

DC SYMPOSIUM WAS INSPIRING AND INFORMATIVE

*The following piece by Jack Palmer, columnist
for the Defiance, Ohio Crescent-News, appeared on April 15, 2005,
the day after the first McMaster Symposium*

During their extensive world travels, Harold and Helen McMaster were struck by the extreme poverty in lands which have natural resources as great as the United States. This poverty must be due to the way people treat each other.

What was needed, they reasoned, was respect for education, individual liberty, equal economic opportunities and civil liberty.

Harold died in 2003, but his legacy lives on through the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity which he and his family founded in 2002 with an unprecedented \$6 million gift to Defiance College.

"We hope the new school will encourage students to undertake careers toward improving the human condition as a means of reducing suffering around the world," Harold stated at the time. In the three years since, the McMaster School is fulfilling its mission through the development of a scholars program for Defiance College students, a fellows program for faculty, a visiting scholars program, an annual symposium and a professional journal.

The first-ever symposium, which concluded Thursday, featured world renowned speakers, visiting international scholars, and the presentation of faculty and student global projects.

Important northwest Ohio issues were also examined, covering such topics as area economic development, K-12 education access and diversity, health issues and underrepresented populations, and the new Family Justice Center.



DR. SYLVIA EARLE (CENTER) WITH ALAN AND SUSAN McMASTER AFTER HER KEYNOTE PRESENTATION, "SUSTAINABLE SEAS," AT THE McMASTER SYMPOSIUM, APRIL 13, 2005. PHOTO BY KATHY PUNCHES

"More than ever, we have real opportunities to be the difference," said McMaster dean Dr. Charles Warren. Warren wasn't just talking to the college students and faculty. He was talking to all of us.

If 9-11 taught us anything, it taught us that we need to change our "to hell with the rest of the world" attitudes. It's time we wake up and realize the world is a neighborhood, and start working to make it a brotherhood.

The world population may represent many cultures, races, religions and socio-economic levels, but we are all God's people. Peace can no longer be narrowly defined as the absence of war. A new era of proactive conflict transformation is in order. We need to treat our adversaries as potential allies. That doesn't mean we have to agree with them. But there needs to be dialogue. We can no longer put our heads in the sand.

Here at home, we need to do a better job of making sure our practices reflect our principles. As more than one McMaster symposium speaker pointed out during the last three days, the United States has been known for supporting

corrupt regimes throughout the world — even in our recent history. The list is sobering. The Shah of Iran. The military dictatorship in Pakistan. Pinochet in Chile. Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. Mobutu in Zaire and the Duvalier family in Haiti.

“Saddam Hussein was our man in Iraq for years,” noted Gillian Sorensen, who worked inside the United Nations for over 20 years. “We trained the Taliban (in Afghanistan), which morphed into Al-Qaeda. We need to be extremely careful of whom we partner with and what we say.”

This country needs to continue to support democracy around the world as a rock-solid principle, not merely as a convenient tool for foreign policy. It is vital that we become an example of fairness and evenhandedness in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nothing much is going to happen in the Middle East until we deal with this “huge elephant in the room” that no one wants to touch.

If we choose to do little or nothing, the admittedly complex dynamics of this conflict will continue to fuel a breeding ground for terrorists around the world. It is absolutely imperative that American Muslims become actively engaged in helping to bridge the gap between the United States and the Middle East. They need to become ambassadors. They need to educate other Muslims about the greatness of America. That, for all our flaws, it’s the greatest country going.

Looking back at these last three days, there is no question in my mind that humanity was advanced at Defiance College. The speakers were inspiring and informative, even though I did not agree with everything they said. The person who inspired me the most, however, did not say a word. His name is Harold McMaster.