

One Nation Under God, Still

This occasion is a time to reflect on our blood-bought freedoms.

I like to return to George Washington's "Farewell Address" on such occasions because, in it, the father of our nation spells out what he took to be maxims of a free society.

Washington urged us, in the "Farewell Address," to contemplate and frequently review those maxims that our nation might endure. We also honor those who've fought and died to protect our freedom by doing so.

The maxim I wish us to review and contemplate today is that a free society requires a moral populace.

Washington noted that:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: 'Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?'

I think we all understand how little justice would be secured in a nation where perjury is commonplace.

Another great 18th Century luminary, Edmund Burke, states the maxim in this way:

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites. . . . Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without

What happens when a critical mass in society lack internal restraint?

It must come from without--through a police force, or even the national guard.

The riots in South Central Los Angeles clearly illustrate this point. The manner in which some fans act when their team wins a national title; political corruption; the Enron scandal; the present mutual fund scandal. These all suggest that the moral fabric of our society has decayed to some extent, and such evidence begs the question:

How is internal restraint built?

Society is like a symphony in which all the various institutions (family, religious, social, legal, educational, and so on) work together in their various capacities, exercising influence on the individuals who are nurtured or "enculturated" within that society.

Though education is not the most important societal institution, it is undoubtedly one of the most influential, and it is the one with which I am most familiar.

The ancients had three divisions of education: The industrial arts, the productive arts, and the liberal arts. The first two were where slaves learned to make things and to maintain their tools. This is the education apropos of the slave. Liberal education is the education proper to free persons, and today's university education is supposed to deliver a liberal education.

What exactly is a liberal education? and, What is the role of liberal education in a free society?

John Henry Cardinal Newman, in *The Idea of a University*, asserted that the end of liberal education "is that of training good members of society." Not just "members of society," Newman wrote good members of society. There is, then, a strong link between intellectual and moral virtue.

I think most people understand the role of universities in terms of how they contribute to intellectual virtue; providing knowledge for all who seek it. As noted at the outset, we need to remember that other important outcome of liberal education; that it equips citizens to participate fully in freedom, or, as Burke put it, it makes us qualified for civil liberty.

This is where intellectual and moral virtue converge; knowledge and the moral excellence to wield that knowledge with grace and use it for the common good. HOWEVER . . .

Recent trends make it nearly impossible for public education to do this vital work. Because of the wall of separation between church and state, modern educators are confined to dispensing theory-free data; modern students are confined to theory-free lives.

Concern mounts as we are daily faced with the repugnant consequences of a politically-free society inhabited (and perhaps even governed) largely by moral idiots.

How can one unable to govern one's own appetites possibly govern a country?

It is imperative . . .

that this nation find a way to encourage civic virtue and, at the same time, secure liberty.

Unless we are content to settle for educating a society peopled by moral impotents,

It is imperative . . .

that we either mollify the effects of the wall or bring it down altogether. Why?

Because that wall has made it nearly impossible to pass our national heritage from generation to generation. Passing a common heritage from generation to generation is a societal imperative. What heritage?

The one reflected in our national motto: In God we trust and in several state mottoes:

- Arizona's God enriches
- Colorado's Nothing without Providence
- Hawaii's The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness
- Ohio's With God all things are possible

- Pennsylvania's Virtue, liberty, and independence

And my personal favorite:

- South Dakota's Under God the People Rule

This is the heritage Washington wished us to perpetuate. It is the heritage to which Lincoln appealed at Gettysburg when he urged this nation, Under God, to seek a new birth of freedom.

JFK, in his inaugural address, referred to it as our proud heritage, that we hold as self-evident that: "The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God." This is the heritage our young men and women are protecting around the globe today.

If we remember that, we will be a moral populace and we will be qualified for civil liberty. So let us take increased devotion to perpetuate that heritage so these sacrifices shall not have been in vain!

Yes, but what about the Wall?

The wall is not set in stone!

It is constructed by means of interpretation, and, I subscribe to the interpretation of the Chief Justice of the United States, William Rehnquist when he writes, "The actions of the First Congress . . . confirm the view that Congress did not mean that the Government should be neutral between religion and irreligion."

Rehnquist argues instead that, "the First Amendment Establishment Clause should be read no more broadly than to prevent the establishment of a national religion or the governmental preference of one religious sect over another."

The metaphoric wall need be neither as rigid nor as impenetrable as is commonly assumed. The wall metaphor squares with neither our history, nor our heritage.

Consider the following:

- When the houses of congress were first built, church meetings were held there on Sundays for the next 70 years.
- In 1789, one of the first acts of congress was to provide for paid chaplains who were to invoke a divine blessing at the start of each session. These were at the very time the establishment clause was framed.
- National days of prayer are still commonly called in time of crisis.

Why must we wait for crises to act in accord with our national heritage? To act in accord with our national heritage refreshes the wellsprings which nourish it. But, thanks to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, some students can no longer even recite the pledge of allegiance.

That is wrong!

We ARE one nation under God, still!

I don't recall a mass movement to repudiate our common heritage. But it has been compromised. That is why I agree with the Chief Justice that: "The 'wall of separation between church and State' is a metaphor based on bad history. . . It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned."

If public education continues to be decapitated by the wall of separation it cannot fulfill its societal imperative: helping produce citizens fit for freedom.

Now, attempting to indoctrinate anyone in the public schools is a clear violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause. I'm against that.

What's happened, though, is that certain political activists have succeeded in pushing the idea of separation of church and state to an unproductive extreme.

As the Chief Justice argues, contrary to groups like the ACLU, not only does the Constitution allow for religious observance in public education, doing so is in keeping with our common heritage and is important to our continuance as a free society.

It is, in fact, my friends, in our national interest to preserve that heritage because **a free society requires a moral populace**, and, as Alexis de Tocqueville notes, in *Democracy in America*: "America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

May God bless our Veterans and may He continue to bless this Nation Under God!