

Has America Past Itz Zenith?

Seniors

If there be such a thing as a national American religion, its grandest festival is Thanksgiving Day. On this day, Americans of all faiths join together in expressing their appreciation of the gifts of life. We would be less than wise at this Thanksgiving season, if we did not also give thanks for the unusual blessings which are ours by virtue of the fact that we live in America. We would be wise also to give thought to ways and means through which we might perpetuate the wonders of our country.

The Russians would have us believe that nothing we can do will preserve America as it now exists, for they insist that America has past its zenith, that its sun is setting and not rising. To demonstrate their point, the Russians present a host of figures. These statistics show that while America is still the most highly productive nation in the world, industrially speaking, its rate of progress is far behind the rate of progress of the Soviet Union. The Russians tell us that their sphere of influence is extending over an increasing number of nations, while our sphere is declining. They point out that while we were supposed to have the most advanced science in the world, they were able to put the first man-made moon into the sky. All of these statistics shouted round the world make up the Russian case that their star is in the ascendancy and our star is fading.

It is discomfiting also to learn that the two most popular of recent historical philosophers both think that the Western world, of which America is the capital, is going downhill. These historians, Spengler and Toynbee, starting with different premises, arrive at the same conclusion. They contend that just as the glory of Greece and the splendor of Rome died out, so the power of the west is on the decline, and new forces must inevitably come into a position of dominance.

According to Toynbee, whose voluminous works have ~~filled the pages~~ been read eagerly by millions of Americans in recent years, America now has reached the stage where the minority class which dominates it is steadily losing its creativity and its courage. Toynbee, let us not be mistaken, is not Marxist; when he speaks of the dominant minority class, he means that self-conscious group which takes pride in its country and though its intellectual leadership, guides the country to greater or less success.

This thesis was treated in some detail by Elmer Davis, the noted radio commentator, in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, "But We Were Born Free". Mr. Davis wrote ^{at that} at the time when the late Senator McCarthy had about one out of every two American hood-winked. At that time, it seemed all too likely that history was about to make a prophet out of Toynbee. Short years ago, during the McCarthy period, America was sitting in a rocket plummeting earthward. ~~The question for us to consider, is whether the factors which built up McCarthy still exist in such strength that we might reasonably expect another such battle in the near future, and the other side of the coin is the question put to us by Dr. Toynbee, has the dominant minority in America lost its creativity, and its ability to steer America through troubled waters.~~

we were able to pull out of that position, but according to Dr. Toynbee that was just one of a series of crises which we must expect in increasing violence as we continue our decline

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By way of considering ~~these~~ questions, I read over several books in recent days. One of them was the book by Mr. Davis, "But We Were Born Free", I turned also to the study of the factors behind the birth of America, and so I ^{reviewed} read, "The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson" by John Dewey, and "The Course of American Democratic Thought" by Christine Gabriel. According to Miss Gabriel, there were three factors underlying the development of the early American democratic faith: First there was the belief in a supernatural moral order which had its basis in God; Secondly, there was the belief in the ability of the free individual to progress and a distrust of ~~the~~ large national government; thirdly there was a faith in America's mission to spread the democratic notion to the world. As I reviewed these three factors I was impressed with their similarity to the factors underlying the development of early Israel. It was the Hebrews who first taught the world that there was a moral order to which all men were subject. They called this moral order, Torah, which means divine law. Secondly the Hebrews ^{contended} taught that if men were taught the Torah, they were capable of obeying it, and ^{capable of} altering their evil ways. To them, man was not to be the slave of the ruling government. Finally, the Hebrews taught that it was the mission of the Jews to be an oir l'goyim, a light unto the nations, spreading the teachings of God's moral order. The direct comparison with the factors underlying the development of America's democratic faith, cannot be accidental. Early Americans sought to project the Hebraic doctrines of Torah, freedom of the individual, and Oir L'goyim, or mission to all the nations.

human law

It is a wise people which periodically examines its actions to determine its current motivations and its ^{current} goals. We first ask ourselves whether today America has the same dedication to Torah which it once had. The concept of a divine moral order implies that all men, yea all political parties, all corporations, and all nations are subject to the requirements of the general good. It is difficult to think, as we review the battle between the Sp and US, that either of these nations has thought much about the general good. Internally, a former member of the administration's cabinet has said, what is good for General Motors is good for America, implying that GM is the chosen corporation upon which must be conveyed special favors in order that the rest of us might benefit secondarily. On the other hand, the head of our administration has publicly stated, American foreign policy is governed solely by what is good for America. Statements like these have rankled in the breast of the UN representatives of the smaller nations who are trying to keep the two giants from destroying the world. Even if we argue that these statements are realistically valid, and I am not one to agree with this view, then we must admit that America has abandoned one of the articles of faith which undergirded its emergence into the world as the new hope 175 years ago.

