
American Freedom Needs Religions in Harmony

by

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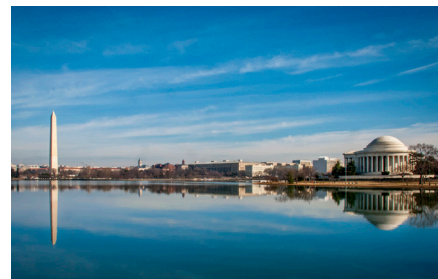
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Decades of slow but deliberate, negative change in American social thought has reached full blossom, now threatening the providence and beauty of American life. We are at a critical moment, near a point of no return. Rescue from this danger is tied to a correct grasp of an often reviled notion, “American exceptionalism.” American exceptionalism is not, as careless opponents propose, a claim of superiority. These social ideals of a free and sovereign people are sufficient to allow any people in any culture to prosper and excel. These same conditions would eventually result in all people to be exceptional. The core blend of civil and religious freedom could just as certainly create Cuban exceptionalism, or Ghanaian exceptionalism. Recovery from the current dark attack on America’s founding and divinely ensured social contract can begin only with affirming the universal principles embodied in America’s founding design, expressed in its seminal documents. This book explains the relationship between two intertwined philosophical and spiritual energies that birthed America’s blessings. The current patriotic response to the 2020 insurgencies in Left run plans and strongholds will not succeed absent cooperation among the wide spectrum faith communities that help America be a place of blessing and opportunity.



Renowned New England Patriots football coach Bill Belichick has a mantra he inculcates to his players. It is simply this, “Know the situation.” He preaches this incessantly as a key to victory. Know the situation. What point is it in the game? What is the score? What down is it? What formation are you facing? What has your opponent done in similar situations? The list of checkpoints goes on. Football is a game of inches and of split-second decisions and the more a player and team, “know the situation,” the more likely they will make the kinds of plays that will result in victory. In a real sense, to know the situation is a practice that is applicable to more than just football. In fact, as we have entered into what appears to be a most chaotic and volatile era in the history of our nation, it would behoove us at this juncture to take Belichick’s advice and to know the situation that America is facing.

When Barack Obama was elected President, he promised to “transform” the United States of America. What did Obama mean by “transform?” Transform America from what and to what? In that Joe Biden appears to be the third term of Obama, the question is newly pertinent.

America has been in the process of transforming long before the election of Obama. This process of transformation has been the hidden dimension within, not just politics, but the entire culture of America since, at least, the late 19th century. So what, presently, is our “situation?” We have gradually been losing the essential dynamics that produce freedom in this historical process of transformation and our subsequent loss of freedom has reached a most critical stage. In fact, we are near to the point of no return.

America’s Founding Notion of Freedom was Exceptional

As stated in our introduction, most are familiar with the term, “American Exceptionalism,” yet a much smaller number understand what the term actually means. The Left, of course, hates the notion outright and deems it to be just another example of American chauvinism. The infamous 1619 Project is the Left’s concerted effort to destroy the notion, once and for all.



America today has journeyed far afield from its founding ideals and, as a result, is giving the world mixed signals about the meaning and proper exercise of freedom. It appears that, whereas, on the one hand, America continues to be a hope for the ideal of freedom, on the other hand we appear, by our own exercise of freedom, resigned to a belief that moral corruption is an inevitable characteristic of a free society.

America: Civil and Religious Freedom

In this brief presentation, we want to highlight what are some of those features that have made America “exceptional.” As was said, it does not mean Americans are better than everyone else. It rather pertains to distinctive and unprecedented principles upon which America was founded. It is the “from what” we are leaving behind in the contrived need for the Left’s transformation of America. In a simple and brief statement, it is the American notion of the essential bond of civil and religious freedom that is the secret to America’s rise in the world over its brief history.

In his closing statement at the 2016 Presidential debate, Dr. Ben Carson put forth a very traditional American expression of the value of freedom.

“I’m very hopeful that I’m not the only one who wants to pick up the baton of freedom because ‘freedom is not free’ and we must fight for it every day. Every one of us must fight for it because we are fighting for our children and the next generation.”

But today, America is giving the world a confusing message about what it believes freedom to be. Is American freedom something rooted in universal spiritual principles or is America’s popular culture, promoted by Hollywood and characterized by self-indulgence the true meaning of freedom? Given this confusion, is the American Dream still possible in today’s America or is the decline of America inevitable?

At this most critical juncture in the history of America’s transformation, Americans themselves are increasingly confused about the way forward. One path leads toward life, liberty, and happiness while the other path surely leads to continued division and decline.

