

ON LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

[This essay is about “freedom for” and not about “freedom from” as such: there is no question that freedom from tyranny is always a good, right and just value and goal. The content of this essay, however, has to do with what is to be done about the freedom preserved, maintained or even gained in the first place – it has to do with *life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*. Unless “freedom from” has to do with “valued and ordered living for” then what good is it?]

I should think that the content and the ordering of the vision, values and rights made by the founding fathers in government of our country – of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - were not hastily or unthoughtfully, or unprayerfully made. I should think then that they came from both the light of natural reason and the aid of supernatural grace. They are clear, concise, and insightful and would not make too much sense if the order was rearranged in any way.

Having said this, just from a study of American history, it seems that the initial LIFE FIRST, emphasis (which also includes “love” – because life and love are bound together categorically), has been, over the years, especially since World War II shifting to LIBERTY FIRST (to the point that absolute unhinged liberty and freedom seems to be the ideal); and in the later 20th and now into the 21st century there has been a shift to PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS (pleasure at all costs) as a primary goal of American lifestyle!

I should think that the founding fathers would not be pleased if they were to come to life today! Freedom of tyranny is one thing; living thoughtfully and responsibly is something else.

This essay is mainly an educated guess as to what might happen in the not so distant future regarding the American dream. It is made, however, as one who is a Catholic Christian – who knows that his true citizenship lies in a Realm beyond this one – and that one of his primary religious duties is to influence the world at large so that it realizes that life is short and that it too is part of that coming Realm whether it knows it or acknowledges it or not – and that life together here could

be a lot more peaceful and productive if more could at least agree on that one starting point.

My prognosis for the spiritual/psychological health of the country is very guarded, unless it begins to respond to the grace of the Holy Spirit that God is constantly offering to it to become a land where life, liberty and happiness are prized and honored in the order in which they were discovered by the founding fathers.

And the operative word is “discovered.”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth [and all that is in them]” – in creating and giving LIFE to man and establishing them in LOVE and FRIENDSHIP with himself and with one another [male and female, Adam and Eve] he gifted them with FREEDOM– free-will in making decisions for their own individual and common good; and then he sent them on their way to subdue the earth – to discover where true HAPPINESS lies – in the fulfillment of his will – which indeed is the seat of their happiness. God is most happy, when man is most happy doing his will. This is how we have been programmed from the start!

Does this progressive order sound familiar: created life/love; free-will; mandate to discover happiness? It ought to - both as a biblical reference, but also as the exact principles and value on which the founding fathers of our country based the present and future of their newly formed nation. There is no doubt that these God-fearing (godly) men used their rightly formed consciences to discover the already “given” values of LIFE, LIBERTY and the PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS (in the particular irreversible order in which they were manifested); and not only to discover them but to proclaim them as veritable rights of every citizen. This, to me, proves that they are indeed from God – because they match perfectly and exactly the very intention and will of God in creating, gifting and sending his own highest form of creation not only to live their own family lives, but family lives together in a human society.

God could not have created “freedom” or “pursuit of happiness” first – without anyone to bestow these gifts upon. If we place these values first then we have also unhinged them from the very necessary prerequisite: the supreme values of

life and love. If “freedom”(freedom *for*) comes first and is sought after as an absolute: then there is inevitable slavery to subjectivism, relativism, and chaotic anarchy: if everyone is free in this hypothetical framework then no one is free and everyone is forced to be subjected to what everyone wants to put upon them. This is not only illogical, it is extremely selfish and self-centered – and has no place in a society of persons who are trying to get along with one another. If everyone is a god, then no one has any real authority at all.

If “pursuit of happiness” comes first coupled with “free-for-all-anything goes (even with the best of intentions)” mentality then the ethical climate cannot help but be more polluted, stagnant, hedonistic and gravely unethical and immoral than not. How could it be otherwise since the pull of original sin and its consequent very powerful emotions of three-fold lust can get the upper hand and keep it unless somehow the power of the Redemption, the power of the Cross is allowed to intervene and break the spell.

