
The Voluntaryist

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"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."

February 1993

Freedom: The Moral Foundation

By Paul Johnson

In November 1975, Ross McWhirter was murdered by an IRA bomb.

The 1981 Ross McWhirter Memorial Address was delivered in the Skinners' Hall, City of London, by Paul Johnson. The text of this address was reproduced in the June 1981 issue of THE FREE NATION, the journal of the Freedom Association, in the running of which Ross McWhirter had played a prominent part.

* * *

We are here tonight to honour the memory of a man who gave his life to freedom. To me this is not only a moving, it is also a profoundly comforting thought: that there are among us, even in this leaden age of ours, those in whom the flame of freedom burns so brightly that even the final sacrifice seems worthwhile to keep it alight. We can, I think, take comfort in the honoured dead.

The Cities Of The Dead

I remember some years ago, while walking in northwest France, I came across, looking unexpectedly through the morning mist, the huge and majestic cenotaph which Sir Edwin Lutyens designed for the battlefield of the Somme. It was like a vision. And, as the mist cleared, one could see unfold the endless rows of white crosses stretching out to the horizon.

Here, a hundred thousand British soldiers had perished, all of them volunteers, all of them in some degree driven to serve by a sense of idealism. Whatever the historians may say, they believed they were fighting for freedom, and in any event they died for it. And not in vain, for I defy anyone who visits one of the great war cemeteries to leave without drawing comfort and moral sustenance from the experience. As Byron puts it:

Freedom hallows with her tread

The silent cities of the dead.

And such cities of the dead are not wholly silent. They bear witness—as our dead friend bears witness—to the unbroken continuity of human idealism, stretching back over the graves of the dead, into the very distant past—into, indeed, the millennium before Christ.

John Stuart Mill, in reviewing Grote's HISTORY OF GREECE, pointed out that the Battle of Marathon was, for the English, a more important battle than the Battle of Hastings. It is true; for those who love freedom, the exploration of the past is a constant stimulus and comfort. History is an enormous reservoir of moral capital, on which we can draw copiously.

The Moral Virtue Of Freedom

It is a significant fact that, today, Mr. Gladstone has again become a relevant and exemplary figure. With his love of economy, his hatred of big government, his devotion to economic and political freedom, he is for our times a more stimulating and impressive mentor than Mr. Disraeli. And Gladstone himself found the source of his action in the honoured dead of the past. During the parliamentary recess of 1867, after the passing of the Second Reform Bill, he made a study of Homer in order to discern its modern relevance.

What did he find in Homer? As fine a set of public principles as are to be obtained. I quote his words:

The power of opinion and persuasion, as opposed to force. The sense of responsibility in governing men. The hatred, not only of tyranny, but of all unlimited power. The love and the habit of reconciliation and harmony between the spirit of freedom, on the one hand, and the spirit of order and reverence on the other. And a practical belief in rights as relative, and in duty as reciprocal.

In the ninth century BC, Homer was able to isolate, to identify and to recommend these great public virtues of a free society. Today, three thousand years later, they are still not only relevant, but absolutely central, worth fighting and dying for. There is a point to consider on the subject of freedom, which I think perhaps enlightened men in Homer's age might have grasped more readily than we do today.

The point is this. All of us here accept the *political* virtues of freedom. And all of us, I think, can recognise the *economic* virtues of freedom. But to my mind, the salient, the quintessential, the outstanding quality of freedom is *moral* virtue. Freedom is a political and an economic necessity. But it is above all a moral necessity.

Let me describe to you freedom's triad—the great tripod of qualities upon which freedom as a moral force rests. The first is sacrifice. There can be all kinds of sacrifices: sacrifices of leisure, and of time and energy; sacrifices of desire, inclination and will; and sacrifice of health, and limb, even of life. But the one thing they all have in common is the voluntary principle.

There can be no sacrifice in a compulsory society, where the demands of the state are all-embracing and universal, and enforced by law and police and power. There is no sacrifice in belonging to the closed shop. No sacrifice in a society where the state authority takes it upon itself to lay down in exhaustive detail the obligations of all its citizens, and to enforce them with relentless ferocity.

It is said, by those who advocate compulsory morality, that a free society is a license of egoism and a formula for mass selfishness. So it may be, perhaps. But [it] is also, and more surely, an open arena, in which the unselfish drive in man can manifest itself. It is an invitation to nobility, an opportunity for service, a warrant for generosity and heroism beyond the call of duty. There is no such thing as statutory charity, or sacrifice by Act of Parliament. No one can be legislated into sanctity. A compulsory society may breed technocrats and it certainly breeds bureaucrats. It does not breed saints or heroes.

Risk

Now the second great moral feature of freedom is related to the opportunity for sacrifice. It is the propensity to take risks. Man is often defined as a tool-making animal. I think it is more accurate to call him a risk-taking animal. Our bodies are earth-bound but our spirits soar. It is our yearning and determination to reach beyond the point which is safe that distinguishes us from the brute creation. And it is the glory of man that he takes risks not only or principally on his own behalf but on behalf of humanity.

The history of human program is the history of risks, risks daringly undertaken and successfully survived. In the great human capital of skill and technology and knowledge which we collectively inherit, risk is the essential element which went into its accumulation. Our prosperity today was paid for by the risks taken by our forbearers. And we repay our debt to the species by taking risks from which our progeny will benefit.

