

THOUGHTS ON INDEPENDENCE DAY

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David McCullough's [NY Times best seller] 1776 is a birthday gift to the nation. It tells fascinating details about "our" national beginning.

What's impressive is the account of divine providence (God's miracles—in modern language!) that enabled "our" rag-tag Continental Army to triumph over King George III's disciplined military so he would send his warships home defeated. Our "army" was largely New England farmers commanded by a greenhorn Virginian George Washington who despised them. Without that "divine providence" at Trenton "we" would never have gained "our" independence.

And why did "God" so bless the Thirteen [Rebellious] Colonies? Their goal was to establish a Protestant nation founded on the basic principle of the separation of church from the state, a nation without a king and a church to be blessed without a pope. The founding Fathers revered the idea that religious liberty of conscience was a divine right already granted by the Creator to every human being—not a "privilege" granted by an earthly government to certain people. In that culture of national liberty where the Constitution would provide for checks and balances to hinder the

growth of tyranny and prevent political and moral corruption, a national climate of uprightness would invite the blessings of heaven. That's what happened! That "Providence" pretty well brought us through more than two centuries, even through our terrible Civil War in the aftermath of which "we" finally repudiated "our" crime of slavery. Lincoln was right: this nation was founded on the Protestant-developed idea of liberty of soul, God's intention being to bless the world and thus prevent the rise of Terrorism. Global respect for what the United States stood for morally would defend "us." Shall "we" abandon those Protestant principles of liberty for all? God forbid!

The words in the Declaration of Independence were powerful—perhaps more so than Washington's sword in the War of Independence. The character of the nation has been shaped by words in the Constitution. Before the nation existed as such, it was created in the words of its three outstanding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

In our 238 years since declaring our "independence," the United States has attained the power and prestige of a world empire. A former President openly said that we are the Roman Empire redivivus. While we bask in

our political and military glory, we need to reflect on what led to the “decline and fall of the Roman Empire.”

Our beginnings lay in the oppressed people of God searching for a land where they could worship God in purity and in freedom of conscience. Massachusetts offered free welcome at the public cost to Christians of any nationality who wanted to escape from wars or famine or the oppression of persecutors. The historian George Bancroft recorded that “one might be for years a dweller in the Puritan settlement, and not see a drunkard, or hear an oath, or meet a beggar.” There was a serious purpose to live the principles of Bible righteousness. The feeble and isolated colonies grew to a confederation of powerful states; now the nation has become the marvel of world history. It has become the land of opportunity; the ambition of millions is to “come to America” and start life anew.

Those principles of uprightness, of Christian liberty of conscience as well as of civil liberty led to immense economic prosperity. “O beautiful for pilgrim feet / Whose stern impassioned stress / A thoroughfare of freedom beat / Across the wilderness! / America! America! God mend thine every flaw, / Confirm thy soul in self-control, / Thy liberty in law!”

Now everybody knows that America has bitter enemies. But if we faithfully adhere to the universally

honored principles of our own Constitution, we can attract and hold the grudging respect of those enemies. The recognition of human sinfulness is universal in humanity; the poet’s prayer is right—“God mend thine every flaw.” As a nation, we should seek for and welcome that “mending.” National arrogance has been wrong for America throughout these two centuries. A decent moral modesty will be a more effective defense against the horrors of terrorism than any military might.

America! America! God shed His grace on thee / And crown thy good with brotherhood / From sea to shining sea!”

God has a worldwide successor to ancient Israel—the church that Christ founded on His apostles. Again, it has existed in the words of the Bible before its present reality took visible shape. Ultimately, it’s the word of God that creates all life: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). Receiving that Word into your heart will create new life within you. It will be “made flesh” in you, not that you will be divine, no; but you will become “a partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). “As newborn babes, [we] desire

the sincere milk of the word, that [we] may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). The Word has power built-in. Spend a prayerful hour imbibing it in the Bible. “The word of truth” there “begets” us, creates us anew (James 1:18). Pray for common sense, pure simple honesty to believe it!