At such important moments in the life of a nation, it is vital that the people of conscience and faith step to the forefront. It is those people, contemplating the meaning and direction of the nation that should have the greatest influence. Elected officials are important as the representatives of “We The People” and must always be responsive to the expectations of their constituents. However, the true leaders of the nation are those who are responsive to the “founding spirit” of America, that is, the timeless ideals and principles upon which the nation was founded.

They are the ones who in time of crisis or national confusion lift high that shining torch that illuminates the path forward. They are not elected to serve at the behest of the people but are appointed by conscience and a timely vision. Leaders emerge in such moments and are the true movers of lasting hope and change.

There is another aspect to this present transformation controversy and it has been going on for quite some time, finding its root in the nineteenth century. It has to do with whether or not our founding documents, the Declaration and the Constitution, are still relevant in the modern era.

One view, sometimes referred to as “Originalism,” asserts that these two documents were relevant for all time and were not just compatible but were absolutely necessary to each other. The Declaration puts forth the principles of the nation and the Constitution, given those principles, described how government should then be organized by The People. The basis of those principles, in this view, was that it was the immutable Laws of Nature and of



Nature's God that demanded that a human ought to be treated justly and, thus, governance would be assessed as "just" in accordance with the extent to which it was mindful to that end.

But a counter-notion, sometimes referred to as the "Progressive" movement, emerged in the late nineteenth century and expanded its influence throughout the twentieth century until today. It was critical of the founding ideals, believing that the principles of the Declaration were not universal nor meant for all time. Likewise, they viewed the Constitution as unfettered from immutable principles. The basis of this view was the notion that historical experience, and the knowledge gained through experience, rather than immutable truths, should be the measure by which we understand the meaning of the Constitution in any contemporary age. In this view, the Constitution becomes fluid and thus flexible, that is, "living and breathing," to accommodate the morays of any contemporary age. It accepted the possibility that the Constitution could mean different things at different times to different people. For this reason, It is becoming increasingly imperative in "knowing the situation," to clarify what is vitally important, necessary, and distinct about America's founding vision and principles. Otherwise, we could easily cast aside what is precious and essential for just governance as we enter this new phase with the rapid pace of "transformation" that has been wrought upon us.

Human Dignity Transcends Government

The Declaration of Independence stated:

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them.

In 1776, the Declaration established a moral and legal justification for the action taken by the Colonies. It identified the higher legal authority that surpasses British authority. Thus, by "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" the Colonists declared a legal justification for severing ties with Britain and declaring British sovereignty over the Colonies null and void. Although relevant to the immediate circumstance of the Colonists, the Declaration was also stating that this legal standing was universal, an entitlement granted to all people as a manifestation of the immutable "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

This was a sea change and an essential component that made the founding of America "exceptional." Up until that moment, the authority of governance emanated from government itself, be it monarchs, claiming a "divine right" to rule, or other power elites ruling by intimidation and fear. In contrast, the Founders declared that the authority to govern was endowed, by the Creator, to each individual. Thus, no one was born with the "natural right" to rule over another, not even the king. It also meant that the only "just government" would be one that derived its powers by the consent of such people. All other forms were tyranny. For the first time in history, the power to govern came from outside government and from the very people who were to be governed. This is what was "exceptional."

There are other rights that flow from the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God. "Among these" are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. Most importantly, our rights are a gift from God. These rights, for all people, come not from government, not by an act of Congress or by the fiat of a king. Instead, our rights and liberties are intrinsic values that flow to us from our Creator.

All the powers of the earth had been served notice by this declaration. Never before in human history had a people, subjected to an earthly sovereignty, been able to declare that authority null and void by way of the implied separate and equal authority of a transcendent entitlement. It was a monumental confrontation between distinct definitions of the basis of human value.



All are Created Equal

The Founders, although greatly influenced by the many Enlightenment thinkers of the age, were most profoundly influenced by their religious faith. Especially influential were the implications of faith with regard to the notion of human equality. It was their faith that had informed them of what, uniquely, comprises a human being, grants value to human life and in what manner a human being ought to be treated and thus, be governed. They emphasized that humans were equal, not just by Natural Law, but were created equal as God had intended. We were not just equal, as the French “Declaration of the Rights of Man” asserted, but rather, our equality was a manifestation of the Creator’s purpose and aspirations in having created us. That is, our equal status was the outcome of the Creator’s love toward us in the same way a Parent perceives the uniqueness of each child but loves each one equally.

