



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

June
2008

Chancellor's Update

National Greatness

Every nation has its days to exhibit patriotism, when the people extol the virtues of their country. Some are proud of their military victories, others are proud of their artistic and cultural achievements, while still others are proud of the personal freedoms they promote and protect. Of what does national greatness consist?

In January, 1846 essayist on social and religious questions, intellectual activist, and Catholic convert Orestes Brownson asked this very question in his Quarterly Review. "We answer, that nation is greatest in which man may most easily and effectually fulfill the true and proper end of man. The nation...is in the people. Its greatness must, then, be in the greatness of the people. The people are a collection or aggregation of individuals...Consequently the greatness of a nation...resolves itself, therefore, into the question of individual greatness. The greatness of the individual consists in his fulfilling the great ends of his existence, the ends for which Almighty God made him and placed him here. No man is truly great who neglects life's great ends, nor can one be said in truth to approach greatness any further than he fulfills them..."

"What is the end to which Almighty God has appointed man? ...For what has our Maker placed us here?. Were we placed here merely to be born and to die-to live for a moment, continue our species, toil, suffer, drop into the grave to rot, and be no more for ever? ...

"But this life is not our only life, and our destiny is not accomplished here. The grave is not our final doom; this world is not our home; we were not created for this world alone; and there is for us a life beyond this life...But even this...does not answer our question..."

"The true end for which man is to live is the supernatural end to which we are appointed, the beatitude which God hath promised to all that love and serve him here..."

"No man is great but as he is good, but as he lives in the order of grace and loves God above all things and with his whole heart and soul, and his neighbor as himself in and for the sake of God..."

"As of the individual, so of the nation. In like manner as justice and sanctity constitute the greatness of the individual, so do they constitute the greatness of the nation. *Justice exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.* (Proverbs 14:34) The great nation is the holy nation, rich in true obedience, and carried away by a divine passion for God and all holy things...*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.*" (Psalm 32:12)

These words echo the sentiments of General George Washington during the war for independence almost seventy years earlier. General Washington prayed, "And now, Almighty Father, if it is Thy holy will that we shall obtain a place and name among the nations of the earth, grant that we may be enabled to show our gratitude for Thy goodness by our endeavors to fear and obey Thee. Bless us with Thy wisdom in our counsels, success in battle, and let all our victories be tempered with humanity...Grant the petition of Thy servant, for the sake of Him whom Thou hast called Thy beloved Son; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done."

(W. J. Federer, *America's God and Country*, FAME Publishing, Inc., Coppell, Texas, 1994, p. 642).

On June 8, 1783 General Washington wrote to all Governors of the thirteen newly freed states. "I now make it my earnest prayer that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in His holy protection...that He would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation."

On October 11, 1798 signer of the Declaration of Independence and second President of the United States, John Adams addressed the military. "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

About thirty years later a famous Frenchman, historian, statesman and social philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited the United States. In his book *Democracy in America* he wrote, "Upon my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things..."

"I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors...in her fertile fields and boundless forests; in her rich mines and vast world commerce; in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution.

"Not until I went into the churches of America, and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.

"America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

James Madison, an author of the Constitution and fourth President of the United States, expressed a similar opinion. "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government; upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God." (Federer, *ibid.*, p. 411).

About one hundred years later, the great Christian author, C.S. Lewis echoed Brownson's sentiments in an essay entitled *The Three Parts of Morality*. He described a fleet of ships sailing in formation. "The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships don't collide and get in one another's way; and secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order...If the ships keep on having collisions they won't remain seaworthy very long. On the other hand, if their steering gears are out of order they won't be able to avoid collisions...And however well the fleet sailed, its voyage would be a failure if it were to reach New York and actually arrived at Calcutta." So, if each man is not living for God and not obeying the Ten Commandments, then the political and cultural result will be many collisions and not aiming for life's great ends.

As we ponder America, her patriots, her virtues and her greatness, we pray that her individual members will reclaim her religious heritage, as described by De Tocqueville, "Christianity...reigns without obstacle, by universal consent."

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Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-

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