Into the hateful confusion of the world today steps the word of God in fresh form—“the everlasting gospel” of the three angels’ message that must be proclaimed “to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6, 7). Somebody must proclaim it faithfully (and God will bless its faithful proclamation!). Somehow it must penetrate Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, yes, our gospel-hardened “post-Christian” culture. The promise of Jesus will be, must be, fulfilled: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). It wouldn’t be fair for God to say “It is done!” until everybody has had a chance to “hear” the Word. Set your heart-receiver to be in tune with Heaven’s broadcast.

This great nation has enemies still today. It gained its independence over two centuries ago by a war of attrition in which at Christmas time when the British military were celebrating, George Washington led his

rag-tag soldiers in a surprise attack, a minor incident that was symbolic. Hopefully it will never be forgotten.

Now, thanks to the security guaranteed by our Constitution, we enjoy unprecedented “peace and safety” with almost obscene prosperity. These are “the last days [when] perilous times shall come. For [people] shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous . . . heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:1-4). Entertainment, movies, sports, novels, sensuality, wild materialism—these are the obsessions. It’s like a tidal wave of ungodliness pouring over a nation. And of course, as the Holy Spirit is steadily resisted, more and more, violence and cruelty become commonplace.

But there is Good News: where sin abounds, grace is seen to abound “much more” (Rom. 5:20). There are people still who keep alert, in tune with Heaven. Especially among youth, the thoughtful, sensible ones “come out of Babylon.” They swim upstream against the corrupt-flowing tide of popularity, and permit their hearts to be deeply influenced by the Holy Spirit who reminds them of the Son of God who remained unmoved by the world’s temptations. In a world of sin, they cooperate with Heaven. You can be one of them!

The United States has a National Hymn: “Our Fathers’ God, to Thee / Author of liberty, / To Thee we sing: /

Long may our land be bright / With freedom's holy light, / Protect us by Thy might, / Great God, our King!" It was hard to sing it without choking up, we loved it so. It was hard also after spending years overseas in World War II, for my father, to sail into New York harbor past the Statue of Liberty, to see the American flag flying, without that lump in his throat.

Even enemies of the United States have been forced to a grudging respect for American history, winning independence from the British crown, for our Abraham Lincoln who preserved our Union in our awful Civil War over slavery, and for some Presidents since; for the Congress that helped to rebuild the devastation of World War II. There seemed to be something "holy" about "freedom's light," everywhere recognized—Muslim or what.

And sober-minded Americans granted a reluctant approval to pre-emptive war adventures in the Middle East. We hoped that "our Fathers' God" would bless our efforts to export democracy to the Middle East. We felt there is something "holy" about democracy, although our wise "Fathers" eschewed it in favor of becoming a Constitutional Republic. And we still pray that He will "protect us by [His] might," and by the two great oceans that surround us.

Now Hollywood's decadent and violent movies have borne fruit. Do we forfeit the national protection of "our Fathers' God," relying now on our sophisticated military might? Let's beware. So did ancient Babylon rely on military might and "impregnable" defenses, until "great Babylon fell" in 538 B.C., a lesson to all the world ever since.

"Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1), says Jesus to those who reverence Him. In all "those things which are coming on the earth [when] the powers of heaven shall be shaken," the same Lord will not forsake those who have resisted the peer pressures of Babylon and have stood loyal to Him (Luke 21:26, 36). "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, . . . that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (Isa. 33:14-16).

The Bible view of history must be seen: national ruin will not precede national apostasy from our Constitution, but vice versa. No earthly power could have brought ruin on the nation ruled by the throne of David so long as the people held to the principles of civil and religious liberty God had given to ancient

Israel. But their national ruin (horrendous!) followed, not preceded, national apostasy (see Jeremiah 52).

The American Constitution is the grandest document ever to come from the pen of man. Not America's two great oceans, but those principles of civil and religious liberty, the guarantees of the rights of the minority, have been the true secret of our defense. The Constitution has been the reason for our prosperity, not its fruit.

