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LECTURE AT JOHN CABOT UNIVERSITY

On June 24th there will be a landing at Bonavista in Newfoundland of a replica of the bark, the *Matthew*. It set sail from Bristol at the beginning of May as Giovanni Caboto and his crew had 500 years ago. I'll talk of those explorers, and what they discovered, and of what it could and should mean to ourselves today, at the end of this century of terrible war. Particularly what it could mean to many of you, since it is in university, when ideals of discovery take hold.

Caboto was an Italian, born in Gaeta, but a citizen of Venezia by the time he was hired by the merchants of Bristol to find a sea route westward to China or Japan. We don't know if he actually knew Cristoforo Colombo, but he had been on a parallel track for five years in search of support to discover the same route by sea to Asia, to find a cheaper and shorter way to bring back to Europe the spices and silks which had to be sent by camel trains overland, hostages to demands along the way by every warlord and middleman imaginable.

Both Italians were supremely confident sailors of discovery. By the way, it's not true that they were original thinkers in arguing that the world was round. Columbus or Caboto never had to persuade anyone of this, as the spherical globe was taught to every student in medieval universities. I guess there were some people who believed in a flat earth and dragons beyond the horizon, just as 9% of people polled today believe Elvis is still alive, but a spherical earth had been pretty well established as a fact by Aristotle, 2,000 years ago. It's just that they didn't know what could be done about it. They were globalists in geographic theory only.

Claudius Ptolemy, a Greek geographer who lived in Alexandria in the 2nd century proved it decisively. But interestingly, he calculated the circumference of the earth at only about 15,000 miles instead of 24,975. His work, with the maps that came out of it, were the standard geographic reference of the Middle Ages until well after Columbus. At the reaching Asia, Columbus in fact decided he could go for it precisely because he believed Ptolemy, that the

distances around the globe were shorter than they were. His first Atlantic crossing from 9 September to 11 October covered by his reckoning 3652 miles, 100 miles farther than the distance he had calculated for the trip from the Canaries to China it self, according to Ptolemy's numbers.

Apart from these faulty calculations, the issue was never geometry. It was means. Columbus and Caboto assumed the trade winds system extended beyond the horizon into the Dark Sea. But for the vastly long voyages, a new kind of sea going sailing ships were needed that could then beat back against the prevailing northerly winds. Navigation by the sun and stars had to be improved. And logistics – stores – adequate to months at sea were needed.

I've visited the place Huelva in South Western Spain – a monastery, actually, where Columbus plotted his visionary voyage, looking out to sea. His story is a strong one – how first the king of Portugal, then Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, turned him down on the grounds of expense. How an adviser then asked the Spanish monarchs afterward «what if he's right? The expense will be nothing compared to the payoff... all the riches of the East». How a messenger caught up with a defeated Columbus trekking back across the semi-desert from Madrid.

In fact, King Henry VII of England had also been offered Columbus trip first but had turned it down. But in 1496, on the strength of Columbus having reached what he wrongly called «The Indies», the English monarch granted Giovanni Caboto his charter of exploration, though he added it was to be done at his own cost. Ironically, Caboto had earlier also pitched his ideas to the kings of Spain and Portugal, but they turned him down as well. Financially, his backers were the merchants of Bristol, long a centre for sailing into the oceans. Caboto had been to Arabia and had seen the silk road from the Orient. He made a simple calculation there had to be a cheaper way to bring the goods of the Far East to England, and relied on his supreme self-confidence in seamanship and navigation. After one false start, turned back by Atlantic storms, he set sail on May 2, 1497 on a northerly route in a small ship with a crew of only 18.

Arriving on June 24th, a voyage of over 7 weeks, he anchored off the coast of what was probably Newfoundland, rowed a shore, and planted a cross and the banners of Henry VII of England, the Pope, and of St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice.

He spent the next few weeks or so sailing around Newfoundland. Making the mistake of many early explorers who reached our North American shores in mid-summer, he thought he'd landed in a much warmer climate than the one we know, making him believe he had indeed neared the sub-tropical Orient. He thought that it was just a matter of stretching the next voyage a little

further to reach Japan. He set off on his return trip for Bristol, making the return trip of 1900 miles in only 15 days.

