

“‘Citizenship and Virtue’ Are Requirements for Maintaining Liberty”

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“Bad men cannot make good citizens. It is when a people forget God that tyrants forge their chains. A vitiated state of morals, a corrupted public conscience, is incompatible with freedom. No free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue; and by a frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.”

--Patrick Henry, First Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia and Founding Father

Introduction

Freedom and democracy are inextricably linked because they can only exist in the state of liberty, “the idea that will, not force, is the basis of government, and the value of Justice [*sic.*], or the idea that right, not might, is the basis of all political society and of every system of political order.”¹ To live in an organized society in the state of liberty requires individuals to show restraint and adhere to a certain level of behavior that cannot be legislated. In other words, democracy creates a tension between order and disorder. Democracy can be difficult to define, and it can be chaotic, in part, because it composed of a community of free people that are imperfect, each having and voicing a unique opinion. To live in a democracy requires people to see each other not as adversaries or competitors, but as neighbors. Thus, citizens of a democracy are not required by law or obligated to like or love one another; if that were a natural state, Jesus Christ would not have had to command “Thou shalt love thy neighbour [*sic.*] as thyself.”²

The United States of America is the most enduring democratic republic in the history of the world. The American republic derives its structure through the Constitution of the United States of America, a document that is the oldest written and codified constitution in continuous use in history.³ The Constitution lays out, with what Supreme Court Justice William Patterson (1793-1806) called “exactitude and precision,” a form, structure, and limits of a government.⁴ As a result of their experience with the King of England, the Founding Fathers were suspicious of the power a government could have over a country’s citizens, however, they recognized the need for “order.” Thus, after the Constitution was adopted in 1788, over the next two centuries it has been amended twenty-seven times to make the union “more perfect.” The first ten amendments are known as the Bill of Rights and protect the country’s citizens from the encroachment of their government.⁵ The document is anchored in accepted morals and virtues that inform modern or western political theory. Adlai Stevenson, United States Ambassador to the United Nations (1961-1965) and one-time presidential candidate once said, “America is much more than a geographical fact. It is a political and moral fact — the first community in which men set out in principle to institutionalize freedom, responsible government, and human equality.”⁶ The Constitution is not perfect despite being called “the most perfect document in existence” by the French Nobleman-turned American Patriot, Marie-Joseph Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette.⁷ And, it has been tested continuously since its ratification in 1789, with some challenges more profound than others, yet it endures.

Abraham Lincoln, echoing the vision of the Founders before he became president of the United States, established the notion that America could never be destroyed by a threat from

¹ Barker, p. viii.

² Matthew 22:39, *Holy Bible*-King James Version.

³ Colley, p. 124.

⁴ Hickox and Laviano, p. 58.

⁵ Myerson, p. 100.

⁶ Stevenson, Adlai E., “A New America.” 17 August 1956.

⁷ Unger, p. 368.

the outside the nation's borders, but acknowledged if the nation was to falter, it would because it was destroyed from within.⁸ A century later another president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, said more succinctly, "Only Americans can hurt America."⁹ Through the course of almost two-and-a-half centuries, the nation has experienced threats from both external and internal forces, each leaving a unique and profound scar on the American political mosaic. With little doubt, the United States has the means to confront almost any external menace. However, because of the very liberty guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and enjoyed by all citizens, internal threats seem to have increasingly come to the forefront in the recent years as the American government itself has overreached and movements of one sort or another have reacted and overreacted. Some of these internal threats have led some to question the nation's ability to survive.

