

Is There Not a Cause?

A recent 90 page study by Intelligence Analysts from the New York City Police Department has come to the conclusion that future terrorist acts are likely to come from home grown terrorists. “The trans-national phenomenon of radicalization in the West is largely a function of the people and the environment they live in. the transformation of a Western-based individual to a terrorist is not triggered by oppression, suffering, revenge, or desperation. ***Rather, it is a phenomenon that occurs because the individual is looking for an identity and a cause and unfortunately often finds them in the extremist Islam***”

According to the King James version of the Bible, ***Is there Not a Cause?*** is the question asked by David, a young shepherd when he arrived at the battle scene between the Israelites and the Philistines. (1 Samuel 17:29). The Philistine champion, Goliath, had challenged any Israelite to meet him in single combat to determine the outcome of the war. For all practical purposes accepting his challenge would have meant disaster for the Israelites. While others were absorbed in weighing the costs of charging into battle, David was only concerned with the issue of whether there was a “cause”. It is in this same spirit that our founders wrote the Declaration of Independence on the eve of the Revolutionary War. Our Declaration of Independence begins....

“When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands 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, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

If we are to understand the thinkers of our founders, it is imperative that we get a better understanding of the terminology they employed. For instance, the phrase: ***the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God*** has often been regarded as a conscious attempt to describe God in deistic terms. As has been pointed out by Gary Amos & Richard Gardiner in their book “Never Before in History”, this terminology had been part of the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries. From there it was passed to Christians more generally in England and became squarely implanted in English Common Law of the thirteenth century.

One of Jefferson’s most influential sources was the Puritan Sir Edward Coke. Coke’s writings on the Common Law served as the central textbook for legal studies at the College of William and Mary, where Jefferson received his formal training. In 1610, Coke explained the meaning of the phrase “law of nature” in “The Reports of Sir Edward Coke”:

“The law of nature which God at the time of creation of the nature of man infused into his heart, for his preservation and direction; and is lex aeterna [The Eternal Law], the moral law, called also the law of nature... And by the law, written with the finger of God in the heart of man, were the people of God a long time governed, before the law was written by Moses, who was the first reporter, or writer of law in the world. The Apostle, in the second chapter to the Romans saith, Cum enim gentes quae legem non habent naturaliter ea quae legis sunt faciunt [While the gentiles who do not have the law do naturally the things of the law]... This law of nature, which is indeed the eternal law of the creator, infused into the heart of the creature at the time of his creation, was before any written laws, and before any judicial or municipal laws.”

Coke, like medieval Catholic thinkers and most Puritans of his day, grounded the law of nature in the Judeo-Christian doctrine of Creation. Jefferson also drew heavily on Sir William Blackstone, who followed directly in Coke’s footsteps in explaining the law of nature.

Our founders were about to embark upon a course of action that would lead to war with the greatest military power of the day, of which they were merely a small colony. Any rational considerations of the consequences of such a course of action would conclude that it was certain suicide. Be that as it may, like David, our founders were more concerned with the issue of cause. They linked that cause to the notion of ***“the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God”***

Today, we are in the middle of a Global war against the enemies of freedom, with Islamic radicalism being the foremost threat. The debate thus far has been largely confined to matters such as should we stay and fight or withdraw and what the consequences of each course of action would be. Perhaps we should take a cue from David and our founders and consider the question: “Is there not a cause?” Since the principles that led our founders to split from England are timeless, I would like to suggest that the cause is the same now as it was then. Let’s take some time to review these causes. To begin with:

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

The phrase “self evident” in as way of describing the truths they held has long been a source of confusion. Amos and Gardiner clear up this confusion by pointing out that Jefferson’s first draft read as follows:

“We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable:”

In the final draft of the Declaration, the terms “sacred and undeniable” were substituted for the term “self evident”. The question is why was this substitution made? John Locke has pointed out in his “Essay on Human Understanding” that the truth of a proposition was self evident if its truth was immediately apparent upon reflection. Is this a case of denying that these truths are sacred and insisting on a secular origin? Again, a closer look at the issue reveals that such is not the case. Christian Theology recognizes at least two types of sacred truths. 1) Those that God made known only to a chosen select few by

special revelation and 2) Those that God made universally apparent upon reflection by imparting them in the human heart. Self Evident truths are of the latter variety. In other words, the truths that our founders were taking a stand on were not the exclusive property of any particular religion, but were universally the common property of all humankind.

“that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,”

The first issue that we should take note of here is that our rights did not come from an act of government, but are “unalienable” and that we are endowed with them by our creator. The term unalienable means that the rights are not transferable. In short, they can not be given or taken away by an act of government. As Sam Adams put it *“The right of freedom being the gift of God almighty, it is not in the power of man to alienate this gift.”* John Adams likewise contended that: *“Human freedom was founded in the ordinance of the Creator”*. Hamilton’s version was: *“The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among parchments and musty records. They are written by the hand of the Divinity. The Supreme Being invested mankind with an inviolable right to personal liberty.”*

The next issue that we should clear up here is the notion that all MEN were created equal. Many have commented that this notion excluded the equal rights of women. Again, upon taking a closer look, this does not appear to be the case. We have to keep in mind that the writers of the Declaration were taking their cue from the Biblical account of creation. In Genesis 1:26 – 28 we read that *“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* It is pretty clear that the term “man” used here refers to the human species and not just the male member. In short, this ideal does not exclude equal rights for women even though the ideal was not always put into practice.