But multitudes obsessed with materialism and fun-entertainment would readily trade liberty for an illusion of security in their pursuit of pleasure. The raw evil of Sodom and Gomorrah constantly infiltrates the nation. Billy Graham used to marvel that the God of heaven could still protect America as a nation. But there stands that grand Constitution which guarantees to the minority the right to worship God as they please. Those holy principles of God-given civil and religious liberty are our lifeline. Sunder that lifeline from heaven, and the ruin that came upon the government of King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 52) must follow. We face a new bloodthirsty "Nebuchadnezzar" today, and the principles that underlie the issues should be understood. "Our fathers' God, to Thee / Author of liberty, / To Thee we sing. / Long may our land be

bright / With freedom's holy light, / Protect us by Thy might, / Great God our King."

Let there be those who do what apparently no minority in King Zedekiah's day did—humble the soul before God. The righteousness loved and treasured by a minority can save a nation from ruin.

All state-controlled religion or state-controlled atheism, is bad for the nation; America has been blessed of God in its two centuries history, not because the people were good but because the founding principles of the nation guaranteed religious freedom by establishing in the First Amendment the separation of church and state. This is the answer to the often asked question, How could "God bless America!" when its moral character (or the lack thereof) is such a scandal around the world? How can God protect such a nation when its leadership is so often corrupt? The answer is in that Constitution: it guarantees the right for the Holy Spirit of God to work within the nation without being forbidden by government persecution, as prevailed during the Dark Ages. It allows God to work through the proclamation of the gospel to counteract the evil that is in the nation.

It is the time-honored custom of those who study Bible prophecy to pray that God will bless earthly government so that we may enjoy this precious liberty

of conscience. Well and good. And thus far we have enjoyed a blessed measure of such freedom. But why do we want more such First Amendment liberty? So we can enjoy it with all the material blessings that come in its train? It's a great life, living in America with all the sumptuous, material luxuries that are ours. We think with horror of the history of previous great civilizations, and wonder what it would be like if "national apostasy" should also result for us in "national ruin." Why do we contend for further religious liberty? There is one big reason: so this "nation under God" can host and promote and support a world-wide proclamation of the message that is to "lighten the earth with glory," the message of Revelation 18. A wise writer has said that "the last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of God's character of love." Heaven will more sympathetically regard our prayers for divine providence to guide if we (a) study that "most precious message" so we can understand it better, and (b) proclaim it fearlessly and faithfully. Liberty of conscience is too precious to be squandered in any other self-seeking pursuit, legitimate as we may have thought it to be.

But when the American people finally repudiate that principle of religious liberty enshrined in their Constitution, then we are told that "national apostasy

will be speedily followed by national ruin." The fact that some speak out forthrightly for the separation of church and state means that the battle is on, and will not let up. Bible prophecy will be fulfilled; the fatal step will eventually be taken (maybe sooner than we think); a people who care more for pleasure and material prosperity than for honesty and morality will sooner or later sell their liberties for what they think is economic security.

The story of King Solomon is cautionary tale for God's people today. It is one of the most fantastic in all sacred history. He starts out apparently perfect with that most rare gift of wisdom, gets everything added to it, collects yearly "666 talents of gold" until he has tons of it, enjoys peace with his prosperity, "and all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart" (1 Kings 10:21).

Solomon, you have it made! You have brought heaven on earth, better yet, you are fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). And then, Solomon, you blew it; you turned right around and "went after Ashtoreh, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites." You built temples to pagan gods and set them up in our holy city of

Jerusalem (11:1-8)! Why, oh why, would you do this? What made you fall like this?

This almost unbelievable history must have a lesson for us today—it's "Solomon's Law" which must be fulfilled all over again 3000 years later until the lesson is learned. Add to Solomon's impressive "holy" obedience of his early years (with God's undeniable blessings) the factor of Old Covenant thinking, and the recipe calls for national apostasy to develop. Solomon reverses 500 years of Israel's history, takes them back to the "Egyptian" darkness from which they had been delivered. Now, in our modern Christian history, if we add to all our "holy" obedience to the law (with God's undeniable blessings) the factor of Old Covenant theology, we also inevitably end up going to "Babylon" to learn methods of worship and patterns of thinking. We again reverse our own history. Those who have been sacredly commissioned to proclaim "Babylon the great is fallen" fulfill "Solomon's Law" by adopting Babylon's theology and worship. Solomon finally had the sense to repent.