It is characteristic of the compulsory society that it seeks to eliminate risks, that it denies the right of individuals to take risks, that it seeks to denigrate risk and confuses risk with gambling. That is the impulse, for instance, which drives the ominous international campaign against the industrial use of nuclear energy. The attempt to create the no-risk, safety-first society, a society cocooned in an infinitude of minute safety rules and regulations, is the biggest threat facing the Western economies today.

In the United States, under pressure from the huge anti-risk
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The Voluntaryist

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Would You Have Signed the Declaration of Independence?

The theme for this article suggested itself to me some months ago, when I began wondering whether there had been any contemporary voluntaryist critics of the U.S. Declaration of Independence or Constitution. (This line of thought was prompted by reading Vince Miller's and Jarret Wollstein's "New Declaration of Independence" in the Summer 1992 issue of FREEDOM NETWORK NEWS.) Without doing any research, I realized that the anti-federalists, the "men of little faith," as some 20th Century historians have called them, were possibly the only like-minded opponents of the Constitution that I would find. But these men, the best known being Patrick Henry, were still dyed-in-the-wool statist. They were arguing about what form of political government was best for the fledgling nation, not whether or not it needed political governing. Then I read a flyer put out by Albert Bellerue of Gold Canyon, Arizona. Mr. Bellerue knew Bob LeFevre well, attended Freedom School while it was still being conducted in Colorado, and had numerous articles published in the Colorado Springs GAZETTE-TELEGRAPH. Based on an article in LeFevre's JOURNAL (Winter 1973, p.7), Mr. Bellerue suggested that Bob LeFevre would have signed the Declaration of Independence. While none of us can state with certainty whether LeFevre would have done this or not, I responded by saying that I would not have signed the document that gave birth to the United States. This in turn led to some brief correspondence with Mr. Bellerue, which appears below. It also led to the idea of soliciting readers for their answers (and supporting reasons) to this question: Would you have signed the Declaration of Independence? Send your responses to THE VOLUNTARYIST, Box 1275, Gramling, SC 29348.

Why I Have Changed my Mind about the Declaration

By Albert Bellerue

...Probably I would have signed it **back in 1776**, along with those folks who had made tremendous strides into what they hoped would become "self-government." That to me was a great step in historical progress for freedom. After their victory over King George, they then had to cope with many of the same problems with their "free and independent states," as you so clearly brought out in "A Plague on Both Your Houses." You noted on page 7 that the first part of the Declaration of Independence was full of natural rights and that you suspected the document was to be used as a "propaganda device." Then you pointed to the closing paragraph which quite properly reveals that they were "still embedded in statism." Thus they had the foot-in-the-door to justify the existing political independent states. I doubt if they could have gained much support (some historians claim that about one-third of the adult white populace at the time supported the Revolution) if they had advocated "consent of the governed" totally.

And so, in answer to your question, since there were no Bob

LeFevres around back then to bring up all the missing facts, I would have—as a political conservative—signed the Declaration. I would probably have followed the old platitude "Right or Wrong, Do Something."

Today is another story. Back in 1965, LeFevre helped me complete my education at Rampart College/Freedom School. Therefore, **after** that date—27 years ago, I can answer your question as **No, I would not**. But as you have pointed out, it is a tremendous propaganda piece to propagate a beginning interest in Individual Freedom, especially to those that have had none.

There have been many propaganda pieces that I have been exposed to during my 70 years of living. Some had religious origins, some partisan political ideas, some economic theories, and some, just self-interest motives. Today, LeFevre's stuff makes more sense to me than anyone's. He once said, "I could live with the Declaration of Independence," and I know what he meant. If "just powers are derived from the consent of the governed," then I don't have to go along with that last paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. Leonard Read pretty much agreed with this idea, when he formulated his principle of "anything that's peaceful." But like everything else within the freedom philosophy, that too can be argued. And, that's good.

You know, as I get older and older I think of important and unimportant memories. Back in the roaring Twenties, my grandfather took me to downtown Philadelphia to Independence Hall. I touched the Liberty Bell, and I remember the chair with the **rising** or **setting** sun. Now I know it was a **setting** sun. Time has cleared this up for me.

Why I Would Not Have Signed

By Carl Watner

The primary reason I would not have signed the Declaration of Independence is this: It is a political document designed to be coercively enforced against those not desiring independence. This was fairly obvious at the time it was written, and soon became obvious as the Revolutionary War progressed.

Most of my general reasons have already appeared in THE VOLUNTARYIST, especially in the two articles on the Constitution and treason in Whole No. 30, and in the article on the Declaration and Revolution found in Whole No. 21. Briefly enumerated, my other reasons are:

1. In describing the "New Declaration of Independence" Vince Miller writes that "The American Revolution was a revolt against corrupt central authority and high taxes." Admittedly, the Revolution did not oppose the idea of "central authority" or "taxes." The American statesmen that signed the Declaration had no desire to do away with political government. They only wanted to get out from under the thumbs of King George III and the British Parliament. They did not want to do away with coercive government, but only change who was in charge. When they



The game of rulership over the ages developed into a nice calculation of how much could be seized, and from what individuals, without inviting sufficient rebellion to endanger the ruler's power. If the necessary means could not be seized from other communities, by warfare, it had to be seized from (the ruler's) own subjects. Who among them, and how many among them, could be plucked with the least squawking? That has been the immemorial problem of ruling individuals and ruling groups in every community, large and small, in history.