In the United States today, as a society, people increasingly exhibit a willful failure to engage, and seemingly have lost the ability to discuss and disagree, with one another in a civil manner. Many have strayed from acceptable norms of decency and embraced inflammatory actions and ideas, adopted extreme positions, and outright hatred for differing views. These emotions are further stoked by pandering political candidates in hopes of strengthening their positions with their supporters. The "we are in this together" seems to have disappeared and the general disregard for the betterment of the whole seems to permeate present reality. The political philosopher Edmund Burke explained that in a real world, people must deal with it as they confront its reality.¹⁰ Today's reality is that the concept of citizenship based on virtue has been lost. The people of the United States must have as "American Revival" that emphasizes "Citizenship and Virtue" because citizenship and virtue are essential elements for governing, being governed, maintaining liberty, and ensuring the very freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

In the study of western political thought, politics, and public policy, all definitions of citizenship or membership of the community and virtue—a particular moral standard or a "special type of goodness"—span centuries and are rooted in the thoughts and beliefs of the ancient Greek philosophers. The Greeks all seemed to agree with the notion that election of their leaders should be by the people and that the attainment of justice and virtue should be the goals of the state. Later, as the monotheistic religions emerged and gained followers, particularly Christianity, the Christian philosophers became engaged in the discussion of political theory and built their ideas on the foundations of Hellenic thought.

The Ancient Greeks

To the ancient Greeks, the "polis"—the city-state—was "the" community structure and to live outside of the "polis" was to be considered uncivilized or to live as an animal.¹¹ In the polis, the concepts of citizenship and virtue were intertwined so tightly that one could almost

⁸ Abraham Lincoln Lyceum Address.

⁹ Eisenhower, speech library dedication, 1962.

¹⁰ Burke, Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies.

¹¹ Downey, p. 21.

not exist without the other. Generally, the Greeks viewed morals, virtues, and justice to all be necessary in politics, election of their leaders, and the needs of humanity for the “common good.” Further, the Greeks viewed thought, contemplation, and philosophy as the most important human activities in the pursuit of the life of virtue. Numerous ancient Greek philosophers contributed to political thought, perhaps, the most important were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. All were from Athens, where democratic politics represented intellectual acuity of the highest order and each played a distinctive part in shaping political philosophy.

Socrates

Socrates (c. 499-369 BC) has been revered throughout the centuries for his contributions that formed the foundation of political thought.¹² He professed that the social and political condition was a response to the inefficiency of man as a solitary being, along with man’s desire to fulfill material wants, the physical desires that could not be provided adequately by himself. Socrates believed that virtue could be developed in a person through the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge.¹³ He believed that virtue was an essential element for happiness and was the most crucial attribute a person should have for their life to be fulfilled and meaningful, in short it was impossible to have one without the other.¹⁴ Thus, for Socrates, virtue and knowledge were of much greater value than material wants or pleasures. The Socratic beliefs would permeate throughout the centuries, particularly advanced by his most well-known student, Plato.

Plato

Plato (c. 428–347 BC) came to be recognized as one of the most important political thinkers and is considered by many as the “master moral philosopher.” He provided moral descriptions of both individual and the individual’s social realities. He explained the realization and frustration of human moral and political development. The publication of his *Republic* or *Politeia* defines the ideal society as one that is virtuous, where each person can reach their full potential. Plato taught that if a person understood virtue, they would conduct themselves accordingly.¹⁵ In the *Republic*, Plato used the “Allegory of the Cave” to explain how to overcome superficiality and materialism.¹⁶ He suggested that justice depended on a group of humans capable of compelling physical obedience and peace, both elements required by democracy. Plato’s ideas, theories, and philosophy were expanded by his successors, most notably by his student, Aristotle.

¹² Johnson, p. 728.

¹³ Johnson, p. 730.

¹⁴ Johnson, p. 729.

¹⁵ Wilson, p. 53.

¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*.

