life ever since; and those renderings were particularly beautiful.

Thank you, too, President Bateman, for the wonderful citation you gave in introducing me. I think you nearly made my speech for me. But, of course, truth will always endure, so I'll say some of it again.

I must confess, my friends, I'm a little bit nervous at addressing such a big audience and such a distinguished one. You see, the only other times that I've addressed such large audiences have been during election times, and I fear if I made an election speech it might be misunderstood at this particular time. But you've very kindly and thoughtfully given me my subject, which is to address the moral basis of a free society—because without a moral basis, such a society would not long endure.

As we wonder what the twenty-first century will hold, we should ponder on the attitudes and values that influenced events in this century. Mind you, Mark Twain always said, "Never prophesy—especially about the future."

There were people at the beginning of this century who did prophesy. Most of the things they got very wrong. They didn't see the rise of the Soviet Union. They didn't foresee Americans crossing the seas to rescue

Lady Margaret Thatcher gave this address when she received an honorary doctorate from Brigham Young University on 5 March 1996 in the Marriott Center.

people so that liberty might still prevail in Europe. No one could have foreseen what happened. Some would call it the century of two terrible wars, of concentration camps, of the gulag, and of totalitarian enslavement. Others would see it as the time when freedom fought back, when a hundred more nations became independent and took their place in the United Nations, when former enemies began to build the structures of friendship. Some would see it as the century where the drive for modernity eroded the traditions and institutions that have formed the cornerstones of society for generations. Yet others would see it as a time when enterprise and initiative were unchained, leading to growing wealth and increased opportunity for all.

For many of my generation, this was a century when the armed forces of America and your staunchest ally, Britain, went overseas to defeat in bitter battles the tyrannies of Nazism and fascism. We knew that those forces were fighting for all humanity in a cause of liberty, justice, and democracy. What gave the peoples of our two countries, and others from the British Commonwealth, the resolve and the strength to fight for liberty and to achieve victory? The great Lord Acton put it this way. Speaking of liberty, he said this:

Liberty, that great political idea—sanctifying freedom, and consecrating it to God; teaching men to treasure the liberties of others as their own; to defend them for the love of justice and charity more than as a claim of right—has been the soul of what is great and good.

That is exactly what the peoples who loved freedom did to rescue those who were about to lose it.

America, my friends, is the only country in the world actually founded on liberty—the only one. People went to America to be

free. The Founding Fathers journeyed to this country across the perilous seas not for subsidies—there weren't any—not to make a fortune even, but to worship God in their own way and by their example to perpetuate freedom and justice more widely. It began with them. Perhaps some of you know the famous quote that President Reagan and I have so often used. On the deck of the tiny *Arabella*, off the coast of Massachusetts in 1630, John Winthrop gathered the little band of Pilgrims together and spoke of the life they would have in the land they had never seen. They were momentous words:

We shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world. [A Model of Christian Charity, 1630]

It is remarkable that before landing in the unknown he said those extraordinary words.

They believed, each and every one of them, in the sanctity of the individual. That, after all, is our faith: that each and every person matters equally, and that each of us is accountable to his God for his actions and for the use of his talents. The Ten Commandments of the Old Testament are addressed to each and every one of us. This is quite different from some of the Eastern religions, where the purpose is to become part of a wider group and to be absorbed in the wider group. Christianity is addressed to each and every person.

These first settlers, followed by many others, who would brave the perils of the ocean and experience the early difficulties of life on these shores, knew also about the injunction of the Old and New Testaments to look after your neighbor as yourself. It was not only their faith, it was a driving necessity.

So often the hour produces the leader. And, led by Brigham Young, the Mormon pioneers made the long journey to found this state. They were self-reliant, hardworking, honorable, and determined to overcome all difficulties. They suffered much, but their faith brought them through all the adversity. It was that kind of faith, that courage, that infused the life of this new nation destined to become uniquely great. Yours is a most remarkable story of faith in action, and it changed the world.

I often wonder what would have happened if the Pilgrims with their faith had gone to Latin America in the south and the people from Spain who came for gold and to take the raw materials out of the ground and go back had come to the north. We should not have the great America today. But the point I make is this: Those Pilgrim fathers came with the faith that infused the whole nation. Yours is the only nation founded on liberty. And you're founded on liberty because of that faith.