—Harry Scherman in

THE PROMISES MEN LIVE BY (1938, p. 237)

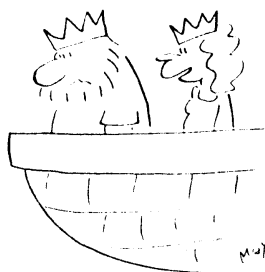
wrote that a tyrant "is unfit to be the ruler of a free people" they did not imply that **no one** is fit to be the ruler of a free people. They did not want to do away with rulership or taxation. I believe this becomes obvious when the revolutionary slogan, "No taxation without representation" is examined. This slogan is worded in such a manner as to legitimize taxation so long as it is supported by majority rule. But taxation is theft, regardless of how many people approve or disapprove.

2. Lysander Spooner's critique of the U.S. Constitution (found in his **NO TREASON: THE CONSTITUTION OF NO AUTHORITY**) is applicable to the Declaration, too. The signers of the Declaration held no power of attorney from their fellow citizens. They had no legal power to bind them. At best, they could only speak for themselves. They had no mandate to speak for the "united colonies" or the new "United States," which they helped create. By what right did they bind those still loyal to Great Britain, or those who claimed no allegiance to any political sovereign?

3. The key attributes of political government are its ability to acquire its income by physical coercion (taxation), and its ability to assert and maintain its control over a given geographic area. How British control could have been broken without establishing a new coercive government in America is a separate issue. At least a few theorists have maintained that a strategy based on non-violent resistance would have made this possible. In his **EVILS OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR** (1842), Charles Whipple noted the Americans would "have attained independence as effectually, as speedily, as honorably, and under very much more favorable circumstances," if they had not resorted to a military revolt. I offer a short summary of his methodology, simply as "food for thought."

Our forefathers might have accomplished this object, great as it was, merely by taking the course which the Society of Friends took to maintain their rights, and by which, though a small and despised body of men, they compelled the English and American governments to recognize and protect those rights. This course consisted of three things. 1st. A steady and quiet refusal to comply with unjust requisitions; 2d. public declaration of their grievances, and demands for redress; and 3d, patient endurance of whatever violence was used to compel their submission. (p.4)

Whether or not such a policy of non-violence would have worked is not the issue. Whether or not you would have signed the Declaration of Independence is. Please write us with your answer. ▮



"Look at it this way—as long as they're busy burning flags, they're not burning **you**."

The Illegality, Immorality, and Violence of all Political Action

By Robert LeFevre

There are only three arguments possible by which to try to justify the concept that some men may rightfully rule over other men and other men's property. Probably the earliest, and the most frequently employed, relates to force.

If I am big and strong enough, I may be able to rule you. Whether the force is obtained by superior military might, or by the presumed might of the most numerous group of voters expressed at the polls, the argument is the same. I'm big enough to have my will over you in any case; hence, my rule of you is just and proper.

The second to emerge is the appeal to a theological justification. God wills it; therefore, I have divine rights and may rightfully rule over you. I am special, set apart by the Almighty. Hence, I may rightfully seek to control you and your property, even if I should happen to lack the military force to do so.

The only other argument possible is the contractual one. You have voluntarily, as your own free act and deed, entered into an understanding with me in which you grant me certain decision-making functions over you and your property.

However, if we wish to be precise at this point, a contractual rule is not rule in any logical or legal sense. The separate contracting parties are always in a position to abrogate the contract and to renegotiate, whereas this is never true with government as we presently know it. The contractual argument is the gist of the Declaration of Independence.

The plight of the people of the United States is best summed up by recognizing that it is popularly believed that all three arguments are quite properly employed in our case.

It is presumed that (1) our government is strong enough to rule, therefore it may properly do so. (2) The Constitution is a divine instrument, the explicit result of heavenly supervision over the revolutionary leadership which brought about our separation from England, and thus, as a curious extension of that argument, while God has dethroned the king, God supervises elections and the voice of the people is the voice of God. (*Vox populi, vox dei.*) Further, (3) the creation of the governmental structure was contractual in nature, hence everything the government does is the result of a social contract to which we have all implicitly or explicitly agreed.

There is only one of these arguments that has any substance. The government is very strong and thus, because of its power, it may very well manage to rule. However, any pretense that the government has been divinely ordained or that some kind of social contract, explicit or implicit, exists between the government and those governed is pure nonsense.

Let me deal with the theological implications first. The very core of the resistance which led to the formation of this country as a separate nation, inspired by such men as Sam and John Adams, Jefferson, Hancock, Henry, Franklin and a hundred others, rested its case on a denial of divine rights reposing in any man or body of men. It was the argument of those who signed the Declaration of Independence, or the Virginia Bill of Rights, and of Tom Paine in "Common Sense," that divine rights which raised some above others didn't and couldn't exist.

On the contrary, the position was taken that all men had precisely the same rights, no one having, or being able to obtain, any moral ascendancy over any other.

It is important to note that the documents referred to, which represented the axiomatic base to be established, clearly showed that all men's rights are *inalienable*. That can only mean that rights cannot be alienated. What these men were seeking to establish was the validity of a contractual government and the invalidity of any other kind of government. By no possible process whatever could any man obtain a right to rule any other—either by force of arms, by the voting process, or by other practices.

The denial of divine rights reposing in anyone, or obtainable by anyone, became the most dominant characteristic making up the belief of an American. Any pretense to divine rights was,

hence, un-American, archaic, and relegated to the ash heap. It is on this point alone that we fought and obtained our independence.

Unfortunately, thirteen years after the signing of the Declaration, the entire concept of a contractual government was put aside. Instead, a single political party put together a governmental structure embodied in the Constitution which was not and never has been a social contract, and which has never been a statement coming from "we, the people of the United States."