NOTE: it is a selfish definition of good which now dominates the American Party

It is certainly true that we have come a long way from the Jeffersonian principle, echoed by Emerson, that the best government is the least. The freedom of the individual has been increasingly threatened by the ^{extension of the power of government} organization of legislative committees like the McCarthy committee and the Johns Committee in Florida which have sponsored witch hunts and mistrust among neighbors. Mr. Davis points out in his book that the growing power of Congress, and particularly of congressional investigatory committees, is the most serious of threats to our system of checks and balances. Mr. Davis contends that the failure of the Chief Executive to balance the growth of congressional power, the failure of the President to lead and chart a course, has made for a growing confusion in the national scene. Personal freedom in America has been increasingly

extension of the power of government

political on the economic scene

threatened by the decline in small businesses and the increasing power of a few large businesses. Far more than 2/3 of the industrial wealth of our nation is controlled by 10% of our corporations. The result is that more and more independent businessmen are giving up and becoming wage earners; more and more farmers are surrendering to corporations with large capital. To compensate for the growth in corporate power labor unions are growing every more powerful, and strikes occur which may benefit the particular group of wage earners, but which harm large sections of the public. In the conflict of the giants, large corporations and large unions, the freedom of the individual is endangered.

This then is the picture of our country and our age. Internally, ^{within the U.S. political} the individual is squeezed between the battle of huge economic forces, and externally, in the foreign scene, he is forgotten as the huge giants battle for control of the world. We have yet to consider the third factor which made for America's early democratic faith, and that was her sense of mission. Today, America's Secretary of State speaks of mission, but seemingly he speaks a language that no foreign nation understands. He has succeeded in making enemies not only of the communist bloc of nations, but of the free nations as well. He has angered not only Israel but also Egypt. He disturbs not only China but also India. His name in France and England is a symbol for vain self-righteousness. In view of his universal reputation, it would perhaps be fair to say that the world no longer looks to America as the force to be imitated. The enormous good-will in America that Wendell Wilkie saw in his trip around the world has somehow ended up in the throwing of rotten eggs and cabbages ~~leaves~~ at the Vice-President of the U.S.

These are the facts on the American scene, a decreasing respect for the moral order; an growing threat from big corporations and big labor unions; and ~~an empty~~ ^{to individual freedom} the substitution of vain propaganda for a high sense of mission. ^{of moralizing committee} Do all of these things add up to the conclusion that Dr. Toynbee predicts? Is the dominant class in America bankrupt in the creative sense? Can we not have a new birth of freedom in America? ^{impossible}

I am essentially an optimist. My Judaism and my Americanism make it impossible for me to surrender to the inevitability of evil. I believe that America yet has tremendous well-springs of democratic faith, and that she can yet turn the tide which seems to be over-taking her. The victory of the Democrats in the recent elections does not necessarily mean that the tide is turning. It seems to me that these issues go deeper than the conflict between political parties. The Democratic party has its own Dulles, ^{more like} and Nixons, and Eisenhowers. What we must work towards is a re-newal of understanding in America's meaning to the world. ^{concentration out along the line - in pol. parties, in corporations, in labor unions}

In this thanksgiving season, we must give thanks that we still have the opportunity to save ourselves and the world from a period of moral decline. In the year ahead let each of us ^{eliminate} watch TV a little less and ^{read} read the annals of Jefferson a little more. Let us go to the races and jai-lai and to the Orange Bowl a little less, and less us read more of Hamilton and Emerson. Let us think less of Mansfield's measurements and more of the political box-score. Above all let us not be self-conscious returning to the sources from whence Washington and Jefferson drew their inspiration. Let us gather together more and more often to commune with Moses and with Jeremiah, with Isaiah and with Micah, to the end that we might become the leaders in that minority, which shall save America and perchance the world. ^{small but distinct group}