

“And The Fair Land”: Freedom Is America’s True Blessing

WASHINGTON – *Thanksgiving 2015* –

The Wall Street Journal has been publishing the same “Thanksgiving” Editorial since 1961. It is titled “And The Fair Land”. it depicts America as a land of opportunity and resourcefulness. But also a land of self-doubt, fears, and internal conflict.

However, the hope expressed in this enduring essay is that we Americans shall reflect on the fact that this land was built by confident people. And they were, and we are, the spiritual heirs of the Pilgrims who came to America, so long ago, carrying with them only a hope for a better life.

They celebrated the first Thanksgiving in 1623, beginning a tradition that was later on institutionalized, and that we still honor today.

And The Fair Land

“Any one whose labors take him into the far reaches of the country, as ours lately have done, is bound to mark how the years have made the land grow fruitful.

This is indeed a big country, a rich country, in a way no array of figures can measure and so in a way past belief of those who have not seen it. Even those who journey through its Northeastern complex, into the Southern lands, across the central plains and to its Western slopes can only glimpse a measure of the bounty of America.

And a traveler cannot but be struck on his journey by the thought that this country, one day, can be even greater.

America, though many know it not, is one of the great underdeveloped countries of the world; what it reaches for exceeds by far what it has grasped.

So the visitor returns thankful for much of what he has seen, and, in spite of everything, an optimist about what his country might be. Yet the visitor, if he is to make an honest report, must also note the air of unease that hangs everywhere.

For the traveler, as travelers have been always, is as much questioned as questioning. And for all the abundance he sees, he finds the questions put to him ask where men may repair for succor from the troubles that beset them.

His countrymen cannot forget the savage face of war. Too often they have been asked to fight in strange and distant places, for no clear purpose they could see and for no accomplishment they can measure. Their spirits are not quieted by the thought that the good and pleasant bounty that surrounds them can be destroyed in an instant by a single bomb. Yet they find no escape, for their survival and comfort now depend on unpredictable strangers in far-off corners of the globe.

How can they turn from melancholy when at home they see young arrayed against old, black against white, neighbor against neighbor, so that they stand in peril of social discord. Or not despair when they see that the cities and countryside are in need of repair, yet find themselves threatened by scarcities of the resources that sustain their way of life. Or when, in the face of these challenges, they turn for leadership to men in high places—only to find those men as frail as any others.

So sometimes the traveler is asked whence will come their succor. What is to preserve their abundance, or even their civility? How can they pass on to their children a nation as strong and free as the one they inherited from their

forefathers? How is their country to endure these cruel storms that beset it from without and from within?

Of course the stranger cannot quiet their spirits. For it is true that everywhere men turn their eyes today much of the world has a truly wild and savage hue. No man, if he be truthful, can say that the specter of war is banished. Nor can he say that when men or communities are put upon their own resources they are sure of solace; nor be sure that men of diverse kinds and diverse views can live peaceably together in a time of troubles.

But we can all remind ourselves that the richness of this country was not born in the resources of the earth, though they be plentiful, but in the men that took its measure. For that reminder is everywhere—in the cities, towns, farms, roads, factories, homes, hospitals, schools that spread everywhere over that wilderness.

We can remind ourselves that for all our social discord we yet remain the longest enduring society of free men governing themselves without benefit of kings or dictators. Being so, we are the marvel and the mystery of the world, for that enduring liberty is no less a blessing than the abundance of the earth.

And we might remind ourselves also, that if those men setting out from Delftshaven had been daunted by the troubles they saw around them, then we could not this autumn be thankful for a fair land.” [emphasis added]

—The Wall Street Journal

WSJ To Pope Francis: Our Prosperity Stems From Freedom

WASHINGTON – Here is how The Wall Street Journal, the unofficial protector of American capitalism, greets Pope Francis on the eve of his visit to Washington, (*The Politics of Pope Francis*, September 22, 2015):

“Like many Argentines of the left, Pope Francis seems given to suspicion about American wealth. But liberty and not coercion is the source of our [American] strength and of the wealth that has lifted millions out of poverty.[...].The U.S has prospered by respecting property rights and relying on the voluntary decisions of individuals. The rule of law here means that unlike countries such as Argentina, an American can build a large, successful business even if no one in government likes him. And unlike in Argentina, capitalist success creates millions of jobs that allow men and women without political connections to support their families and live in dignity.”

Freedom includes economic freedom

So, here is the thing. In America we have built a society whose corner stone is the constitutional protection of individual freedoms. Among these freedoms there is economic freedom. People are free to start a business.

As long as they play by the rules, respecting all the laws and the rights of others, all Americans are free to work and prosper. In so doing, they bring along many others employed by them. Wider prosperity means less poverty.

And it all starts with freedom. In Cuba, the first stop in Pope Francis’ trip, there is no freedom, including no real economic freedom, (despite minor reforms). And so, while the political elites are taken care of, the people suffer. They are poor in large part because they are not free.

God-given rights

In America we created widespread prosperity as a result of the enterprise and hard work of free people, and not political favors and kickbacks. This is the good outcome of the exercise of “natural rights” that our Founding Fathers believed to be given to each human being by God.

Yes, in America we do believe that the Almighty blesses hard work and its fruits. And, yes, we also believe that the best tool to fight poverty is not redistribution policies or chastising the rich, but broad-based growth.

After 150 Years, We Still Mourn Lincoln's Death

WASHINGTON – 150 years ago President Lincoln was assassinated as he was watching a play. His killing, just a few days after the end of the Civil War, was an immense tragedy. Beyond the loss of his life, America lost a leader who could have steered the war-torn country in a different direction.