In 1906 there appeared in the Review and Herald an article entitled "Lessons from the Life of Solomon." Mrs. White reviewed the steady, subtle, unconscious apostasy of Solomon, his rash disregard of "the wise provisions that God had made for maintaining the

purity of His people," his reasoning that alliances with heathen nations would have good evangelistic results, and the effect of his apostasy in the spiritual decline of Israel.

"How could it have been otherwise, when their king united with satanic agencies? Through these agencies the enemy worked to confuse the minds of the people in regard to true and false worship. They became an easy prey. . . . Refusing to follow in the path of obedience, they transferred their allegiance to Satan. The enemy rejoiced in his success in effacing the divine image from the minds of the people that God had chosen as His representatives . . . Satan brought about that for which he had long been working,—a national apostasy." (R. & H., Feb. 1, 1906; FE 498, 499.)

But Mrs. White was not writing a dissertation on ancient history. Our people were not to be too far-sighted in the past, and fail to recognize present applications of that written for our admonition:

"Never was there a time in earth's history when this warning was more appropriate than at the present time. . . .

"Those who are placed in charge of the Lord's institutions are in need of much of the strength and

grace and keeping power of God, that they shall not walk contrary to the sacred principles of the truth. Many, many are very dull of comprehension in regard to their obligation to preserve the truth in its purity, uncontaminated by one vestige of error...

“Men today are no wiser than he (Solomon), and they are as prone to yield to the influences that caused his downfall. For thousands of years Satan has been gaining an experience in learning how to deceive; and to those who live in this age he comes with almost overwhelming power.” (Ibid.)

It can hardly be seen how Mrs. White could write thus in 1906 if she believed that the omega of Satan’s list of deceptions had already been spent several years before! It must be noted clearly that Satan has been learning in each succeeding attempt to overcome God’s people. By now he must have attained a nearly consummate skill. If he was successful in leading the Jews to study Moses assiduously with a “vail . . . upon their heart,” would he not permit us to quote the Spirit of Prophecy, so long as that same vail is upon our heart? It is disturbing to note that the pantheism apostasy pretended to have the support of Mrs. White’s writings, and thus many of our brethren were caught unawares:

“In His work on this earth, Christ saw how, by a disregard of the injunctions of God in regard to righteousness and true doctrines, evil would be made almost indistinguishable from good. . .

“The track of truth lies close beside the track of error, and both tracks may seem to be one to minds which are not worked by the Holy Spirit, and which, therefore, are not quick to discern the difference between truth and error. . .”

The sad pantheism apostasy should teach us that “off-shoot movement” men are not the only agents who can misuse the Spirit of Prophecy. At that time, it was respected, successful, highly honored men amongst us, who were misled.

As was strongly implied in 1906 in the article regarding Solomon’s apostasy, there was a great danger in “borrowing” any ideas from the world, or from worldly religious sources. Indeed, the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light; but that does not give license to us to go to them for wisdom. What greater triumph could Satan effect than to send us to Babylon to get help for preaching the third angel’s message in verity? Mrs. White was greatly concerned in 1909 also:

“The light of truth which God designs shall come to the people of the world at this time is not that which the world’s men of learning are seeking to impart; for these men in their research often arrive at erroneous conclusions, and in their study of many authors become enthused with theories that are of satanic origin . . . In the investigation of these subjects, men are led to accept erroneous conclusions, and to unite with seducing spirits in the work of propounding new theories which lead away from the truth.

“There is danger that the false sentiments expressed in the books that they have been reading will sometimes be interwoven by our ministers, teachers, and editors . . . under the belief that they are the same in principle as the teachings of the Spirit of truth.” T9, 67-68.

There is evidence that Mrs. White at last regarded the omega trials as being an experience for the church which would come after her death:

“I am charged to tell our people that some do not realize that the devil has device after device and he carries these out in ways that they do not expect. Satan’s agencies will invent ways to make sinners out of saints. I tell you now, that when I am laid to rest, great changes will take place. . . . I want the people to know that I warned them fully before my death. I do not know especially what changes will take place, but

Satan’s devices will be brought before the people. But they should watch every conceivable sin that Satan will try to immortalize.” (Letter sent out by W. C. White, Elmshaven, Feb. 24, 1915.)