Beginning approximately in 1785, a couple of years after the signing of the Treaty of Paris which brought about our legal severance from England, a political party calling itself the "Federalists" was organized. This small but determined group put together the so-called Constitutional Convention of 1787 and managed to obtain a majority approval of the instrument they had designed as a new form of government. The delegates were bound to return their findings to the state legislatures which had authorized their sojourn in Philadelphia for the convention. But this was never done. The Federalists well knew that the instrument they had framed would be disapproved by every state legislature then in existence. Hence they wrote into the Constitution, Article VII, the process of ratification, specifying that the Constitution would obtain ratification from the conventions of nine states. This made it possible for the Federalists to avoid virtually certain rejection by the state legislatures and also placed control of the conventions in their hands. As the only organized political party, they carefully packed the separate conventions, making certain not to convene any of them until they were reasonably certain of a successful vote. This procedure, by itself, wipes out any possible assumption of legality or moral obligation.

The Constitution was drawn up by a single political faction, was subsequently read by fewer than 10,000 (that is a generous estimate—it probably fell far short of that number), and was approved by simple majorities with a total of fewer than 6,000 delegates participating in scattered conventions. Opposition was strong and the Constitution barely squeaked by in some states. Thus, the instrument was drafted and approved, in the main, only by a few people within a single political party. Yet the instrument purports to come from "we, the people of the United States."

In view of the undeveloped communications system, the absence of roads, and the huge size of the rural populations, it is probable that a vast majority of Americans of European, Asian, or African origins didn't even know that conventions had been held or that an instrument had emerged claiming to be a contract with them.

At the time this was occurring, the total imported population was approximately three million people. By no stretch of the imagination can the deliberations of some six or seven thousand of that number be presumed to bind the total number within a contractual agreement.

In further support of this argument, the evidence shows that popular voting for presidents, beginning with George Washington, was so meager that no effort was made to preserve the figures. Thus, for the first ten presidential elections the only figures available are those showing electoral votes. However, in 1824, when no candidate obtained a majority of electoral votes and the election was decided in the House of Representatives, for the first time the popular totals were retained. The four candidates running that year polled an aggregate of 352,062, while the population of the United States according to the census of 1820 had reached a total of 9,638,453. Only slightly more than three percent of the total population was voting even at this late date. The winning candidate in 1824, John Quincy Adams, received 105,321 votes, slightly more than one percent of the population of 1820. It is reasonable to assume that popular voting prior to 1824 was considerably less. There is no way these facts can be construed as evidence of a contract with the people of the United States.

As a result of the constant barrage of propaganda to which we are subjected both directly from government and through the governmentally dominated and supported public school system,

we have been led to believe that the American government has some kind of divine right to impose its will on us and to take our money and property and lives if it chooses. And if the divinity of the election process is denied, then it is argued that the Constitution came into existence as a result of a contractual understanding in which well-meaning persons entered into a voluntary association for mutual benefit. The facts are to the contrary.

Therefore, there is only one argument that can be validly applied to the American government. It rules because it has the power to rule. This is the justification of brute force. Every law, ukase, rule, or bit of legislation enacted at federal, state, or local level is backed up by the ultimate threat of death. That may sound like an extreme statement, yet it is true, and applies even to traffic citations.

Let us suppose that a person has received a summons because he has allegedly violated some statute, law or ruling. He decides that the summons is unjust and that he will not obey. The men in government decide that they will compel him to obey.

Clearly, it is always possible for men in or out of government to change their minds. The government can fail to prosecute, and a man who decides he will not submit to prosecution may ultimately decide to do so. But let us assume that both sides remain adamant.

What ensues? Legal formalities will be followed, of course. The unwilling target of the prosecution will receive a series of warnings, each more harsh than the last. Finally, since he will

"The only real revolution is in the enlightenment of the mind and the improvement of character, the only real emancipation is individual, and the only real revolutionists are philosophers and saints."

—Will and Ariel Durant,
THE LESSONS OF HISTORY,
(N.Y. Simon and Schuster, 1968, p. 72)

not obey, he will be physically arrested. But if he submits to arrest, he is in fact obeying. Therefore, he must resist arrest or confinement. Ultimately, he will be shot for resisting arrest or for trying to escape. The shot may not be fatal. But unless the man submits, he must keep trying to escape. In the end, death will be inflicted.

The ultimate truth is that even a traffic citation is backed up by an appeal to ultimate force to the point where death makes obedience impossible.

To assume that the people of the United States entered voluntarily into a contractual relationship of such unbalanced character that specific performance on the part of one of the contracting parties is enforced under the threat of death while specific performance on the part of the other contracting party is totally unenforceable, is a patent absurdity. No sane or reasonable human being would voluntarily bind himself by any such contract.

There is no way in which a remedy can be found for government that exists only by force, until the people at large understand that that is the only kind of government they have. However, this most assuredly does not imply, nor should it be inferred, that a government of force should be overturned by force. In my judgement, such should never be attempted. A forceful government forcefully eliminated, leaves forceful persons in control. The result is not a cure, but a further extension of the disease. There are available far more efficacious methods than an appeal to arms. The first and most important of these is an appeal to reason and to peace.

We have long been aware that slaves can be the product of monarchs and dictators. It is time we realized that slaves can also be produced by legislatures, and by executive decrees.

