



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

May
2022

Chancellor's Update

How To Think *NOT* What to Think

Over twenty years ago the then House Majority Leader, Dick Arme, said "Outcome-based education... trains the child away from the attitudes, belief and convictions that parents teach children at home." Thomas Sowell, author, of *Inside American Education* said: "Parents have no idea how they are being undermined." Today, as a result of not paying attention to what has been taught, we have Critical Race Theory (CRT). Now, Robert B. Charles brings us up to date with the following quote:

The greatest service we can do for our children is to teach them how to think, not what to think. The greatest service we can do for ourselves is to humbly remember that lesson. This may sound like common sense, but common sense is fading. Now is a good time to remember.

Daily, we get bombarded by those who are sure they know, confident in their conclusions, pressing our kids-and us-to accept their claptrap lock, stock, and barrel. Can we still say that? Teachers, unions, politicians, and the media push us to forget our history, traditions, principles, and past sacrifice, to abandon all we know from life experience to be true, from honor to biology and liberty to math.

Using fear, prejudice, accusations, peer pressure, loss of employment, even federal power, they encourage average citizens to doubt themselves. They press kids and parents to accept unacceptable, immoral, objectionable, freedom-crippling junk. They tell us to "just go along".

The modern vice-pushed more by government and media than citizen on citizen-is to infiltrate and influence our lives through centers of persuasion and livelihood, school boards and town meetings, work, school, and polling places. And to question is to be villainously extreme to nonconformist.

We are coerced by anonymous high-tech, low intelligence, government-dependent voices to forget what we know, assume our compass is now faulty, and reorient to social trends and variants.

To trust oneself is viewed as odd, vaguely dangerous, almost reportable, especially if you hold moral, religious, historical, constitutional, or grounded convictions. The list is long but known to all who keep their own counsel. Ridicule often follows the exercise of free speech.

So, what does this moment mean? It means we need to fortify each other and take stock of what we know, not what others tell us to know. And what we know is found in the wisdom of the ages.

Among the most admired American writers, famed for his "Essay on Self-Reliance," is Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Born when Thomas Jefferson was president, he lived through Lincoln and the Civil War, and he died the year Theodore Roosevelt served his first term in the New York State Assembly.

Wrote Emerson, a quintessentially original thinker: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." Continuing: "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind," thus "a man should learn to detect

and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of [. . .] bards and sages." Or politicians.

In other words, when others tell you what to think, stop and say, "No, I will recall how to think and think for myself, view all assumptions with skepticism, give them weight due, and no more.

By recognizing that much of what passes for wisdom is nonsense, and for morality just self-indulgence, we get a whole new appreciation for our own reasoning. If we stop to question assumptions, if we bother to probe, reason backwards, ask hard questions, and not accept blithe conclusions, we learn to trust ourselves. That is wildly empowering, as it was for our Founders.

The point is not just to stir the pot, but to have integrity. Colin Powell used to say we needed to have the courage to "be the skunk at the garden party," to say the truth when others will not.

The goal is to think afresh, regain balance by dead reckoning, trust yourself, and have what Emerson called self-reliance-the opposite of dependence on big government or media.

Notably, like our Founding Fathers, Emerson disdained "groupthink," compliance with political "factions." Half a century after Washington, Madison, Jefferson, Franklin, Hamilton, and Monroe, he pressed us to do what they did: think for ourselves.

Wrote Emerson: "A party is an elegant incognito devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking." Yet thinking is what Americans are known for-being stubborn, ruggedly independent.

The principle goes further back than Emerson, Lincoln, or America's Founders. It was advocated by Socrates, Cicero, and most of the Greats. Wrote Voltaire: "Doubt is not a pleasant state of mind, but certainty is absurd," especially blindly following a power-concentrating political party.

If credit belongs to early thinkers and to Emerson, it goes also to modern sages, conservatives like Russell Kirk, Ronald Reagan, and William Buckley and those who pushed original thought. What rings true in their counsel should be heard again and taught widely. Freedom requires us to think.

To accept what a leftist politician, social media engine, talking head, or Marxist firebrand, perhaps beholden to higher authorities, says is unthinking. It's a loss of integrity, an insult to your reasoning, the definition of conformity. And what happy American was ever a conformist?

With two final quotes from Emerson, I leave you to think for yourself, drawing your own conclusions. He wrote, referring to parrot-like politicians: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines," adding that "with consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do" and "may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall."

In "Self-Reliance," Emerson wrote: "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist." His point was not to cause trouble or urge us to become antisocial belligerents, be violent, or start riots.

His point was clear, painfully simple: If you wish to live well, be happy, be your best, and help society to prosper, do your own thinking and encourage those around you to do the same. The great secret is learning how to think, not what to think-perhaps the greatest service we can perform.

Copyright 2022 by the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. All rights reserved. The O.S.J. Messenger and the Chancellor's Update are among the authorized publications of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. and the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem-Knights of Malta. World Headquarters and Convent of the Order are located in Hughesville, Maryland in the United States of America.



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

<http://sovereignorderofsaintjohnofjerusalemknightsofmalta.org/>