Aristotle

Aristotle (384-322 BC) believed that the knowledge of universal principles could be drawn from examples found in nature. Socratic-like in his beliefs, he suggested that the foundation to human happiness was to have “just enough” of everything; both having too little and too much of anything was abusive and led to unhappiness. However, happiness does not consist solely in acquisition; rather, one needs enough to have time for contemplation. Aristotle developed his theories of politics in a systematic and logical progression of situations, small to large; simplicity to complexity. For example, in the beginning Aristotle contemplated the life of a sole individual in complete isolation. The solitary being lives a difficult life which is unsustainable because alone longevity of humanity cannot be provided, particularly procreation and social interaction. Next, he considered the nuclear family, the scenario which provides for a simple form of rule between parents and children. However, to achieve a fully human life, that same nuclear family is not sufficient. After several generations, multiple generations of the same nuclear family form the basis of a tribe. The tribe provides for most of the physical needs since there can be a greater division of labor in the tribe than the nuclear family as people. Aristotle noticed the existence of a larger form of human social organization beyond that of the tribe which came to be known as “the polis,” the place where all of humanity’s individual and social needs can be realized.

While Plato attempted to define “the best city,” Aristotle postulated that participation in the civic arena was an essential element of citizenship and was defined by deeds instead of birth status, in other words lineage or royalty. In order to rule the polis a person should exhibit “excellent reason and character.” Paula Gottlieb, Professor of Philosophy and Affiliate Professor of Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Wisconsin, wrote, “The virtuous person not only knows what the good thing to do is, she is also emotionally attached to it.”¹⁷

In short, “the Greeks had viewed reason as the source of practical wisdom—the virtuous life was, for them, inseparable from the life of reason.”¹⁸ The community was viewed as a complex organism composed of many, however, the success of the whole depended on the adherence to virtue for both citizens and elected leaders. Their beliefs, ideas, and thoughts would have a lasting influence on future political thought and philosophers.

The Christian Philosophers

Hundreds of years later, the Christian political philosophers built on Hellenic thoughts, traditions, and philosophy to explain the quest for knowledge and began have greater influence as they introduced different ideas concerning citizenship and virtue. Among these ideas was the belief that God ruled and obedience was mandated by a set of commandments which led to “righteous living.” In other words, they tried to define the traits of a virtuous person. Perhaps,

¹⁷ Grönroos

¹⁸ Rachels. P. 175.

the most important early Christian political philosopher to explore these questions was St. Augustine of Hippo.

St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.) became the most important early Christian political philosopher to explore the questions surrounding human nature and citizenship. Lacking an early religious foundation, he set upon to explore the world of his time. Augustine’s beliefs were shaped through his life as a “restless soul.” Augustine searched for the meaning and purpose of life trying different conventional and unconventional lifestyles until he found peace in Christianity. Ultimately, Augustine came to believe that man was created “good and free,” however, that freedom was only maintained when “not caught up by various sinful desires.”¹⁹

In his attempt to explain virtuous living, Augustine wrote the *City of God* and proposed that the entirety of human history could be understood on the basis of two temporal cities: the City of Man and the City of God. The City of Man is the materially minded city of the greedy and fleshly-minded people disobedient to their creator. The City of God is the kingdom of the virtuous, those who acknowledge and worship their creator. Both cities exist side by side in the spacial world, but the earthly city will be destroyed in the final judgment of the world and the City of God will continue as the home of everlasting blessedness of God. Bradley G. Green, Professor of Theological Studies at Union University, wrote, “For Augustine, knowing what we ought to do is not enough. We must delight in doing what we ought to do.”²⁰ Seemingly, Thomas Aquinas picked up Augustine’s themes.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 A.D.) was born a nobleman and later became a Dominican friar, relinquishing all forms of material wealth. Aquinas came to represent for the medieval Christian world the same role that Aristotle did for the Greek civilization, the greatest philosophical synthesizer of ideas of their time. For Aquinas, like Aristotle, the best organized society is one that makes it easy to be virtuous. In this context, achieving happiness required adherence to certain virtues. He defined virtue is a habit that “disposes an agent to perform its proper operation or movement.”²¹ Aquinas’ political theory can be found in his *The Summa Theologiae*, perhaps, his most important work. His three ideas of authority were, (1) the essential substance of authority is ordained from God; (2) a constitutional form is ordained by the people; and (3) enjoyment is conferred and can be withdrawn by the people.²²

¹⁹ Green, p. 69.