It is, of course, the biblical ethics that are the origin of human rights that belong to everyone because of our common humanity. Perhaps we should also pay tribute to the early people, to some of the secular people in Athens long before there was Christianity. We should recognize the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle and that they did much to contribute to our understanding of such concepts of truth, goodness, and virtue. But it is doubtful whether the virtues founded on reason alone would have endured in the same way as they did in the West, where they had the sure moral foundations. Indeed, Sir Edward Gibbon, who also wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, wrote tellingly of the collapse of Athens, the birthplace of democracy. What he wrote has great meaning for us—we should heed it. He said, speaking of the Athenians:

In the end, more than they wanted freedom, they wanted security and they wanted a comfortable life. And they lost it all—security, comfort, and freedom. The Athenians finally wanted not to give to society, but for society to give to them. When the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free.

That should be an object lesson to us all.

So that is my first point. America was founded on the moral foundations of Christianity by the people who came here. During great times in history, somehow always the great people are produced—and they were then. What did the early settlers bring with them from Britain, you might ask? They came away because they weren't allowed at that time to worship particularly in their own way. And so they came to these shores with their faith. But they brought something else—something very valuable. It is really the gift of Britain to the wider world. It is the common law of the land.

There can be no freedom or liberty without a rule of law because otherwise, as you know, it would be the freedom of the strong to oppress the weak. There is something very unique in the character of the people of Britain, and they brought that uniqueness here and added many other things to it—right from the year 1215, when we had the great Magna Carta, when the barons squared up to a king because he was taxing them and taxing them. They said, "We're not going to pay you monies unless you first redress our grievances." And they didn't. And that is why to this day we have our debates in the House of Commons. In fact, we have to have debates to redress the grievances of the people before we grant the supply of tax. Mind you, my friends, it hasn't stopped taxes from going up rather too much. There are far too many people, you know, who think they keep their seats

in Parliament by putting up taxation, whereas, in fact, ultimately that leads to their losing them.

However, that is how common law developed early, and why we have commemorated so many great judges. We had very great people in Britain, and the king said to them, “You hear the cases and judge rather like Solomon did in his wisdom. You hear the cases that come before you, the quarrels, and you decide what is best.” And these judges decided on the basis of fairness and equity. (Now, if I am ever in Russia and starting to lecture about this, they’ll say, “What is equity?” For there is no such concept in their background or language.)

And these judges built up the case law, which became the common law, and eventually the king didn’t like some of the decisions they were making, and he said to them, “I’m going to try cases.”

And they said, “You’re not.” Oh, they were very bold people. They said this: “The king is under no man, but he is under God and the law.” So the common law, too, was founded on these moral principles of equity and fairness. Those decisions were written down and brought with the Pilgrim fathers as the common law from Britain. And later, of course, it was added to by an elected legislature.

So, we have it there, the morality of liberty and, of course, the morality of the law—very different from countries like the Soviet Union. There is no rule of law there. There was only a very rudimentary law before the Communists seized power in 1917 from the only elected government that Russia had ever had. Their rudimentary law was abandoned. There was no moral basis. Religion was forbidden. Freedom of speech was forbidden. And what they had were only the dictates of the Communist Party. So communism has left a poisonous residue wholly devoid of morality; and because it was devoid of

morality, individuals did not count at all. Ronald Reagan was absolutely right to call it “the Evil Empire.” Those people were mere pawns on a chessboard to be moved about by the dictates of others.

Indeed, to bring down the Iron Curtain without a shot being fired required far more from this country and from Britain than a policy based on expediency or pragmatism. They needed the confidence that comes from the belief that you are in the right.

It is now an election time, I gather, over here. I say this to you: Expediency and pragmatism are never enough. When I had to pull Britain around, we worked out our principles, once again renewed them, worked out our policies from our principles, and then implemented our programs. And they were all of a piece because we had the faith on our side, and we knew that what we were doing was fundamentally right.