(This article originally appeared in LEFEVRE'S JOURNAL, Summer 1974.) ☐

God's Ambush

By Kurt Schuermann

If there is such a thing as a typical Sunday, this Sunday of my memory was such a day. It was not, according to the church year, a feast day or holy day. Neither was it a day that was otherwise deemed important by the Annual Conference. No special offerings were suggested. The Sunday in question fell into what some people call "ordinary time." If the time was ordinary, then so was the church, and so was its pastor.

I suppose someone should have seen it coming—one of God's ambushes—because the God we worship seems to delight in surprises. When everything seems ordinary and typical, we should learn to be on the alert, for God may just do something so startling that nothing will ever seem typical again.

From the front of the sanctuary, seated in the 100-year-old "preacher's seat," I could see that the congregation contained the usual collection of saints and sinners. Most were sitting in "their" pews, unmoved—physically and spiritually. This day was typical—more empty seats than saints.

As I took mental roll call of the flock, my eyes fell upon a new group of people. They packed a whole pew, making the sanctuary seem unbalanced. A closer look determined that the group was not altogether new. It was a group of our Easter-and-Christmas-only attenders. Their attendance was strange, for this certainly was not Easter or Christmas. What were they doing here? Seated among them was a young woman I had not seen before. There was no denying it. She was a visitor! That was surprising enough, as our church did not have many visitors.

The service, except for the surprising visitor, went on as usual—some hymns, some prayers, a Bible reading, a sermon, the collection, and finally the scattering of the congregation out into the bright, midwest sunshine. As I stood by the church doors, finishing the handshakes and the "God bless you's" the Easter-and-Christmas-only family came out. I discovered that the young woman was their son's fiancée from Sweden. I shook her hand and said that she was probably the first and only person in the history of the congregation to be a visitor from Sweden.

But she had a perplexed look on her face. Had she not understood what I said? Had I made some huge cultural error in my comments? Had she been touched by my powerful sermon? "I have a question," she said. Now a more alert person could have heard the machinery of God's ambush cocking and about to snap shut. But I was oblivious to it all. She continued, "I noticed the American flag sitting in the front of your church. Do you have to be an American to worship God here?" Snap! the ambush was complete.

"Do you have to be an American to worship here?" Who could have expected that question? The flag had been in the front of the sanctuary for what seemed like forever, but I never even paid any attention to it. Now my mind was racing. It ran through the possible answers to her question. Of course, you don't have to be an American citizen to worship here. We are the people of God and our concerns and allegiances are deeper and wider and bigger than the fate of any single nation-state. She didn't ask the second question; but she didn't have to. I asked it for myself: What was the flag of America doing in this sacred space?

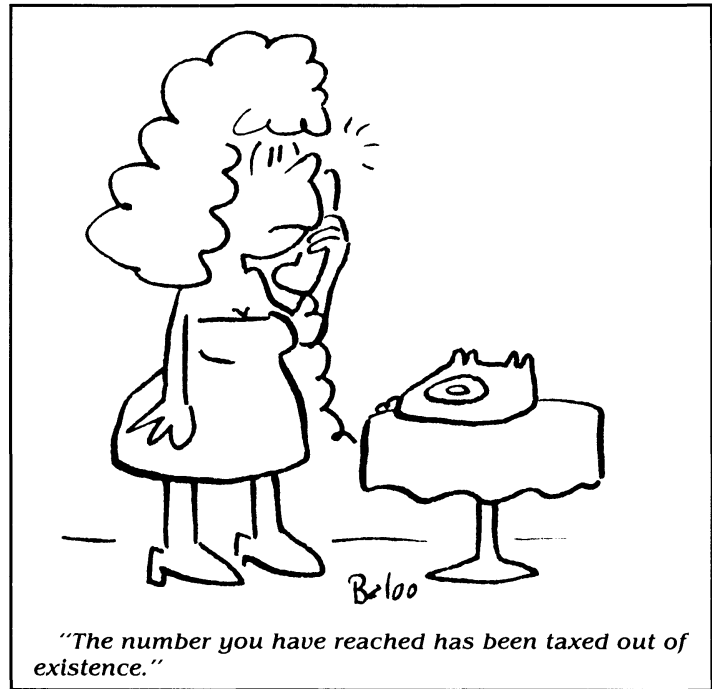
Several months later, after this ambush, God seemed to want to continue this lesson. During a church remodeling project, the flag was moved so the new dry wall could be moved in. The flag, having been stationary for years, could not stand the move. It fell apart. Dry rot had set in. Maybe God wanted us to know that everything made by human hands—whether flag or government—is only temporary.

God's ambush that so changed me was wrapped up in the honest question of a Swedish visitor. I had to explore the question: Just what is the relationship between Christians and the nations in which they live?

The social principles of the United Methodist Church have, if we would hear them correctly, a chilling and direct assessment of the situation:

"Governments, no less than individuals, are subject to the judgement of God."

Modern Christians do not like to confront the reality of God's



judgement, especially if it involves them personally, or what they value, or what their hands have made.

Some governments seem, from our perspective, candidates for judgement. You don't exactly have to be a prophet on the level of Nathan, Isaiah, or Jeremiah to apply the notion of God's wrath to the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Hussein and Kaddafi. We have no hesitation imagining God's wrath falling on these men and their governments. We may even enjoy imagining it. But we are more reluctant to consider God's response to *our* government. For most, our prophetic sensitivities go no deeper than the belief that if only the political party of *our* choice could get elected, then God's will would finally be done. We tend to believe if only Congress could have a few more _____ (liberals or conservatives—you choose), then the kingdom of God would come upon the earth. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

The witness of the Bible shows that the people of God and rulers of earthly kingdoms have often found themselves at cross-purposes. Don't we hear this conflict in Moses' words to Pharaoh, "Let my people go!"? As we read and relive the events of Exodus, it is astounding that in spite of all manner of plague and suffering, Pharaoh opposed the freedom of the Hebrew people. He preferred the status quo, no matter how painful, needing workers to labor on his public works projects. Making people work, support, or pay for government projects against their will was slavery in the time of Pharaoh and it is still slavery today. The Pharaoh's attitude is still behind the scenes of all our debate on public policy today.