Finally there is the question of slavery. How did the founding generation reconcile the institution of slavery with their professed principles? In general, they didn’t, although their principles were not put into practice until the 19th century with the Abolitionist movement. Samuel Rutherford, Scottish Presbyterian theologian and author who was another influential thinker whom the founders borrowed from, picked up a line of thought that goes all the way back to Augustine in claiming that the institution of slavery was incompatible with the dignity of the human person created as a rational being in God’s image. In his most prominent piece entitled “Lex Rex”, which is generally translated as “The Law and the Prince”, he had this to say:

“Slavery of servants to lords and masters, such as were of old amongst Jews, is not natural, but against nature. Because slavery is malum naturae [bad by nature, or evil in and of itself], a penal evil and contrary to nature, and a punishment of sin. A man being created according to God’s image, he is res sacra, a sacred thing, and can not more, by nature’s law, be sold and bought, than a religious and sacred thing dedicated to God.”

This was a view, which is part of a larger argument against tyranny, was shared by Jefferson. In 1774 he wrote his “Summary View of the Rights of British America”, which contained this:

“The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies, where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement of slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa... The God who gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them.”

He also included an attack on the institution of slavery in the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

“He [King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of distant people who never offended him, capturing and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.”

“that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

As has been pointed out, the view expressed in the Declaration of Independence saw life as a precious gift of God. Again, they were about to embark upon a course that would lead to a war with England. Obviously, a war would mean a great loss of life. It is for this reason that the Judeo-Christian tradition, which the founders inherited, gave a great deal of attention to the notion of a “Just War”. In order for a war to be just, it had to be fought for a cause that was compatible with God’s justice and the divine dignity of human nature. Here is where such rights such as liberty and the “pursuit of happiness” come in, as well as the notion that these rights are “unalienable”. The rights to liberty and the pursuit of happiness were being threatened by the British. The God that gave us life, also gave us liberty. It is liberty that makes life worth living and which separates us from animals, which God gave life to as well. Liberty is necessary for the realization of human purpose, which is expressed as the “pursuit of happiness”.

Further clarification is in order here. Today our view of happiness tends to be hedonistic. We want to feel good immediately and tend not to think too far ahead. So we see a night out or a pleasant activity as a route to happiness. This was not the view that the founder had in mind.

The ancient Greeks had a very different perspective on happiness. Aristotle spoke about achieving *eudaimonia*, which is roughly translated into happiness.

Eudaimonia is not an emotional state; it is more about being all that you can, fulfilling your potential. The idea is that by living in a way that reaches your full potential you bloom or flourish and so display the best version of you that you can be.

For early Americans, who were inheritors of the Judeo-Christian tradition, our potential as human beings created in the image of God can only be fulfilled in a loving relation with him. It is important to note that they were claiming a right to “pursue” happiness, rather than a right to happiness itself. Happiness is something that can not be provided to us, but must be pursued. The view of happiness found in relationship to God was prominent in the Biblical Psalms of David, in the teaching of Christ and the writings of Paul. This notion was explored by Augustine and picked up among American Puritans by Jonathan Edwards.

“to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,”

Again, this is a notion that has its precedent in early writings from the Judeo-Christian tradition. 140 years before the Declaration was written, Puritan John Winthrop wrote in “A Defense of an Order of Court Made in the Year 1637”:

“It is clearly agreed, by all, that the case of safety and welfare was the original cause or occasion of common weales and of many families subjecting themselves to rulers and laws,. From the premises will arise these conclusions: No common weale can be founded but by free consent.”

Of course the Puritans got this notion from the Biblical Israelites who were led out of bondage in Egypt into the promise and of Canaan. The early Puritans saw a parallel in their being led out of religious persecution in England into the promised land of America. They saw the ancient Jewish federation during the time of the Judges (before Israel asked God for a King) as the most pure example of a free republic that the world has seen. The first written constitution of modern democracy was “The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut”, according to historian G.P. Gooch. They were drawn up in response to a 1638 sermon by Puritan Minister Thomas Hooker before the general assembly in Hartford. Hooker’s view was centered on the verse in Deuteronomy 1:13 *“Take ye wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you”*. Hooker interpreted the words “take ye” to imply some form of democratic choice in who was to rule over them. In other words, the choice of rulers belongs to the people by God’s own allowance. The foundation of the ruler’s authority is therefore in the free consent of the people. Puritan pastors combined this verse, coupled with the strong denunciation of monarchy found in I Samuel to mean that God ***required*** a democratic Republic.

By the time of the revolution, this view had become prevalent among the colonists. So much so that the best selling pamphlet by Thomas Paine entitled “Common Sense”, which has been credited with generating widespread support for the revolution, echoed it. He used the verses in I Samuel and the words of Gideon in Judges to denounce not only the British crown, but the institution of monarchy itself.

“That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute

new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

The founders did not believe in revolt for light and transient reasons and thought that it is generally better to suffer such evils than to engage in revolution. They had too much respect for tradition to take lightly the overthrowing of an established government. That being said, there comes a point when it is not only a right, but a duty to resist the forces that would encroach on our God given liberties.

“And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”

The founders believed that they could rely on the protection of “Divine Providence” because they believed that they were carrying forth God’s plan. Again, this notion harkens back to the early Puritans who thought of themselves as a second Israel.

On June 11th 1630, while still aboard the Arbella, John Winthrop wrote “A Model of Christian Charity”, which contained the following:

“We shall find the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory, that men of succeeding plantations shall say “The Lord make it like New England.” For we must consider that we shall be as a City on a Hill...”

The founders were concerned above all about getting the cause right because they believed that doing so would determine whether they would enjoy “the protection of Divine Providence”. They also saw their endeavor as a possible inspiration of future generations, or “a City on a Hill”.

It falls upon us today to examine the justice of the cause which we are fighting for and whether the threat of Islamic radicalism poses a threat to our God given liberties such that we not only have the right, but the duty, to resist.