²⁰ Green, p.69.

²¹ Aquinas, *ST Iallae* 49.1.

²² *Summa Theologiae*.

Virtue and Citizenship

For thousands of years, the ancient philosophers and leaders of the monotheistic religions have postulated on the correct traits of good character or defining the correct course of action that should be taken. The common theme for all is that “the virtues,” morals, goodness, uprightness, and ethics were the central point of good character in a person. They understood and believed that without virtue, life took on a characteristic that was less than meaningful and lacked happiness. If life were less meaningful, therefore devoid of happiness, the whole community failed. In short, the ancient Greek and Christian philosophers seemed to be asking the same question: “what traits of character make a good person?”²³ Thomas Hurka, Canadian Philosopher and Jackman Distinguished Chair at the University of Toronto, defined virtues as, “a disposition to produce what is otherwise good or to do what is otherwise right.”²⁴ However, knowing virtue was not enough, for example, Plato thought that if a person understood virtue, they would conduct themselves accordingly. And, Augustine believed people should “delight in being virtuous.”²⁵

The classical thinkers and their Christian devotees held that persons can only be truly happy when they seek and practice virtue. Harmonious states result when most citizens are practicing virtue. The intersection of virtue and citizenship came together beginning with Aristotle when he conceived the theory of the good human life and concept of “virtuous citizenship.”²⁶ The ideal citizen is the member of the community capable ruling and being ruled by its own constitutional form. A good or just city is one with a constitution that promotes virtue in its citizens much like a set of commandments promotes proper behavior in a religious order. When the balance is lost, unrest ensues, and revolutions result, for example: democratic revolutions because of unrestrained liberty or anarchy. Oligarchies can cause these revolutions when the rich exclude the poor from a reasonable political participation, for example the American Revolution (1776-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1794).

There are many virtues, among them civility, compassion, moderation, cooperativeness, self-control, and tolerance. These stand in stark contrast to incivility, cruelty, polarization, opposition, unruliness, and intolerance. The virtues of a person can be dependent on relevancy to a particular subject. Edward L. Pincoffs, philosopher and professor at the University of Texas defined virtue as “a trait of character, manifested in habitual action, that is good for a person to have.”²⁷ Thus, virtue is the foundation upon which morals are placed, for example, “liberty without virtue is no liberty at all.” James W. Rachels, a contemporary American philosopher, wrote, “The major virtues are mandated not by social convention but by basic facts about our common human condition.”²⁸

²³ Rachels, p. 175.

²⁴ Hurka, p. 3.

²⁵ Green, p. 171.

²⁶ Develin, p. 79.

²⁷ Rachels, p. 178.

²⁸ Rachels, p. 187.

The wisdom of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle was the basis of Christian political thought. The Christian political thinkers continued to speak in the terms and messaging as the Greeks on political theory. The synthesis was the immediate ancestor of the modern period of political thought and combined these finely sifted ideas formed the western political thought of John Locke, Edmund Burke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and others which had a lasting impact on western democracy and ultimately the Framers of the Constitution of the United States of America.

The Intersection of Virtue and Citizenship in the American Context

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”²⁹

-The Declaration of Independence, 1776

The United States of America was a regime built on a foundation of equality and freedom to pursue happiness. That happiness, as the ancient Greek and Christian philosophers postulated had to be rooted in goodness, as Augustine believed, “Knowing what we ought to do is not enough. We must delight in doing what we ought to do.”³⁰ Absolute freedom of thought and action, sinful desires, would lead to chaos, therefore, the Founding Fathers decided to form a structure for the new nation. James Madison, commonly referred to as the “Architect of the Constitution, philosophically wrote, “If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controuls [sic.] on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”³¹