Since the day Moses stared down the Pharaoh, counting only on the word of the God of freedom, the State has claimed many things about itself, but one thing it can not do: the State can not declare itself to be Divine and worthy of absolute allegiance. Only God is worthy of such loyalty.

According to Walter Brueggemann, wise and insightful interpreter of the Hebrew Bible, God's method to reveal his will and way in the world was through the formation of a new community, based on its primary allegiance to God. As such, there was little of what we would call today organized "social action." The way of God, as revealed in the Old Testament, was to gather a community which confronted the "Royal Consciousness" of governments, like Pharaoh's. According to Brueggemann, the Royal Consciousness was based on coercion as a concentrated power that forced free individuals into activities that violated their will. It does not change matters one bit that the use of this royal force was for the supposed "good" of the individual or for the good of the "social order." Coercion and slavery was always Pharaoh's way. The Royal Consciousness, as embodied in the

State, acted solely to assure its own continuance and enrichment. Even today, look behind the machinery of any modern nation-state and you will still find the face of Pharaoh.

In the New Testament, the freedom exhibited by Jesus, due to His unity with God, also caused difficulty with the government of his time. How could it not? The instrumentalities of the Roman Empire were used as a giant machine that produced his death.

The account in John's Gospel of the confrontation of Jesus and the State reveals that Pilate just could not understand Jesus. The two men with such different allegiances had no common ground. Here was Pilate, the embodiment of Roman institutional might, and he could not get this Jewish carpenter turned religious fanatic to buckle. Pilate tried his best to impress Jesus with his power. He claimed to hold in his hands even the power over life and death. But Jesus thought the strutting and posturing of Pilate was hardly worth noting. He broke his silence before Pilate with a concise explanation of the true nature of power. Vernard Eller, in *CHRISTIAN ANARCHY*, paraphrases the response of Jesus in this way:

"There is no such slavery under the cope of heavens as that which is brought upon the people by presence of law, and their own voluntary consent."

—John Lilburne,
LEGAL FUNDAMENTAL LIBERTIES, (1649)

Please fella, don't bother telling me how great is this Roman Empire of yours and how great the fact that *you are the governor of it...I happen to know that the one, real, true kingdom isn't even of this world...Sure you can crucify me...But there is no way you can eliminate me...Let's get on with the crucifixion; and I'll see you day after tomorrow, in church, at the Easter Sunrise Service, OK?* (Eller 10).

Thus the kingdom of Jesus operates in a different manner than the kingdom Pilate represents. It is based on voluntarism, not coercion. In God's kingdom love, not oppression, is supreme. In the coming of the kingdom of Jesus, there are no conscripts. The kingdom of God is filled only with those who volunteer. There is no slavery in Christ's kingdom; there is only the choice whether to remain spiritually free or slave.

The reading from Romans seems to contradict the stance Moses and Jesus have taken in opposing the "Royal Consciousness." However, Karl Barth, the great theologian, helps us to understand this passage in a new light, more in keeping with the radical witness of Moses and Jesus.

Both Karl Barth and Paul knew the danger of governments. Paul was writing to a group of people in Rome who knew the reality of persecution that occurred during the reign of the Emperor Claudius. Karl Barth, likewise, watched the governments of Europe ravage the continent during World War I. Barth's commentary on Romans 13 in his vital work, *EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS*, demonstrates that Paul had no intent in his writing to legitimize *any* government, much less the Roman one. Barth too saw governments as a distraction, which caused some people to place allegiance to government over loyalty to God. According to Barth, governments may be *allowed* by God but are *not sanctioned* by God. Barth makes the amazing claim that God uses earthly governments as a negative sign which points to the coming perfected kingdom of God. Paul's advice to the Romans to submit actually means—"Don't start a revolt." It would not be worth the effort, he feels, for Christians have more important things to do.

History proved both Paul and Barth correct. On January 30, 1933 the Nazis came and took over the university where Barth taught, causing him to claim that his beloved German people had started to worship a false God. Soon the Nazis ordered that every class begin with the Nazi salute. But Barth kept to his custom, which was to begin each class with a hymn and a prayer. He did not counsel resistance, but rather advised all his students to live their lives simply as good evangelical Christians.

Prophets seem to go forth gaining power from their dreams

and visions. While I am no true prophet, I do have a vision of how the world might be:

I believe that God desires primarily the formation of communities devoted to him.

I believe that neither revolution nor elections are God's way to develop societies based on justice. Societies become just as individuals within them become just.

I can envision a time where persuasion will triumph over coercion in the affairs of humanity.

I can see a time of reduced poverty, not because of government programs, but due to the fact that living individuals have been moved by God's Spirit to help those caught in the darkness of the fallen world.

An old Protestant hymn of unknown authorship catches the essence of my prophetic vision well. It will stand as a summary:

Know this, that every soul is free.

To choose his life and what he'll be;

For this eternal truth is given,

That God will force no man to heaven.