Acclaimed a great hero he was given an expeditionary fleet of 5 new ships to make the second voyage he was sure would bring him to Japan. But he and his fleet vanished. However, his achievement was massive – the discovery, albeit unawares, of North America.

As the American historian Samuel Eliot Morison has put it, «the Americas were discovered accidentally by a great seaman who was looking for something else; when discovered, it was not wanted; and most of the exploration of the next fifty years was done in the hope of getting through or around it».

It would be well more than a century before the idea of reaching the Indies by a NorthWest passage was overtaken in importance by the actually far more powerful imagery of the discovery of a great new continent itself, a New World.

It wasn't until 1609 that Henry Hudson, an Englishman working for the Dutch, entered what we know as New York Harbour and sailed up the great river which today bears his name. In search also of the elusive passage to the Indies, he had to give up just north of Albany. But by 1621 the Dutch had begun to seize the profundity of their real discovery and created a trading post at New Amsterdam, when they also pulled off in 1626 the greatest property deal in all history, buying Manhattan from the local Indians for something around a couple of hundred bucks. Meanwhile Champlain had set up a trading post in the name of France at Québec in 1608, the *Mayflower* pilgrims arrived in Plymouth in 1620, and the exploration of our continent, and its own enormous history had begun in earnest.

It was a very ragged history; devastation and deceptions affecting relations with native North Americans for many years; the violence of growth; the premises and practices of slavery which would endure for much more than a hundred years, and racial discrimination in the United States which remained institutionalized long enough for me to say that my life's first political act, as a student in New Jersey, was in a march to support Martin Luther King to free up buses and schools in 1959. But it was an epochal, colossal idea, the «New World».

Scott Fitzgerald recalled its enormity at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, pondering wistfully the great and elusive American dream, «the green light that year by year recedes before us».

In the book's end, Nick Carraway looked out across Long Island Sound, and felt the strength of that idea. He

«became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes - a fresh, green breast of the New World. Its vanished trees, the trees

that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate for his capacity for wonder».

I don't intend to take you on a trip through North American history but I want to share with you the strength of my feeling that the discovery of North America by Europeans, whatever the motives of commerce, competing interests, and religious obsessions, released something vaster in concept than they could then, or scarcely ever grasp. Trade and human connection are conclusively important today.

But we must remember that America was an idea.

An ideal.

As Emerson wrote about the U.S., «we began in freedom».

I'm Canadian, but we identify with the strength of that assertion for our own country too.

American mass culture has enormous power today, making the U.S. the informing centre to the world, which can be a problem. But this phenomenon aside, it is an emphatic truth even today that our two countries, as immigrant societies, upwardly-mobile and restlessly changing are still driven by ideals rather than residing on deep-seated traditional cultures, a more static society, and or inherited senses of national rivalry and interests.

North Americans shied from the great power politics of Europe in the early decades of this century. After the terrible sacrifices we all made in World War I, «foreign entanglements» were to be avoided, and North America pulled away from Europe, especially, and possibly tragically, the USA, which retreated indeed into isolationism.

World War II brought North America back into war in Europe – again, the U.S. two years later than Canada – and the cold war kept us here. Now it too has happily gone. But unfortunately, tragically, some of those dreadful rivalries remain, and they are dangerous.

Let me speak about the connections of North America to Europe still. They are still needed, perhaps more than ever, because of those new dangers. I need to speak particularly of the values which bind Europe and North America, but also of our inter-dependencies economically and on a human level.

On economics, we have now all gone global, of course. Caboto would be pleased, I imagine. The post-war multilateral system, for peace and security,

and trade and payments, was a vast improvement on the fledgling structures which came out of the First War, so soon abandoned as useless against naked force. The well-being of the United Nations' system also became the leit-motif of the Canadian international personality which had found its own maturity from the tragedy of the war against Hitler. May I add that multilateralism as a technique for resolving international issues seemed particularly vital to a country situated between the two greatest powers on earth. Now that the closest of our two neighbours is completely dominant in the world, we'd be the first to say that healthy multilateralism is more vital than ever.

But, alas, I need to speak today of war, and in Europe, because the shadow of war is again cast over Europe from its edges.

As president Scalfaro said on Italy's national holiday this Monday:

«in this Europe of ours, where nobody would ever have believed that ethnic conflict could have taken place - well, this is exactly what has occurred, and with great suffering.

