

July 2, 2006, in place of Proper 8B



ere they living today, the Founders of this Nation would be reviled by many as fanatical left wing radicals – liberals of the worst sort. Yet they were seeking individual and personal freedom, so that humans – all of them – had the opportunity to develop the potentials placed in them at their birth. Many of us learned in our education that these men were heavily influenced by many of the radical ideas that were sweeping across the still smouldering remains of the Roman Empire. One of the primary influences, we are told, was the teaching of John Locke and others whose thoughts are bunched under the general title of “Enlightenment.”

Indeed these great men were avid readers and students of as much as they could get their hands on. Yet, it is my conviction, that the Enlightenment only enhanced the basic structures of their thinking. In common with most of the people of the colonies, these men were raised on the reading of the Holy Scriptures. The ideas and concepts that they found there were enhanced, developed and exploded into what I call a “religious secularism” or a “secular religion.”

They found, in the writings of the Bible, a series of basic principles

that are designed for the whole creation, and especially for all humans. As they studied the Scriptures, they saw clearly what scholars are only now discovering in the texts and history of the Hebrew/Jewish people. When religion becomes institutionalized, then, like any other ‘good’ in all of creation, it becomes a vehicle for the demonic and evil. Remember, Europe had just completed a hundred years of wars over religion.

Imagine! Wars of religion; religion – fighting to dominate others. But religion – as is true of ANY institution – can assume the worst evils of self preservation. This is true whether we are speaking of the formation of nations, or the idealization of families and clans:– self preservation then becomes an evil and sees others as enemies.

The Founders of this nation – through their reading of the Bible – saw clearly that God made all humans equally. In the most real sense, humans, all of them, are brothers and sisters, not “us” and “them”: or, as in the case of kings, dukes, fathers and mothers, “mine.” As soon as one human exercises “rights” of possession over another, humanity on both sides of that equation has been damaged.

It was not, the Founders saw, the nature of reality, that one human could “own” or “direct” or “order” another. This violated the basic

principles of creation as expressed in the Bible. The Bible, the Founders saw clearly, taught BOTH a total freedom fo ALL, as well as a basic INTERDEPENDENCE for all. This resulted in the Biblical teaching that it is part of human nature – basic creation – that humans are **both** totally free, **and** also totally obligated to see that ALL humans share in that freedom.

That is, in my mind, the origin of the essential meaning of the Independence Day statement, that all men are “created equal, and have certain unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” But our personal and individual “unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” DEPEND on our sharing with others. If we do not freely share it, we do not have it.

It is on these TWO things, Freedom and Interdependence, that this nation was founded.

It is interesting that we have all accepted without question the idea that there is a great separation between religion and the ‘secular’ world. Whenever ideas, concepts or peoples are separated from one another, then what the Bible calls “sin” has come into play. Sin, essentially, means “separation.”

When we are separated from others – whether by our own choice or by the action of others (including that extension of ourselves called “The Government”) – we are both less than human, and also we have lost much of our freedom.

Independence Day is a celebration the wondrous thinking of these men. We reflect on the successes and failures of the people of this nation to accept fully the freedom and the rights to which freedom is the key.

We see our nation torn: torn because in some places we see little or no freedom: magnified by hatred and horrors unimaginable. It is sooo easy to flex muscle and violate the basic meaning of freedom and try to force others. It is sooo difficult to sit back and see brothers and sisters harmed, hurt, hated and destroyed.

The Biblical solution is not violence, but love; it is caring, not fighting; it is talking, not biting. We cannot put a ring around freedom and say it is ours. Freedom is of the essence of being; freedom is the essence of choice; freedom is the essence of love; freedom is what binds together the definition of God we christians call the Trinity. Freedom is indeed the glue that binds together all humans. But there can be no freedom without total respect for others

no matter what their response is. Jesus went to the cross rather than violate freedom or love. We need to remember that we do not know all about freedom: we know something about how it has developed here. Freedom has and will develop in different ways among others. Our freedom is enriched as we respect the freedom of others; and as we all intermingle in total respect of others, we are each enriched by the freedom of each other.

This, I believe, is some of what grows from the vision of the Founders of this nation. We are in a process that is steadily advancing. The danger is that we are so fraught with excitement about our freedom, that we would force it on others: a total contradiction. Today, we reflect; today we rejoice; today we celebrate. Freedom is not only “No slavery;” freedom is also “I love and respect you.” “I will work in love to provide you with justice and freedom.”

My friends, as you rejoice in this extra long holiday weekend, set aside sometime to reflect on the freedom and justice which is the basis of the good life most of us enjoy. Talk with your children about freedom and the responsibility that comes with it and the respect for others it requires. May we all learn that respect and love are of crucial importance in the interpersonal relationships of daily life, and in the vast interrelationships of large organizations and governments.