The Framers of the Constitution of the United States of America understood, based on their experience as British subjects—subjected to the reign of George III—that a government should derive its powers from a set of laws rather than by the whims men. Aristotelian in nature, they viewed the essential element of citizenship was defined by deeds and not by birth status. They were certain that a free society of honorable people required the rejection of nobility; clearly, the experience that a king was endowed by God repulsed them. They believed that a codified constitution—a government of laws, not men—much like the monotheistic religions were framed by commandments should be established. Those laws should be managed calmly and in a systematic manner. While most of the Framers were men of deep faith, the Framers, Aquinas-like, believed that the essential authority ordained from God lay in the rule of law. Thomas Paine wrote in *Common Sense* in 1776, “But where some say, is the King of America...In America the Law is King.”³² Thus, the new nation would be based on laws

²⁹ *Declaration of Independence.*

³⁰ Green, p. 69.

³¹ *Federalist No. 51.*

³² Paine, *Common Sense.*

that guaranteed certain freedoms. Wilson wrote, "The natural and sacred rights of man should be defended and ordained from a theistic vision of a moral cultural and political order."³³

The uniqueness of the United States Constitution lay in several ideas, primarily in the separation of powers of the government, particularly the Executive Branch and its rejection of nobility.³⁴ In the British system, all department heads come from the Members of Parliament (MPs). Madison writing as Brutus concerning the separation of powers in *Federalist No. 47* stated, "The accumulation of powers, legislative, executive and judicial in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may just be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."³⁵ And, later in *Federalist No. 51* stated, "No single individual or group, however selected or monitored, can be entrusted with the authority to write laws, enforce them, and then decide on guilt or innocence of the accused."³⁶ Michael I. Myerson, Professor of Law at the University of Baltimore and author of *Liberty's Blueprint*, wrote, "One aim of the Constitution was indeed, according to Madison, 'to obtain for rulers, men who possess most wisdom to discern and most virtue to pursue the common good of the society.'³⁷

What the Framers seemed to be saying was what the political philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) asked, "What is liberty without wisdom and without virtue?"³⁸ All people residing in a democracy do not need to agree on everything and have the right to disagree, but all should be motivated to participate in the political process; to listen to one another; contemplate opposing points of view; and draw informed conclusions. Each citizen should accept one another, regardless of opinion or ideology whether they agree or disagree politically. In short, "delight" in practicing civility. An examination of the tone of political conversation in the United States today, displays a fraying of civility, as people have strayed from the virtues that the Greeks believed were inseparable from a life of reason and informed citizenship.

Virtue and Citizenship Today

*"This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in."*³⁹

-Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States of America (1901-1909)

The majority of Americans have the unwavering, "deep-in-their-soul" belief that the United States of America is an exceptional place; the very best country the world has ever known; the brightest beacon for humanity; the proverbial "Shining City on a Hill" despite her admitted imperfections. The nation is the antithesis to what Sigmund Freud believed America

³³ Wilson, p. 12.

³⁴ Myerson, p. 176.

³⁵ *Federalist No. 47*.

³⁶ *Federalist No. 51*.

³⁷ Myerson, p. 177?.

³⁸³⁸ Burke, p. 183.

³⁹ Roosevelt p.63

to be, “a mistake; a gigantic mistake...none the less a mistake.”⁴⁰ It seems every generation has some call to restore the faith in the “whole.” It is only natural in a democracy, which is not necessarily guided by some tortured dogma, that liberty and democracy are fragile. Reasonable people can disagree, but reasonable people cannot evade responsibility of citizenship. Lincoln once said, “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”⁴¹

Many of the virtues overlap one another, for example, moderation, self-discipline, self-control, and temperance seem to indicate similar states. Today, many citizens at all levels of American society lack self-control and/or temperance in their words, actions, and deeds. Rather than take on a discussion of ideas and attempt to understand opposing views, it has become the norm to become critical of the opposing position and to criticize and obstruct. At times this behavior becomes confrontational, and can lead to violence. William J. Bennett, former Director of the National Humanities Institute, wrote, “There is much unhappiness and personal distress in the world because of failures to control tempers, appetites, passions, and impulses.”⁴² The failure to control passions is linked specifically to the virtues of moderation, tolerance, and compassion.

