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Reflective Reading Essay Contest 2022

America: The Country Built On A Rock, Not Sand

Our Religious Foundation of Democracy and the Threat It Faces

What holds us accountable for our actions? At first glance, the answer is the law. Crimes are punishable by fine, probation, prison, or even death. But humans are the creators, enforcers, and interpreters of the law. We cannot be the prosecutor, defendant, judge, and jury all at once. The delicate nuances of justice can be managed only by an impartial, specific standard of behavior. If humanity was on trial for crimes against itself, the trial would be held in a court of moral law, presided over by a righteous being with clear views of right and wrong.

God holds us morally accountable. He gave us an innate moral compass: a conscience. Religion preserves morals; it outlines behaviors to support or avoid. It is the foundation society rests upon. Without it, society would be a house of cards built from fickle “public morals” that can topple at a mob’s whim. Being “free” from religion is being enslaved by fear of our fellow man’s destructive power. *True* liberty is based on religious principles, allowing us to have free will without fear of natural rights violations; true liberty is restrained by morality. Knowing this, the founders established a country where their posterity would have natural freedoms fortified by the Constitution.

According to the First Amendment, the government cannot establish a state religion or interfere with citizens’ rights to practice their own. This separation of church and state was

created to avoid abuse of power. But it is a misconception to believe the founders envisioned a completely secular nation. John Adams wrote, “we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by...morality and religion....Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”¹ There is only so much the law can do to protect against moral corruption.

How does this corruption occur? C.S. Lewis identifies that those who are blind to their incipient immorality “do not understand either the source or the real character of the prohibitions they are breaking. Their consciousness hardly exists apart from the social atmosphere that surrounds them.”² These invertebrates desire to be indistinguishable from the public. They compromise on ethics in the name of “acceptance”; downgrade inherited values with the label “traditional thinking”; shun criticism and instead seek coddling. Gradually, their consciences are lulled to sleep with a false sense of security. But firm individuals are tethered to a biblical anchor; the tug of their conscience keeps them from straying too far. As Christians, we must be these individuals.

If we allow America to corrode its religious foundation, we will be governed by the vagaries of the mob’s morality. If we are overly complaisant, we will be horrifically complicit in our country’s downfall. America will no longer be the land of the free as our ancestors knew it; it will be an unrestrained perversion. History is watching. We cannot let our founding fathers’ experiment in self-government and democracy be a failure.

¹ John Adams to Massachusetts Militia, October 11, 1798

² C.S. Lewis’s “Screwtape Proposes A Toast”, December 19, 1959