He'll call, persuade, direct alright,

And bless with wisdom, love and light.

In nameless ways be good and kind,

But never force the human mind.

(THE VOLUNTARYIST Feb. 1992, p.7).

Many years ago God ambushed me, and the startling truth of his freedom continues to shake me up. I was struck dead in my tracks by his invitation to examine the issue raised by a Swedish girl who just happened to come to worship. Since then, the freedom that comes from knowing God has been God's gracious gift to me. It has changed the whole way the world appears to me. Applying the freedom found in God to ever new challenges and situations has been my calling. I knew then in part and am learning still that you cannot build the kingdom of love with the tools of Pharaoh. I thank God for the Swedish woman who was a prophet of God for me.

[Editor's Note: The author of this sermon has been pastor of United Methodist Churches in rural Missouri for the past eleven years. His article was originally prepared for the CIRCUIT RIDER Magazine's Sermon Critique Contest. References to Bible verses Exodus 5:1-9, John 19:1-16, and Romans 12:17, 13:1-7 in his original sermon have been deleted.

It is unusual to find a clergyman who identifies himself as a voluntarist. Pastor Schuermann relates that "the intellectual road I have taken to THE VOLUNTARYIST began with reading Michael Novak's THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM. Somehow from that I got plugged into Laissez Faire Books. In the back of David Friedman's THE MACHINERY OF FREEDOM, I found your address," and soon thereafter became a subscriber.

When I pointed out the lengthy Robert Nisbet quote in Whole No. 52 (p.2), to the effect that "the Church and State have more in common with each other than with the marketplace," Pastor Schuermann agreed that "the church has in history been a terrible coercive force. More dangerous than church or state alone is some sort of unholy alliance between them." Certainly both institutions have often restored to coercion and threats when demanding unity and loyalty.

Since this article was written as a sermon it intentionally leaves unanswered the questions (1) Why was the American flag standing in the church? and (2) What is the relationship between Christians and the State? As Pastor Schuermann wrote to me, "Part of the purpose of a sermon is to unsettle. It is a weakness in some sermons that all the loose ends seem to be tied up. In life nothing is so tidy." Perhaps he will begin to answer these two questions in future epistles.] ▣

"Neither fortresses nor cannon nor guns by themselves can make war, nor can the prisons lock their gates, nor the gallows hang... All these operations are performed by men. And when men understand that they need not make them, then these things will cease to be."

—Leo Tolstoy

Freedom: The Moral Foundation

continued from page 1

lobby, American enterprise has been buried beneath an avalanche of statutory regulations—and enormous federal regulatory agencies to enforce them—which together have become the biggest single cause of its poor performance and, in particular, of its stagnant productivity. The regulatory agency is now the American equivalent of the British trade union—an ever-growing burden which private enterprise must carry. And it is possible to observe the same process beginning here.

But of course the refusal to take risks is, for human societies, the greatest risk of all. And, at a moral level, the urge to take risks is the emblem of the divinity of man—the spirit of Icarus, which soars over our grosser appetites. I agree with Francis Bacon when he remarks: “They that deny God destroy man’s nobility; for certainly man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not kin to God by his spirit, then he is a base and ignoble creature.”

Well said; risk-taking springs from our elemental urge to do better, to excel and to realise the higher spirit within us. That is what gives risk its moral quality, and makes it such an ennobling element of a free society. The willingness to take risks is an essential element in all political progress; it is fundamental to economic expansion; and, not least, it is the foundation of human self-respect and moral improvement. Risk is the atmosphere in which freedom lives and breathes.

Conscience

The third great moral attribute of freedom is the individual conscience. Conscience is the self-correcting mechanism of human progress, the admonitory organ within us, which goes to the very core of our being, which spurs our sense of sacrifice and gives our urge towards risk its moral content. Freedom is not an end in itself; it is a means to a higher end.

Lord Acton, who spent his entire life collecting materials for a history of liberty, observed, rightly in my view: “Liberty is of conscience. A man must live by the light of doing what he ought.” A free society, he said, “is ultimately founded on the idea of conscience. A man must live by the light within and prefer God’s voice to man.”

We need not share Acton’s religious faith to accept the truth of this position. There is a light within all of us which must be allowed to shine on our lives. We cannot opt out of moral decisions by putting a collective conscience in charge of our behavior. Indeed, a collective conscience is a contradiction in terms. A conscience is individual, or it is nothing. I cannot delegate my conscience to a Member of Parliament, or a minister of government, let alone to a bureaucrat whom I do not even help to elect.

Perhaps one of the most morally debilitating features of our times is the willingness of so many among us to say: “The poor are no concern of mine—that is the business of the Ministry of Social Security. The sick are not my affair—that is for the Ministry of Health. Nor for me to look after the homeless—we have a Ministry of Housing for that.” This is the voice of moral abdication, the voice of Scrooge: “What, are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses? Are not the Treadmill and the Poor Law in full vigour?” he asked, when the charitable gentlemen called.

The central moral weakness of the compulsory society is that it turns charity into a nationalised industry, transforms the human impulse into a statutory benefit, and denies the individual the right to be generous in the light of his conscience. Conscience itself is indestructible, but without freedom to exercise it, atrophy sets in: a man is morally diminished when the state takes over ‘the still, small voice’ of conscience. ...

Conscience is our personal, inalienable possession: it is a birth-right and an heirloom, entailed on us as individuals for the span of our lives. We cannot mortgage it to a political party or surrender it to an ideology or give it to a politician to hawk around the House of Commons.

