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“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure” (1). Here, amidst a new civic battle, I recall Abraham Lincoln’s riveting words, spoken on an eve of death wrought by another nationwide philosophic dispute. Men went to war—as they have always—for their convictions, purchasing ideas with blood. Although the United States survived that war of a desperate house divided, many now question whether it can do so again; for we face a new storm which rages about our foundations. To decide whether America’s founding principles are still relevant today, we must first establish these principles, then mark how they have been criticized, and, last, come to a conclusion.

What are America’s founding principles? There was not one idea guiding our Founders, but many. Foremost among them were equality before the law, life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and justice. “We hold these truths to be self-evident,” says our Declaration of Independence, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among them are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (2). The Constitution of the United States was enacted, in part, to “establish Justice . . . and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity” (3). Among even a simple survey of our Founders’ thought, we find their minds, their souls, always returning to sing this one melody: that certain things are transcendentally true and good, and given to us by our Creator. Their aim in birthing what became one of the greatest governments of the world was to secure those eternal principles in law for themselves and all who would yearn to breathe free on our shores afterward.

Many in the United States today have a different opinion of our founding principles. Disillusioned by the stumbles our nation has had since its inception—the Civil War, the Great Depression, Vietnam, Watergate, even the current war in Iraq—many have sought another philosophical roadmap. While on Christmas break this year, I visited another small, midwestern, liberal arts college. In the sheltered confines of a tall, cement dormitory, I sat with several students. At one point, my friend gestured at me and said, “She believes in absolute good.” The room then erupted into slightly mocking laughter, incredulous looks, and patronizing smiles. Apparently, I was the only one in the room who held this primitive idea. One young man began by saying, “Why, that sounds like Plato’s absolute forms, and we all know that’s trash,” to nods of agreement from the others who, having read parts of Plato in Freshman Studies, considered themselves masters enough to dismiss him with a grimace. We held an eager discussion for about 45 minutes, stalemating when I could not get anyone opposite me to agree that stopping the Holocaust was a good, an absolute good, from anyone’s perspective. According to them, Hitler was societally wrong, which is why anyone believing differently should be allowed to take up arms against him, but no one could properly condemn his actions.

In that kind of pluralistic world, of course, “might makes right.” The allies were thus correct in stopping Germany only because “their cultural ideas triumphed over Hitler’s cultural ideas.” This is absolute nonsense. Proponents of multiculturalism apparently believe that political correctness will stop oppression. They do this because they believe that there is no God—they must, for they wish to seize His throne. If there are no transcendent values, a good we can discover and should follow, we are free to manufacture our own. As historian Balint Vazsonyi has written, “Multiculturalism is code for the gradual elimination of all Western traditions” (4). For a law to endure, it must reflect the laws which govern our universe and the hearts of men. Either there is an eternal Lawgiver who knows and directs our best interests, or we are left to experimentally legislate our own ideas of human perfectibility for those we can persuade—or coerce—to obey. Is man fundamentally flawed, or is society? A fallen man needs redemption from without; a fallen society demands revolution from within. Relativists decide

their own fate and values which, because we are diseased creatures despising the Doctor, will inevitably diverge and clash. If I value good wine but do not own a vineyard, it is perfectly justified for me to take yours, if I can, because this corrupt system does not allow for an eternal arbiter to settle our dispute with His decree: “thou shalt not steal.” It is your word, your values, against mine—and my gun. This system does not stop oppression: it breeds it.

Many multiculturalists have adopted their chaos-inducing ideas because they feel sorrow for the way many in the Western tradition have used truth as a club, rather than a salve. In one way, they are right: no one has a corner on truth. Truth with pride has strengthened the false justice of slavery, the bigotry of discrimination, the parasitic enabling of colonialism. However, to reject a truth just because some have misused it, or to reject all truth because we will never know it perfectly, is to refuse the best hope we have towards finding absolute truth and implementing absolute justice. To hide our talent in the ground because we are afraid to use it is a waste of heaven and history’s investment in our civilization. Destroying the hard-won foundations of our heritage will only weaken the walls which barricade against barbarism. We may never reach our destination, but we must climb or perish in a slide to destruction.

James Madison, universally termed the “father of our Constitution,” recognized the danger of these ideas in Federalist Paper No. 10: “A pure democracy can admit no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will be felt by a majority, and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party. Hence it is, that democracies have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have, in general, been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.” Good government happens when authority enforces justice—true justice, not its current version, “justice 2.0.” Justice is blind; it does not change based on the latest polls. Relativists will have a “living, breathing Constitution”—a phrase recalling the psychotic redefinition of life in George Orwell’s 1984. If truth is situational, then the sinister whimsy of political correctness

becomes law by mob rule. By generating a worldview in which popularity directs policy, multiculturalism creates anarchy.

It is now clear that America's founding principles are still relevant. It is not melodrama, it is historical record: without a culture based on the same transcendent beliefs, the polis—the community—will die. Relativism is wrong. You cannot synthesize opposite philosophies. Either man is his own god, or there is Another with a claim to our actions, our thoughts, our souls. Good and evil do not peacefully co-exist. That is the fundamental difference between our bedrock founding principles and the new cinnamon-candy ideas of American multiculturalism. Our founding principles say, "There is truth, there is justice, there is a right; and I will give my mind, heart, and body to defend their reign." They do not say, "Your idea of justice, my idea of justice—the two are different, but let's all love each other, ignore our differences, and live under the rainbow." When a difference is fundamental, you cannot ignore it. Evil never obeys a truce. Like Germany before World War II, evil makes conciliatory gestures to the world while secretly building dark instruments of mass terror in underground tunnels, ultimately unleashing its pent-up fury on surprised and unprepared innocents. The only thing that can now save America from the lethal crop these ideas plant is a return to the truths we once believed together. I still believe, with all the expectation and promise of youth, that the hopes of Abraham Lincoln can still materialize for our beloved country. "[We] here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth" (5).

I do highly resolve. Do you?

Works Cited

- (1) Lincoln, Abraham. Gettysburg Address. American Heritage Reader, Hillsdale College (2001), p. 326.
- (2) Declaration of Independence. American Heritage Reader, Hillsdale College (2001), p. 95.
- (3) Constitution of the United States. American Heritage Reader, Hillsdale College (2001), p. 107.
- (4) Vazsonyi, Balint. America's 30 Years War. Washington, D.C: Regnery (1998), p. 56.
- (5) Lincoln, Abraham. Gettysburg Address. American Heritage Reader, Hillsdale College (2001), p. 326.