I should perhaps say also, not only are pragmatism and expediency not enough, but followership isn’t enough either. You know, some people look at their opinion polls. I never did. I thought I was better off without them. But some people practice followership. There was in the last century a politician in France, Ledru-Rollin, who had his own definition of leadership. After a big meeting in an open square one day, he went back to his office, saw a group of his own people moving away, and said to his companion, “There go my people. I must find out where they’re going so that I can lead them there.”

No, if you are going to chart the way into a better future, you must have a compass of enduring values and principles to steer by. You will be criticized. You’ve seen question time in the House of Commons—it’s quite exacting.

President Reagan and I had the same beliefs and determination. We fought the battle of ideas in the Soviet Union and helped

to end the terrible tyranny of communism. Liberty—the moral underpinnings. A rule of law—the moral underpinnings.

What about capitalism and free enterprise? When I first came into politics, we used to hear the left wing denigrating free enterprise. They suggested that a command and centrally controlled economy maximizing the powers of government and minimizing those of the people would produce better results—because, after all, government knew best and could plan everything. Well, that creed was tried out in 1917 in the Soviet Union. From the moment Lenin seized power, the world unwittingly entered into an experiment between our way of life—of freedom, maximizing the powers of the people—and their way—taking away all powers and liberties of the people with the few elegant intellectuals at the center planning everything. Very elegant indeed. They said they could produce more prosperity than our system could. That experiment lasted, in fact, seventy-three years, during which the people had no freedom of any kind. It ended with a ruined economy, the collapse of communism, and terrible environmental problems. It could bring neither prosperity nor dignity.

Now that is the ideological battle of this century. But I think those of us who believe as passionately as we do in a free society should put the case of capitalism much more positively than that it merely performs better. Capitalism is economic liberty. It is a vital element in the network of freedom. It is a moral quality, for it reflects man and his right to use his God-given talents. Remember the parable of the talents.

As Pope John Paul II declared four years ago in his encyclical:

We should not see the collapse of communism simply as a technical problem, but rather as a consequence of the violation of human rights to private initiative, to ownership of property, and

to freedom in the economic sector. Indeed, today the decisive factor is increasingly man himself, his knowledge—especially his scientific knowledge—his capacity for interrelated organization as well as his ability to perceive the needs of the market and to satisfy them. [Centesimus Annus, May 1, 1991]

There we have it. You get the best results by men and women exercising their God-given talents and working together and responding to the needs of the market in a community of work. Of course, the market's never been unfettered. It requires a framework of law, regulations about weights and measures, regulations about accurate description, and so on. This will change with the circumstances, but these laws must never stifle the spirit of enterprise.

We now know—although I've found some people surprised when I say it—that countries are not rich in proportion to their natural resources. If you took a map of the world, put on it all the natural resources in each country, and thought that would give you a guide to the wealth of each country, you'd get it wrong—because if you look at natural resources, the wealthiest country in the world in terms of natural resources is Russia. It's got everything. It's got oil, it's got gas, it's got diamonds, it's got platinum, it's got gold, it's got silver, it's got all of the industrial metals that it can mine, it's got marvelous timber, it's got wonderful soil. But it had a government that did not allow the people to produce prosperity but instead planned them into poverty.

You look at some other countries with no natural resources: Japan, Sweden, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore. They have governments that encourage the talents and abilities of the people. So there we have it once again. The moral underpinnings of free enterprise are all there—because free enterprise gives

real power to the people, and it can be described as economic democracy.

Many years ago, Edmund Burke, the great commentator, philosopher, and member of Parliament, had it right when he criticized measures to secure economic equality. He said this: “It is the character of egalitarian measures that they pull down what is above. They never raise what is below. Beware dependency on the state.” This was in 1770. Beware dependency on the state. Once used to such support, people would never be satisfied to have it otherwise. (This was prophetic, wasn’t it?) The enterprising spark of society would be extinguished, and a poorer nation would result. Of course, the obligation to relieve genuine hardship is a duty upon us partly through the state, but also through voluntary effort.

And who has the greatest voluntary effort in the world? Your country. You don’t shrink from looking after your neighbor as yourself. It’s part of your creed. Your peak year for giving was 1992. I think you’d had twelve very good political years before that, as a matter of fact. During that year, your people gave \$124 billion to voluntary causes—and that wasn’t the end of your voluntary work. Those who couldn’t give money gave their services, their effort. And there’s a long role of honor. It is said now that, of those who go to church, some 64 percent do voluntary work—more than three hours a week. You are the greatest voluntary nation in the world—again coming from those strong moral foundations.