Our denominational history is a parable of profound import to this generation. (1) An advanced understanding of the everlasting gospel consistent with our doctrine of the cleansing of the sanctuary, and intended to bring about the effective finishing of the work of God on earth in the “loud cry,” was offered this people [in 1888].

(2) The spiritual development of the church in particular and human nature in general, was such that the development of Christian experience required a more mature understanding of the gospel than had ever been had before. The fullness of the time had come “for the perfecting of the saints . . . unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

(3) We refused the gracious revelation—misunderstood, repulsed, spurned, and scorned it. This, of course, necessitated the withdrawal of any further special light.

(4) We realized that we had made a mistake, and had sinned. There was no genuine, sincere repentance for

the sin itself, however. There was just a cutting down of the tops, leaving the roots of prejudice and unbelief intact.

(5) It was inevitable that Satan should thus find an open door for the presentation of his deceptive delusions; having rejected genuine light, we would be necessarily infatuated with counterfeit “light”—sparks of men’s kindling. Our mistake [at Minneapolis] gave him just the opportunity he had long been wanting, and his course of attack since then has been in fulfillment of Revelation 12:17—a text which we have erroneously assumed awaited a future fulfillment in actual “hot war” persecution, forgetting that Satan is a master at “cold war” tactics, using fifth column infiltration and other quisling devices. Satan is trying his best to control his temper and avoid “hot” wars of persecution—he knows such outbursts do not help his cause.

(6) By a variety of expressions, Mrs. White sought to warn the church, of the dangers of internal apostasy.

(7) The warnings were seen to be justified by the sad blindness of most of us when the pantheism heresy came. Mrs. White was forced to “meet it,” and take the wheel of the good ship Zion just in time.

(8) The pantheism delusions were but the alpha of an alphabet of deadly heresies and doctrines of devils

Satan would foist upon the naive, unsuspecting “woman in white” in a last and “almost overmastering attempt” to defeat God’s plan of salvation.

(9) Our hope, recognizing our sinfulness, is in God’s mercy and unchanging love. “The remnant church, enfeebled and defective as she is, is still the supreme object of His regard.” The long Detour of wandering which we brought upon ourselves must lead us in the fullness of time to the Christ whom we spurned [at Minneapolis]. In self-abhorrence and deep repentance, we shall find Him. There will be no self-vindication in the process. God’s hope, on the other hand, lies in our honesty of heart. He is Himself on trial in us, before the Universe. He has staked His throne on the honesty of His people:

“Something great and decisive is to take place, and that right early. If any delay, the character of God and His throne will be compromised.”

“Is it possible that we are about to risk the honor of God’s throne? Brethren, for the Lord’s sake, and for His throne’s sake, let us get out of the way. The only way to get out of the way of God is to flee to Him.” (Quotation from Mrs. White, “The Crisis Imminent,” quoted by A. T. Jones, whose remarks follow, in General Conference Bulletin, 1893, p. 73.)

(10) A recognition of the significance of our denominational history in the light of Spirit of Prophecy declarations, is essential before the loud cry can be recognized, and received. Could any other kind of “loud cry” than that which would follow a denominational repentance “lighten the earth with glory”? What glory for God would there be in it?

God still lives, the same God whom the Founding Fathers of the American nation revered and who enshrined in its Constitution grand principles of justice with civil and religious liberty. His protection has been over this land because in His love and mercy God wants the whole world to embrace those principles of justice and liberty of conscience. As God said to ancient Israel, His blessings upon them were not due to their own merit, but because He wanted the gospel truths that Israel knew to be proclaimed all over the world. So the security and prosperity America has enjoyed are not due to the merit of its people any more than that of other peoples of the world. The American Constitution has been the source of our blessings, the envy of all nations (many emerging ones have sought to copy it).

God’s purpose has been transparently clear: to make it possible that “this gospel of the kingdom” that Jesus spoke of shall be proclaimed clearly to all the world.

This is further evidence of His love for the world. Let us employ every advantage we now possess in its proclamation, remembering that we have not earned the blessings we still enjoy! And may the Holy Spirit give us wisdom to train our children to appreciate them. Lord, grant that same precious gift to us!

God grant us the sense to use our present opportunities of freedom, not for personal pleasure, but in proclaiming the pure “everlasting gospel.”