So, our “equality” was secured upon the highest transcendent plane and was constantly reaffirmed within the faith traditions of the people of America. It was revealed through the holy scriptures that humans were created “in the image of God” and the essential lesson derived from the narrative of Jesus was the knowledge that all were so loved by God, as to the same degree God loved his very own son. This affirmation of human value defined how one was to view, not only the value of self, but also the value of others. This discovery of human value bore a dramatic impact on the development of society.

For instance, the Pilgrim Fathers discovered in their faith experience that their value was of a much higher standard than what was being afforded them by British society. Their faith, “that God so loved” every human, elevated their social conscience and it caused them to set out from Britain to forge a new nation that would be consummate with their newfound faith and social conscience; a “shining city upon a high hill.” Philosopher Jean-Jacque Rousseau spoke of this phenomenon in his book, The Social Contract:

“There is a profession of faith which is purely civil. . . not strictly as religious dogmas but as expressions of social conscience without which it is impossible to be a good citizen”

This is what led to the cooperative relationship of civil and religious freedom that was observed and so intrigued Alexis de Tocqueville upon his visit to America in 1831. America’s unique founding was rooted in a delicate blending of a faith perspective with public virtue. All people, beyond tribe, nation or racial group, according to this perspective, were the children of God. As such, America was to be a nation where that ideal could emerge and the sentiment was later expressed in the Pledge of Allegiance affirmation of America as, “One Nation Under God.”

These Truths are “Self-Evident”

In the colonial era prior to the Revolution, America was structured in thirteen separate colonies, each one aligned with a particular version of a Christian religious faith. Eight of the thirteen colonies had established official State Churches. The social compact of each colony required that each individual remained in good standing with the particular religious doctrines and practices sanctioned by the State. That meant, one could lose their legal standing as a citizen if one did not believe “correctly.” This led to an era of widespread religious bigotry and oppression throughout the colonies. Puritan dissident Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams were forced into exile from the Massachusetts colony. Those of the Quaker faith were severely treated and some were even executed for their faith. In Virginia, Anglicans oppressed those of the Baptist faith and sought to regulate their religious practice. Thus, for the Founders, in order to form a cohesive nation, there was a dire need for a new social compact, one that could be widely embraced by all faiths. Without it, the Founders were certain the nation would soon be pulled apart along religious lines. It is for that very reason they turned to the notion of transcendent principles, “the Laws



of Nature and Nature's God," and described them as "self-evident" truths. This meant that, although affirming God's vital role as the author of these transcendent principles, they did not necessarily demand a religious faith, an ecclesiastic authority or particular dogma in order to perceive and adhere to the virtues they engendered. Jefferson felt that the existence of God and the resultant moral implications associated with God's existence could be commonly embraced as a reasonable, empirical observation. From these perceived "self-evident" truths, a basis of common values could be forged, the practice of good citizenship could be clearly defined. Thus, a national cohesion, while maintaining a religious diversity, could be accomplished.

In his article for the Boston Globe, "Jefferson's Support for Intelligent Design," Stephen C. Meyer says:

"Moreover, because the evidence of "Nature's God" was publicly accessible to all and did not depend upon a special appeal to religious authority, Jefferson believed that it provided a basis in reason for the protection of individual liberty. Thus, the Declaration of Independence asserted that humans are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."

A new social compact for all was forged based upon the concept of "The Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." From this "self-evident truth" the nature of a human and how such a human ought to be treated would be impervious to any "power of the earth." It would be universal and transcendent for all time. Thus, the principles of how a human should be governed justly and how government should be organized would be indisputable.

This necessitated the birth of religious freedom. James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution," said in his essay "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments,"

"Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other Religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other Sects?"

Although they themselves were of the Christian faith, they did not want to establish a civil society that would treat other religious as had the various sects of Christianity treated other sects of Christianity during the period of severe religious bigotry. Thus, everyone of any faith tradition could establish legal standing as a part of the American social compact. This has been the allure of America for the world over. However, the "American Dream" is not just a dream for America alone, it is a universal dream for every nation and people.

Religion is to Provide the Common Virtues that Safeguard our Freedom.

In the view of the Founders, the purpose of religious freedom was to establish this vital link between religion and virtue in the public square. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a great Philadelphian and signer of the Declaration of Independence perfectly explains that there is a vital relationship of faith, virtue, and liberty:

"The only foundation for a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."

This explains what Tocqueville observed near 50 years later in 1831. In his renowned work "Democracy in America" he cited this unique cooperation in America that existed between religion and liberty and that it was a key element giving American democracy its unique flavor. The American notion of freedom, at that time, was absolutely aligned with the virtues that were rooted in religious faith (as opposed to the modern idea of freedom being simply "to do as I please.")