But, my friends, freedom has responsibilities as well. As we look ahead, some people are taking the freedom and leaving the responsibilities. This is giving us one of the most serious problems, one of the most acute problems, of the future. The values and virtues we prize are honesty, self-discipline, a sense of responsibility to one’s family, a sense of loyalty to one’s employer and staff,

and pride in the quality of one’s work. All these flourish in a climate of enlightened politics. But these qualities are threatened in the West by a lack of respect for the rights, freedom, and property of others—and thought for others. This manifests itself in two ways: in rising crime and violence, as people go and take what they want and have no sense of morality towards others, and also in the breakdown of the family arising from a vastly increased number of children born to single parents.

For years the numbers of children born outside wedlock stayed constant—at about 5 percent of the total. As a matter of fact, the percentage actually went down in the Great Depression. (Actually, crime also reduced slightly during the Great Depression.) Since 1950 those figures have moved from 5 percent until in your country and in mine now, 30 percent of children born this year are children born out of wedlock. My friends, the effect of this on the family is devastating.

No government at any level, or at any price, can afford, on the crime side, the police necessary to assure our safety unless the overwhelming majority of us are guided by an inner, personal code of morality. And you will not get that inner, personal code of morality unless children are brought up in a family—a family that gives them the affection they seek, that makes them feel they belong, that guides them to the future, and that will build continuity in future generations. We know that greatly increased crime among young people is because so many of them are born to single parents. Seventy percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from single-parent homes. Some 80 percent of those who commit crime grew up in single-parent families. The girl born in these circumstances may well herself soon become a single mother at an early age. Some of them are abused. Many of them don’t have a chance. Indeed, I would say,

the greatest inequality today is not inequality of wealth or income. It is the inequality between the child brought up in a loving, supportive family and one who has been denied that birthright.

I remember when I was a young woman first in politics, one naturally wanted to make it up to any illegitimate child. There were very few in those days. And so we did everything we could. In the year 1935 you had here a special aid for families with dependent children. It was meant for people who had suffered, of course, from the depression or from the war. So they were given an income, and often they were given a house or a flat. Unwittingly, my friends, in trying to make it up to them, we have created conditions under which the number of such children have multiplied until they are threatening the future stability of society.

Now we have got to consider this. We've got to consider the welfare benefits. We've got to look at it in connection with whether the allowances should be paid on condition that some of the young people live in sheltered accommodations—where their children are supervised and brought up properly, where they would have advice, where they would have other people with them, where they would feel they belonged, and where they would have a regular life. But we cannot let this go on as it is. Otherwise we shall soon be in much worse straits because we have no idea whether that 30 percent is the end.

There are budgetary problems as well. In terms of constant dollars, the total of all federal greater welfare spending has gone up from \$43 billion in 1968 to \$207 billion, in constant dollars, over twenty-five years. And the largest part of the growth comes from women bearing nonmarital children. In words that would be appropriate today, F.D.R. said in his 1935 State of the Union address:

Continued dependence on relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit.

So, my friends, we all have to tackle it. We have to tackle it together. May I just say a word about countries not having a moral basis to their system of government. Let me just look very quickly at the problems of Russia and China, who have known virtually no liberty during their long history. Unless you have a moral basis, human beings are not valued for themselves. And the political system under which they live is one of false dogmas, lies, and terror. It crushed the human character, which makes it very difficult now for those countries to come out of seventy-three years of total tyranny. It will take that much time and much longer to develop into a free society. There's no rule of law—*no* rule of law. Where do you go if you want to complain? Any country that has operated under the dictates of the former Communist Party will find it difficult to create a rule of law. It hasn't got the concepts. It is difficult also to have a sound currency. The crushing of the human personality has given these countries immense problems. No one took responsibility for decisions. All industries were nationalized.