There is no such thing as a power of attorney over a man’s conscience. We are answerable as individuals; there can be no collective excuses. That is the ultimate moral merit of the free society and the voluntary principle: it recognises the individual responsibility of man and gives him liberty to accept or reject it. The choice is ours alone: we cannot take refuge behind

majority opinion.

Margaret Thatcher once said to me: “Why have we allowed the Socialists to claim morality on their side? Why do we say so little about the morality of freedom?” I agree with her. The most serious mistake made by those of us who honour individual freedom has been to allow the debate to be conducted on the field of efficiency and expediency alone. That is not good enough. I repeat: freedom is a moral issue. It is *above all* a moral issue.

The real evil of class politics, the fundamental objection to political determinism, is that they destroy the individuality of men as unique creatures, each invested with freedom of will. The class war—and the compulsory society to which it inevitably leads—breeds hatred and poisons society at its very roots. But, still more reprehensibly, it denies to you and me our status as human beings, whose desires and hopes and ideals transcend the class to which we belong or the economic category into which we are thrust by chance. It denies us this unique status, and insists that we are mere flotsam, ephemeral rubbish drifting impotently on the tides of historical necessity.

I reject these determinist doctrines as inherently immoral and grossly insulting. They degrade mankind. We are not lemmings. We are not swine of Gadara. Weak we may be, but the individual conscience gives us a freehold over our moral destiny which no party or state or regime can take away from us. That conscience is the ultimate credential of our humanity. I do not say that conscience is an easy possession. On the contrary, free will is necessarily a burden. The freedom to choose is, in one sense, a continuous burden, and a burden we must carry, in the last resort, alone.

The Virtuous Dead

That is why we need the help and inspiration of examples. We must have heroes, to comfort us in our solitude. And so we commemorate noble spirits who have gone before us. We commemorate them in tombs and monuments, in prose and verse, and on occasions like this, when we meet to remember a man whose life and sacrifice we admire, and whose example we strive to follow. A great gulf separates the living from the dead. But a man who dies well, in whose death we can discern moral purpose, throws, as it were, a slender bridge across that gulf. In departing he illuminates the scene, disperses the darkness, and gives us confidence and courage to follow.

There is, then, a kind of compact between the virtuous dead and the living who still aspire. In this case it was—is—a compact to hold on to the freedoms we still possess, and to seek to enlarge them. The compact goes back, generation after generation, deep into antiquity. Let us honour that compact in and by our lives, as he did. And let us honour it in such a way that those who come after us will wish to honour it too.

(Editor’s Note: My wife, Julie, thought the following poem an appropriate addendum to this piece.)

THE BRIDGE BUILDER

An old man, going a lone highway,
Came at the evening, cold and gray
To a chasm, vast, and deep, and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim—
That sullen stream had no fears for him,
But he turned when he reached the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting strength in building here.
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again must pass this way.
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head.
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
“There followeth after me today,
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim,
Good friend I am building the bridge for him.”

—Will Allen Dromgoole

Guest Columnist

Politicians: M.Y.O.B.!

By Al Bellerue

Some months before the November election, Barbara Bush offered her personal opinion on the subject of abortion. She said that she felt "it should not be a political issue."

Not only does that make sense, it points to the cause of many of the problems that confront us today—problems which stem directly from government trespass upon individual rights.

Not too many years ago, the expression: "Mind your own business," was commonplace. In fact, it was a peaceful, non-violent warning to some offender who was trespassing beyond proprietary limits. The warning usually worked. When the trespasser took heed, harmony was maintained.

Today, politicians have trespassed into many subjective areas that rightfully should have been left in the voluntary sector of society. One such area concerns the question of abortion. Here, as in many other examples, the politicians, legislatures, and courts are trespassing into a sphere that is none of their business.

In spite of the supposed adherence to the doctrine of "separation of church and state," many religious groups have been campaigning for laws for or against abortion. Other non-religious groups are doing the same thing. It's none of their business, either.

It is easy to understand the continuing degeneration of such groups when they stoop to use the coercive methods of political government to force their subjective beliefs upon everyone. Good and reasonable beliefs shouldn't need to be forced; they will grow, evolve, and be accepted by themselves.

Destructive political/religious intrusions upon individual freedom are continuously being substituted for constructive programs encouraging individual responsibility and private property ownership.

The logic of this argument—that moral persuasion, educational effort, and nonviolent social ostracism ought to be the tools by which we influence others—applies whether one thinks that abortion is right or wrong. Historically, abortion did not become a political issue until some religious groups sought to use the political process to impose their private views on society. Rather than resorting to politics, the right-to-lifers (anti-abortionists) should have been using social persuasion to promote their goals voluntarily. Rather than going the "political" route, they could have been magnifying their efforts to set up counselling centers, establish adoption agencies, and generally promoting their belief that "out of respect for all life" (including the unborn) women should carry their pregnancies to term. They might even arrange to accept guardianship of and financial responsibility for unwanted babies. But when the right-to-lifers try to use the coercive political system rather than using their own private resources to force their subjective beliefs upon everyone, they only succeed in creating public chaos out of what should have remained a highly personal decision.

And so when you hear a politician babbling for more government over women's free choice, tell him that Barbara said, "it should not be a political issue," and that I said, "Mind your own business!" But the real problem is that none of them really understands what this means!

(Al Bellerue is a free-lance columnist residing in Gold Canyon, Arizona) ☐

"There are no warlike peoples — just warlike leaders."

—Ralph Bunche

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