

From the Pastor's Desk

Enough of the Gloom

Mr. Principal, members of the faculty, family, friends, and Class of 1976. Now is a time of great challenges. But it is also a time of great opportunities. As you embark on your lives as educated men and women, I call on you to give something back to your community, to work for a brighter future, and to try to make the world a better place.

Now that we have that out of the way, I have something more interesting to say to you. I want to share my vision of what the world will be like at the time of your thirty-fifth reunion. The calendar will have rolled over into a new millennium, bringing you a world that is beyond your imagination. I am not referring to the advance of technology, though it will have effects you can barely conceive. I am referring to the advance of peace and human security, which you will find even harder to conceive.

To be sure, the world of 2011 will still be a dangerous place. During the next thirty-five years there will be wars, as there are today, and there will be genocides, as there are today, some of them in places no one would have predicted. Nuclear weapons will still be a threat. Some of the violent regions will continue to be violent. But superimposed on these constants will be unfathomable changes.

First and foremost, the nightmare that has darkened your lives since your early memories of cowering in fallout shelters, a nuclear doomsday in a third world war, will come to an end. In a decade the Soviet Union will declare peace with the West, and the Cold War will be over without a shot being fired. China will also fall off the radar as a military threat; indeed, it will become our major trading partner. During the next thirty-five years no nuclear weapon will be used against an enemy. In fact, there will be no wars between major nations at all. The peace in Western Europe will continue indefinitely, and within five years the incessant warring in East Asia will give way to a long peace there as well.

There is more good news, East Germany will open its border, and joyful students will sledgehammer the Berlin Walls to smithereens. The Iron Curtain will vanish, and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe will become liberal democracies free of Soviet domination. The Soviet Union will not only abandon totalitarian communism but will voluntarily go out of existence. The republics that Russia has occupied for decades and centuries will become independent states, many of them democratic. In most of the countries this will happen with not a drop of blood being spilled.

Fascism too will vanish from Europe, then from much of the rest of the world. Portugal, Spain, and Greece will become liberal democracies. So will Taiwan, South Korea, and most of South and Central America. The generalissimos, the colonels, the juntas, the banana republics, and the annual military coups will depart the stage in most of the developed world.

The Middle East also has surprises in store. You have just lived through the fifth war between

Israel and Arab states in twenty-five years. These wars have killed fifty thousand people and recently threatened to drag the superpowers into a nuclear confrontation. But within three years the president of Egypt will hug the prime minister of Israel in the Knesset, and they will sign a peace treaty that will last into the indefinite future. Jordan too will make a lasting peace with Israel. Syria will engage in sporadic peace talks with Israel, and the two countries will not go to war.

In South Africa, the apartheid regime will be dismantled, and the white minority will cede power to the black majority. This will happen with no civil war, no bloodbath, no violent re-criminations against the former oppressors.

Many of the developments will be the result of long and courageous struggles. But some of them will just happen, catching everyone by surprise. Perhaps some of you will try to figure out how it all happened. I congratulate you on your accomplishments and wish you success and satisfaction in the years ahead.

How would the audience have reacted to his outburst of optimism? Those who were listening would have broken out in snickers and shared a suspicion that the speaker was still tripping on the brown acid from Woodstock. Yet in every case the optimist would have been right.

Above taken from "*The Better Angels of Our Nature - Why Violence Has Decline*" by Steven Pinker. pp 28-29.

Given all of these positive developments, why is it that most Americans believe that our society / world are getting worse? Some are so confident in their pessimism that they believe God shares their gloomy views and will bring it all to an end soon. The Christian virtue of Hope is lost. So is gratitude when there is so little to be thankful for. Those most susceptible to this pessimism perceived salvation to be a rapture scheme where they leave earth behind as a barren wasteland with no concern for God's creation, while they enter into a narcissistic eternal bliss while still alive. So unlike the path our Lord followed. The theological idea of "rapture" is a fairly recent development by pessimistic people obsessed with the end of the world. It may be good entertainment but is lousy theology.

What I hope comes to an end soon is the human delusion that our world is so bad. ~ PB

"Earth's crammed with heaven and every bush afire with God.

But only those who see take off their shoes. The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

"Many of us spend our lives waiting for the next moment, because we believe the next moment will be better than the present moment. When we live our lives with the belief that satisfaction and contentment await us at some future moment, we miss the present moment. Since life only happens Now, we end up waiting for an illusory future that never arrives." Eckhart Tolle