The loss of “moderation” which can also be defined as the lack of restraint permeates American politics. In failing to moderate political discourse, the ability for citizen interaction is impaired, preventing the government to function correctly for all. Madison warned in *Federalist No. 10*, “So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions, and excite their most violent conflicts.”⁴³ Madison and the other Framers were afraid of “the mob” or what could transpire when citizens became overtly agitated and inflamed by incomplete or erroneous information resulting in the lack of “self-control” to seek and understand the complete truth on an issue.

Too often, politicians use bombastic and extreme language when disagreement arises instead of acting in the interests of American ideals. Aristotle wrote about the “golden mean,” “But as a practical matter, we must sometimes aim a bit toward excess and sometimes toward deficiency, because this will be the easiest way of hitting the mean, that is, what is right.”⁴⁴ Leadership requires restraint in both word and action. Elected leaders should be self-compelled to take responsibility for their words and actions and not to shift responsibilities or the blame to others for their failures. Wilson wrote, “Governors must learn the state cannot be neutral in the face of social revolution; that there is no absolution like popular despotism run riot, and no tyranny like the demonic passion of so-called groups of “common men” convinced of the necessity of killing their fellows.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Koelsch, p.128.

⁴¹ Lincoln letter to Stanton.

⁴² Bennett, p. 21.

⁴³ Bennett, p. 739.

⁴⁴ Bennett, p. 102.

⁴⁵ Wilson, p. 86.

Tolerance is required in a democracy because it is composed of free people that are imperfect. Each individual has a unique point of view and belief on the way “things ought to be.” Perhaps, tolerance was not necessary for Socrates’ selfish and material-minded solitary being, but for a community composed of many, the that lack of tolerance becomes chaos, what the Founding Father Alexander Hamilton called “anarchy and convulsion.”⁴⁶ Augustine believed that all should delight in what they ought to do, therefore, citizens should engage in tolerance of each other. Francis Graham Wilson, political philosopher and professor at the University of Illinois, wrote, “what the defenders of democracy must have is a firm assurance of the dignity of man, and such assurance can be found only in some interpretation of human nature.”⁴⁷ Dignity, simply stated being of value or worthy of citizenship.

Today, there is a seeming loss of compassion in the United States intertwined with the lack of moderation and tolerance. Bennett wrote, “Compassion is a virtue that takes seriously the reality of other persons, their inner lives, their emotions, as well as their external circumstances. It is an active disposition towards fellowship and sharing toward supportive companionship in distress or in woe.”⁴⁸ The myriad of problems facing today’s realities of illegal immigration, gun violence, illegal drugs, hunger, and more are exacerbated by the loss or complete disregard of compassion, “the reality of other persons, their inner lives, external circumstances.” The *Holy Bible*, in one of many places, speaks to compassion in Ephesians 4:32, “And, ye be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving of one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”⁴⁹ The centrality of the problems the nation faces lie in Augustine’s City of Man where the materially minded and greedy disobediently live and eschew the City of God, “the Kingdom of the Virtuous.”

American Revival: Citizenship and Virtue

“We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

--Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America

When the Constitutional Convention was assembled in 1787, the Framers of the Constitution were seeking solutions for the dysfunctional; Articles of Confederation that had been proposed in 1777 and ratified in 1781. Once the yoke of Great Britain was removed, the Framers were concerned that the eight-year Revolutionary War had been fought in vain and were determined to produce an enduring form of government for the newly freed people. They were acutely aware that democracies of the past had failed and realized the binding agent that would have to hold this new nation together was more than rules or regulations could, in one word it would be “virtue.” Madison, believed without virtue “nothing less than the chains of

⁴⁶ Myerson, p. 177.

⁴⁷ Wilson, p. 24.

⁴⁸ Bennett, p. 105.