The fact is that people rather despised it. They had their way of getting around it. Some of them used to say to me as they said to others, "You know, Mrs. Thatcher, they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work." Oh, they do have their way of getting around it, but when you come into a free society and you hear that some of them haven't been paid for more than three months, that is very difficult. Just have a great deal of sympathy for President Yeltsin. With communism having collapsed, it is vital that we do bring them forward to a

free society. It will take time. It took a long time for a rule of law and democracy to grow with us. It is a plant of slow growth, but we must do everything that we can to help.

I was very interested when President Yeltsin, before he was president, came in to see me one day saying, “Look, President Gorbachev gave us freedom of worship and freedom of speech and freedom to see what was going on and freedom to vote, but that freedom won’t last unless it is underpinned by economic freedom.” And he said, “That’s what I want to get.” But he’s having great difficulty because there is no rule of law, and the Mafia takes over. Then people say, “You see. It’s the same old people who get all the advantages, and we get all the disadvantages.” Nevertheless, we must do all we can to bring that people through. The Russians are good people, and they deserve a good deal better than they are now getting.

China is different. I had to negotiate with Deng Xiao-ping about Hong Kong, where the lease of the land ends in 1997 and it returns to China. He wants them to have economic liberty because he wants them to have prosperity. But he wants to keep a grip on the communism and the politics. You see, they have no respect there for human rights. They say, “Oh, human rights don’t apply to Asian people.” We say, “Don’t be absurd. They apply to human beings everywhere because of our common humanity.”

We still have terrible difficulties there with human rights violations—you’ve read about them. Some say that we should give up trade with them. Please, my friends, don’t. The people who are going to bring that country out of the terrible communism on the political side are those who are building free enterprise businesses. And you know the Chinese are born traders, and they’re getting on with it. So it’s they who will do it. And as they come to this more

prosperous way, they will gradually demand more political powers and they’ll get out of that way.

May I just leave China there—it won’t go away—but with this one warning: We have to keep in touch. We have to keep in contact. We have to encourage a free enterprise. China is 1.2 billion people. The world has never had a country of 1.2 billion people before. It is going to be very powerful, and it is vital that we do all we can to help those people come through to a full democracy. We need to gain more countries for democracy—genuine democracy—based on the moral concepts that I have, in fact, indicated. Why? Because we know now from history that just about half of the countries of the world are democracies—and there is no record in history of any genuine democracy going to war with another genuine democracy. They are all far too busy trying to improve the way of life, the quality of life, and the standard of living. So the strategy is not only to have more democracy because we believe in it, because it is better for people, but also because it leads to peace.

May I very briefly touch on one other danger for the future and perhaps the great danger at the moment—the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. As you get to the end of one problem, so another one arises. Yes, we are fearful. Nuclear materials and some of the methods of delivering them by missile technology are escaping from Russia and being sold by China. And we also have terrorism. This is the new problem, and the problem we must assess, because it is a very great danger to the free societies.

Now, my friends, we must never be complacent. We must never think that there will be perpetual peace. That is what they thought after World War I. We must be vigilant to see that we are fully and strongly equipped should anyone dare to, or want to,

attack us. Dictators are frightened by the strength of others. They are attracted by weakness. Let us be vigilant to ensure that the great heart, as Winston would have put it, has his sword and armor to guard the pilgrims on their way. He would say, "Keep strong in defense and technology, and vigilant to perpetuate that deep faith on which America is founded—and which here in Utah built a city not on a hill but a city surrounded by mountains that remind us each day of the majesty and glory of God."

May I finish with the words from a great hymn sung by the Tabernacle Choir during their broadcast on Sunday. I'm not sure whether you know it.

*I vow to thee, my country—all earthly things
above—
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my
love.*

["I Vow to Thee, My Country," music by
Gustav Holst and words by Cecil Spring Rice]

They sang that verse marvelously. We used to sing it during wartime. The choir did not sing a second verse—but the point I want to emphasize is in the second verse. It goes on from the love of country, a country based on liberty, to a verse that doesn't quite say it in those terms. It is about another country, the kingdom of God. And I think I can just about remember that verse now, because we used to sing it at school:

*And there's another country, I've heard of long
ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to
them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see
her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is
suffering;
And soul by soul and silently, her shining
bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her
paths are peace.*