When “love/life” as given by God, comes first, however ---- an amazing opportunity for liberty and the pursuit of happiness follows. The primary example and affirming cause of the “original set-up” is Jesus. Jesus came to earth because he “loved us” and was very much concerned about the fact that we were now subject to eternal death rather than abundant life here and hereafter; in his amazing gift of giving his life for his friends (us, all) on the Cross Jesus not only destroyed death, but he also restored life – because in his mind, which is God’s mind: “life comes first” – and then the freedom is now reestablished so that we can do loving things for one another – and hopefully, only loving things – *doing unto others as we would have them do unto us*: loving as we have been loved by God – as we fulfill our destinies – to be fully and completely happy as members of God’s household in heaven forever. Whatever path leads to that particular happiness can be evaluated as a proper pursuit for here because it will lead to there.

In “non-religious” terms: when “love/life” in their purity and abundance is a primary focus for persons, then, freedom and free-will have a proper subject. We would only “choose” what will enhance life and not diminish or destroy it; and the

happiness that we get doing the loving and friending of people - in as much as possible a disinterested yet committed way - will blossom forth in the bliss of eternal life of which the joys that come from truly being other-oriented now are only a small foretaste.

On a personal level, I should think that men in our military services would be willing to die for love/life first, and then freedom-for, and then the pursuit of happiness. Unless the freedom is based in concrete persons (wife, children, parents, grandparents etc. friends back home, even strangers), then it seems more difficult to fight to the death for an unqualified concept of freedom. I should not think that anyone would give their life so that a good portion of the population is absorbed in a variety of self-gratifying, pleasure oriented games and pursuits.

Perhaps it can be argued that “freedom” is the *central* value, and this is precisely my point, *it is centrally located in between life/love and pursuit of happiness*. Life/love give freedom *substance*, pursuit of legitimate happiness gives freedom *direction*. So, yes, the word “freedom” is centrally situated and worth our focus but only if we remember what comes before and after it in the order in which it was originally given.

What is an absolute fact is that the human mind is already programmed to go for the good, to go for the right, to go for the beautiful, to go for the just: *to go for life/liberty/the pursuit of happiness (in that particular order)*. We are simply wired that way because God wants us with him in eternity! So while preserving our freedom (free-will) he goes so far as to tip the scale in favor of our seeking real and true happiness, which comes from freely choosing life/love first. This is called CONSCIENCE – (to “know with” – *to know with certainty* the right direction to go so that our lives will be abundant in an environment of life and love forever).

Somehow, through prayer and reflection and much discussion, our founding fathers tuned into their consciences and placed the values of LIFE, LIBERTY and PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS – in the divine order – in the exact same order that God did. We therefore ought to honor their work and discover newer ways to live out

each value in the order they were given! Shouldn't this be the primary duty of good citizens in society and good government?

In our day, the order is in grave danger of not only being violated, but even dismantled. This is truly the work of the Evil One who apparently feels himself threatened more than usual at this particular time in history – and perhaps is bringing upon himself the arrival of THE FINAL BATTLE – where he will discover for himself that he has already lost the entire way.

LOVE & DIVINE FRIENDSHIP/ABUNDANT LIFE; LIBERTY IN CHRIST; AND THE PURSUIT OF ETERNAL HAPPINESS are and will be completely victorious and reign forever.

My questions are two: did Jesus affirm his Father's establishment of the order of life/liberty/pursuit of happiness and confirm their power by his own Death and Resurrection for nothing?

and: shall we, or any that we know, get on board with this now; or risk missing the boat entirely in the end because we were too caught up in our own faulty perspectives and stubborn views?

Most assuredly a great many will not be spending eternity enjoying the fullness of life/liberty/happiness because they chose death/slavery/misery here and now! And God - who gave us love and life – and respects our freedom and conception of happiness (however incomplete or faulty it might be) – will be very sad when he has to grant some their hearts' request of eternal existence without him, or anyone else, simply because they rejected light and grace – the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Who would want to do such a thing?

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May 31, 2009

The Solemnity of Pentecost