⁴⁹ Ephesians 4:32, *Holy Bible*-King James Version.

despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the Founders brought forth a new nation “conceived in liberty” and the propositions that “all men are created equal” and that government would function with “the consent of the governed.” This concept was the “mindspring of unprecedented human progress” for people around the globe. Little could the Founders have known the profound mark they would leave on the world for the past three centuries.

The United States of America’s exceptionalism comes, in part, because its guiding principles are enshrined in its “far from perfect” written constitution. At the heart of all of the problems the nation faces, what some call today, moral decay, is “the loss of the presumption of good intent,” in other words, Augustine’s delight in doing what is correct. Aristotle believed that all citizens have a great deal in common, despite their differences.⁵¹ In the twenty-first century, the nation has been caught in a time of increased polarization, where fanatics on the extremes of the political spectrum driven by normative agendas have contributed to the disruption of normal political order. The center of the political spectrum has been pulled to the left or right through the prostitution of the truth, demonization of opposing views, resulting in increased polarization, and damaging accepted norms. The notion that well-intentioned Americans do what they think is best has been lost. Wilson wrote, “Without moral order, loyalty to the community can hardly be demanded either of intellectuals or ordinary citizens, tradition fades and treason can become a way of life.”⁵² Perhaps, the words of 2 Timothy 2:16 are most appropriate of the times, “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”⁵³ Meaning a person cannot recognize or handle the truth correctly unless they stay away from spiritual battles or disputes with the false teachers, who are most likely focused on ideas that are shallow and unspiritual.

To continue to strive to be a “more perfect union,” maintain the freedom—the liberty—that has been enjoyed for almost two-and-a-half centuries, citizens must return to and embrace virtue. However, more importantly, people must “understand virtue” and learn that of civility, compassion, moderation, cooperativeness, self-control, justice, and tolerance is stronger and more beneficial than polarization, hatred, silence, and division. That does not mean that there should not be vigorous debate or disagreement, but it does mean “all are in this together for better or worse” and all are a part of the American mosaic. Further, all should remember, that after all the votes are counted this is still one nation under God, indivisible.

As a nation, to maintain liberty, citizens must have, as Patrick Henry said and recorded in Section 15 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, “a frequent recurrence of fundamental principles.”⁵⁴ The fundamental principles of liberty are rooted in virtue, because liberty devoid of such cannot be maintained. As a people, and from the public policy perspective, Americans must have the difficult discussions on guns, entitlements, immigration, and a myriad of other

⁵⁰ Meyerson, p. 176.

⁵¹ Rachels. P. 186

⁵² Wilson, p. 144.

⁵³ 2 Timothy 2:16, *Holy Bible*-King James Version.

⁵⁴ The Virginia Declaration, Section 15.

issues. America will remain that “beacon on a hill” as long as the nation has the Constitution to serve as its guiding principles. If not, Prophet Isaiah (59: 1-4) informs:

¹ Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: ² But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. ³ For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. ⁴ None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.⁵⁵

Certainly, no single person has all of the answers, perhaps, no single person has any of them. Former Vice President Mike Pence said, “As you stand for your values do so with gentleness and respect—that’s how we move our country forward.”⁵⁶ For some time now, the Republic has been fraying, the sense of community cracking, and if the United States of America is to be preserved for future centuries, its citizens MUST engage with one another in a civil manner, discuss issues, consider alternatives, understand one another, elect people that Aristotle called of “excellent reason and character,” and embrace the virtues they seem to have forgotten about. The conservative columnist Peggy Noonan, wrote, “...we have much to do. And, it all starts with a greater civility, a greater respect, both a higher—and deeper—tone to our political conversation.”⁵⁷ Virtue and liberty must together always be in harmony with one another because when they do, citizenship always blooms and flourishes.

⁵⁵ Isaiah 59: 1-4, *Holy Bible*-King James Version.

⁵⁶ Mike Pence, University of Virginia, April 12, 2022.

⁵⁷ Noonan, p. 190.

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