This could help we Europeans to avoid feeling that we are better, more civilised, than other peoples belonging to other continents; it could help us to open our eyes to the possibility of similar destructive developments in the future, not least in unexpected places; it could help us, indeed it must help us, to prevent any pathology of this kind from emerging. But such prevention requires a profound and courageous act of self-examination.

This century has witnessed the mad will to power of those who considered themselves superior men, a superior race, and for this reason held themselves destined to rule over inferior peoples.

The inhuman philosophy which underlay nazism, that philosophy which gave rise to Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Mathausen, has come back today – and it is true and authentic barbarity».

At the end of this century of disgrace, do we still have such terrible surprises to come?

How will Europe turn at last away from violence, forever? The President's warning that merely being very civilized isn't enough is important. In the Canadian novel *The English patient*, Michael Ondaatje describes the co-existence of the incomparable beauty of Renaissance civilization and the ghastly violence which ran through its history. He wondered if the war fought in Italy in 1943 and 1944 was at the end of this continuum, as the last medieval war.

«Fortress towns which had been battled over since the Eighth century had (then a) traffic of stretchers, butchered vineyards, where, if you dug deep beneath the tank ruts, you found blood-axe and spear ... English and

Americans and Indians and Australians and Canadians advanced North, and the shell traces exploded and dissolved in the air ... When the Thirteenth century castle at Monterchi was finally taken during the spring rains, troops were billeted under the high dome of the church and slept by the stone pulpit. Looking up with service binoculars in the gothic church in Arezzo soldiers would come upon their contemporary faces in the Piero della Francesca frescoes. Nearby a twig from the tree of good and evil inserted into the mouth of the dead Adam».

Indeed, the war in Bosnia sadly ended the notion that Europe had grown out of its capacity for medieval butchery. Was it only a last spasm from the corpses of the twin devils of this century, Fascism and Communism? There is a case to be made that under the surface the feuds of the world are still boiling.

Though the American revolution was borne of ideals, remember that these ideals themselves came from European civilisation as a gift to humanity greater than all the frescoes and fables of good and evil. Which the countries of North America imperfectly tried to implement. Internationally, these ideals were eventually codified and declared in many forms after 1945, in the *Nuremberg Declaration*, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *U.N. Charter* itself, the values of democracy, pluralism and tolerance which we said should become our common interest and which western civilization must at last live up to.

In this essential venture, Europe and North America in particular, acknowledge their common parenthood and make common cause. It is a security issue of the utmost importance.

We still live in a world of shock. Western Europeans are insulated from the worst of change by the profound success and enviable prosperity of the European Union. But the E.U. has to project more than property. It too was founded on ideals. As the first political officer assigned by Canada to cover the E.E.C. In the 60's, I remember the idealism of commission officials who then had maps without national frontiers on their walls; Lombardy, Lorraine, Wallonia.

This form of Euro-idealism may have run ahead of today's Euro-sceptical reality, but that spirit of a community of peoples is what it took to end the historic and violent national clashes within Western Europe. However, Eastern and Southern Europe are another matter, enormously and pathologically affected by totalitarian society.

These last 70 years have profoundly injured Russians. Their reconstruction today is brave and enormously complex and commands our respect. The one thing I learned from 4 recent years there is that the central corrective challenges in the former Soviet Union are much less economic and structural

than they are behavioural and psychological. The new impulses and reflexes of a pluralist society grow, but slowly.

Other societies emerging from the Cold War have had even greater shock in trying to cope with a present suddenly the opposite of their recent pasts. Some risk falling back into false identities taken from ethnic rivalry of the last century.

Or falling back on clannish religion. Spinoza wrote that of all hatreds, none is deeper or more tenacious than that which springs from extreme devotion or piety, and is itself cherished as pious.

Today Albania is the crisis before Europe. This seems a country whose history of victimization and oppression is almost an index of failure in Europe since 1922, leaving it completely dysfunctional. Hopefully, Albania can be healed with help, most prominently from Italy itself.