Montesquieu was another Enlightenment philosopher who greatly influenced the Founders. He strongly asserted that a Republic could only function with a virtuous people. If the people did not live for the greater good as a



manifestation of their virtue, then society would collapse, or tyranny would rise up to force the people to adhere to State interest. The great Irish statesman and Member of Parliament, Edmund Burke had said,

“Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere and the less of it there is within (moral & spiritual), the more there must be without” (the imposition of tyrannical power).

This means we must do more than merely point our finger at the Leftist takeover of our nation, but we must also examine the possibility that a social vacuum has been created by our own departures from the fundamental responsibility freedom requires.

Thus, the moral, spiritual authority of faith over one’s behavior was a key requirement to be able to have the experience of freedom. For that reason, religious freedom was essential to the founder’s vision because, whereas on the one hand, it would respect the diversity of faiths, at the same time on the other hand, it would provide the context for all peoples of faith and good conscience to have common ground around universal self-evident truths that were essential for living in a society that would be pleasing to God.

The unfettered articulation of religious truths and their moral implications in the public square would provide the necessary moral foundations for America to thrive. It is the foundation of commonly held values that support meaningful and trustful relationships within society. It is the essence of what comprises a nation. George Washington repeatedly stressed this perspective:

“Virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.” and in his farewell address, he stated that “...reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

Patrick Henry also reflected this view:

“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.”

However, today, the modern media-driven popular culture has dramatically redefined the nature of freedom. In this new definition, freedom and religion are not partners but are avowed enemies. They assert that to be free, we must throw off the oppressive limits of religious constraints. We can gauge how far America has strayed from our original principles by a random perusing of the standard fare of cable TV offerings provided by the entertainment industry.

The American Dream: Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize

The promise of the American Dream has been a beacon of hope throughout the ages. However, the American ideal is a goal to be accomplished. The history of America is about a nation striving toward an unprecedented ideal. It is the hopeful history of people striving toward noble ideals fueled by transcendent principles.

But also, as is common to all humans, our history contains elements of failure, compromise, and hypocrisy. America is a great vision not yet fully achieved and thus, to do so should be the guiding purpose for every generation. Every generation of Americans must play their own unique role in making the Dream a substantial one for all, as Dr. Carson had reminded us.

America is in transformation. We are at a time, once again, when our nation urgently needs realignment. It is time



for faith leaders to speak out as the conscience of the nation, to call America, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did, to live out the true meaning of its creed. The words spoken by Dr. King in 1963 still ring true today:

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

Today, we need a new generation of “Founders.” Today’s Founders will renew that unique American ideal of equality and freedom. It finds its deepest root in the eternal self-evident truths that testify to the love extended to all of humanity by their Creator. It is this thought from which emerges the highest expression of human equality: **We are one nation under God.**

Some believe that God heard the prayer of the Pilgrim Fathers and made a covenant with them as he had done with the Israelites in the wilderness. Others believe that God also heard the prayers for deliverance of America’s overlooked Pilgrims, who were enslaved against their will, brought here chained to the bottom hulls of slave ships. Their prayers for deliverance were forged in pain and suffering. The story of Jesus provided them the knowledge and hope that there was a redemptive power in the path of their undeserved suffering. These Pilgrims, too, were praying for a land, to form a nation reflective of the values that they had discovered at the root of their faith.

America is destined to be a nation free of the false impositions that wrongly defined us and that caused impenetrable walls that fragmented the human family, be it aristocracy and peasantry, slave and master or the many other self-interested divisive factions. We were not created to be confined to ingratiating ourselves to the whims of a king. We were to be a nation based upon a new view of human value, one that asserted that all people were created equal and are were endowed with the rights of a people so loved by their Creator.

Some believe, like the Pilgrims, that God also has a Providential hope and a purpose for America, that America would love the world as God has loved America. That America would be a nation dedicated to the values of altruism, the value of living for the sake of others, the values that served as the glue between the mind and body bonding together words and deeds. Such a people of good character, of husbands and wives and families, would then serve to define the character of the nation. America was to be a shining hope for the world and by so doing, bring true freedom into the world by demonstration, that is, becoming a model of the good news that we are truly one American family.

It is God’s enduring Providence to bring that wondrous news to every land with the hope that it could become the ethos and value at the root of every nation, every religion, every family, and every person. It is an immutable truth that predates all prophets and all religions. It stood even before the dawn of time.

It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. Alexander Hamilton



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