Can we also discourage the growth elsewhere of petty nationalism, and ethnic and regional conceits, before they turn violent? Failure can have shattering consequences. The European community failed in ex-Yugoslavia in 1992. Europe, *per se*, can't project force very effectively. Can an enlarging Nato do so? Will North America stay engaged? Can we bring these nations within a securing system of democratic values and tolerance?

Some question whether a North Atlantic community still exists, or should exist beyond the Cold War.

This community does exist, above all exactly as a community of values, extending now eastwards in Europe, as the re-anchoring of human rights becomes the entry ticket for countries to the East and South seeking to join Nato and the European Union.

But a side-warning! If trans-atlantic values remain pertinent, the substantial sense of vital economic and even political interdependence may be slipping away. It's as if the isolation of North America between World Wars were a natural state, interrupted only by the requirements of the wars against Fascism and then the Cold War against soviet Communism.

Those big wars are over. And as to the European Union and North America, though we do sign declarations of joint action, and do some big business, we are growing indifferent to each other on several levels. European energies are today largely absorbed by the internal European processes. North American States are in their turn focussed on NAFTA, the Pacific, and themselves.

In the absence of compelling challenges to security, Europe and North America could continue to drift apart on economic interests. The loss will be greatest for those countries with the highest trans-atlantic vocations, such as Italy, Britain or Ireland, as well as Canada. But I would also worry about a

consequent disconnect with European civil security and the value system at its foundation.

Here in the 500th anniversary year of the discovery of North America by Giovanni Caboto, we remember that we share across the Atlantic a history of mutual human investment.

In my country, more than a million and a half Canadians are proud of their origins in Italy. I visit the towns they came from. I also visit the cemeteries of the 7000 Canadians who were killed here in 1943 and 1944.

From these visits, I take a meaning, both existential, and purposeful. Human investment of this kind is flesh and blood stuff which gives life and reality to relationships between countries, because shared history and connected aspiration build shared human assumptions. We cannot drift from this human factor.

We need to see our common history as a foundation on which to continue to shape an interdependence of substance; business, trade, investment, research, scholars, transferring technology, and engaging trans-national issues such as organized crime, terrorism, infectious disease, and pollution. Our relationships live in the town halls, universities, and board rooms, in countless daily transactions. All the things which characterise the North America-Europe relationship and no other, because of history, but also because of shared values and political systems.

This is a relationship which has the attributes of family. In Italy, family is the bedrock of society, the starting place for personal loyalties. War and its aftermath of migration and interdependence made all of us into family and the challenges of new outbreaks of illiberalism insist we act like more of one today, with our family values at the fore.

But it is an outward-looking family.

Let me return to our best Euro-American ideals. What we have is not some kind of «Occident» for the occidentals slogan. Nor is it cultural imperialism.

But post modernists should make no mistake. None of us should ever apologise for trying to promote democracy, tolerance, and the rigorous application of human rights, and we celebrate the extent to which these values are now shared through much of Europe, all, or almost all, of Latin America, much of the Pacific region, and so on. This is the value system which is the legacy of the enlightenment which spread from France in the 18th century to become our bedrock faith, a global asset, and our best protection.

It must also be the protection of those from overcrowded and poorer societies to the South - available within those societies, but also representing their rights when they come to ours.

The effort to promote these values we share represents where we most clearly failed in the 20 year truce between World Wars. It represents the best the European-North American alliance can make available to others, as a guide to how to deal with the continuing shock and after-shock of change.

Globalizers smile at the remembered images of Europe at the beginning of the century, though our conscience frowns at how much better we might have done to avoid the hell which followed.

Indeed, the first great globalists were Columbus and Caboto, were they not? Globalization is a reality of yours in dimensions unthinkable to them. But globalization needn't obscure the obligations of family, not in the narrow ethnic and exclusive senses, but the obligations which are based on the shared and timeless values of pluralistic humanism which in fact globalization requires.

Conversely, our values are shallowly shared if they are not accompanied by a sharing too of economic stakes. There is a need for Europe-North America economic renewal.

Hopefully, this lecture is a reminder of what we have done and not done well this century, Holocaust as well as our hopes, and of what we must share, values and risks still, as we reach out as Caboto and Columbus and those discoverers reached out then to the corners of the earth, but with a sense now of more common and vital more cause.

Stay engaged, friends from North America, and Europe, in each other, and in our own best selves.

Thank you.