Johnson and Reconstruction

It was America's bad luck that, because of Lincoln's death, Vice President Andrew Johnson, a racist, became President. He engineered Reconstruction in a way that allowed the old Southern establishment to reassert itself and circumvent, in practice, Lincoln's objective to give freedom and equality to the Black slaves.

Slavery had been abolished. But some its worst features came back via the segregation legislation passed by all Southern

states. These laws relegated Blacks to the bottom of society, with few, if any, chances to emerge from poverty and illiteracy.

New course

While it would be too much to assign the entire blame of Reconstruction to President Johnson, he certainly changed the course that had been charted by Lincoln with the Emancipation Proclamation, and then the 13th Amendment that formally abolished slavery.

It took America another century to finally confront the legalized injustice of segregation. It was only in the 1960s that true equality under the law, for all Americans, was finally established.

Which is to say that leadership matters. Certainly the goal of welcoming the former Black slaves into the American mainstream would have been an immense challenge for any President.

But Johnson chose to essentially reverse course. He wanted peace and normalization with the South. And that meant looking the other way as the old White establishment reasserted itself, while pushing the former slaves down, and keeping them down for another century.

America lost a leader

Yes, without exaggeration, sometimes in history one man can make an enormous difference. And this is why the death of Abraham Lincoln is such an immense tragedy.

He lost his life, just days after victory in a horrible war.

Without his leadership, America lost a chance to advance on the path of equality and justice for all.

America Is Still “The Fair Land”

WASHINGTON – Since 1961 The Wall Street Journal has published the same editorial in celebration of Thanksgiving, the most American of all the annual festivities. This is the way in which this newspaper declares that the old American values, the values that inspired the Founders, should continue to be our guidance as we move forward. Thanksgiving is tied to the history of the Pilgrims who in 1620 sailed to America on the Mayflower and who established their small colony in Plymouth, in what later on became the state of Massachusetts.

Thanksgiving

Over the centuries, Thanksgiving has become the day of the year in which America reaffirms the value of its unique experience. Americans celebrate their spiritual roots with family gatherings.

And this is what the old 1961 WSJ editorial, published again and again, says in its conclusion:

“We can remind ourselves that for all our social discord we yet remain the longest enduring society of free men governing themselves without the benefit of kings and dictators. Being so, we are the marvel and the mystery of the world, for that liberty is no less a blessing than the abundance of the earth.”

“And we might remind ourselves also that if those men [The Pilgrims] setting out from Delfthaven [in the Netherlands] had been daunted by the troubles they saw around them, then we could not this autumn be thankful for a fair land”.

Yes, the Pilgrim Fathers who landed in America in 1620 had the fortitude to believe that they could succeed, despite the terrible odds.

Their experiment, after so many changes and additions, became a Republic based on the twin pillars of the sacrosanct value of individual freedoms and self-government.

The story of Plymouth Colony is emblematic of an arduous journey. Nothing was easy. Only a strong spirit made it possible to build Plymouth Colony, and much later a different country, the very first modern republic. This is true today as it was true in 1620: *we are still on a journey, and nothing important is easy.*

Let's value our freedom

Therefore, let's cultivate our spirit. Let's value our freedom and let's protect it, as we use our intellect and our ingenuity to continue building this country.

Most of all, let's keep in mind that our unique American foundations rest not on language or shared ethnic origins but on the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution.

As long as these principles are understood and shared by all Americans, we can rest assured that the "Fair Land" will endure and will prosper.

There Is No Such Thing As An

“Illiberal Democracy”

WASHINGTON – *“Giovinezza, giovinezza, primavera di bellezza, nel fascismo e’ la salvezza della nostra liberta’”*. *“Youth, youth, springtime of beauty, in fascism is the safeguard of our freedom”*. This is the refrain of *“Giovinezza”*, *“Youth”*, the hymn of the Italian Fascist Party. In many ways, a beautiful and inspiring song. It is all about youth, national unity, shared purpose, fighting the good fight.

Fascism and liberty?

Of course, in hindsight, we notice a huge dissonance. How could *“fascism”* become the safeguard of *“freedom”*? Fascism is the denial of freedom. It is totalitarian, it is about a faction that took power in Italy in 1922 outside of democratic methods. It is about the abolition of most individual freedoms, first and foremost the freedom to criticize the government and to organize any political opposition.

Of course, fascism and any other authoritarian look-alike offshoot amounts, among many other things, to the denial of freedom. But for more than 20 years *“(Il “Ventennio”)* the Italians were happily going to Fascist rallies, proudly singing *“Giovinezza”*. And many of them for sure really believed that Fascism was protecting their freedom.

What is democracy?

But how is this possible? How can we commingle freedom and autocracy as if they had anything in common? Well, this is possible when liberal democracy fails to reaffirm in a peaceful but authoritative fashion what real democracy is about.

Mussolini: The Man of Providence

And quite often this is not done. While Mussolini was ruling over Italy, many European conservatives admired him. They saw messy Italy finally organized. And, let's not forget that under Mussolini "trains run on time". Which is to say that for the perennially anarchical Italians a good dose of authoritarian government was a God send, right what the doctor ordered. (In fact the Catholic Church, a powerful moral authority, called Mussolini "The Man of Providence". Think of that).

(Mussolini ruined his chances by getting into WWII along Hitler. Had he stayed on the sidelines, just like fellow dictator Francisco Franco did in Spain, he might have died of old age, as opposed to being executed by the Italian Resistance in the last days of the war.)

We still fail to make distinctions

But my point here is that this dangerous commingling of opposite concepts that belong to true liberal democratic principles and authoritarian government is not confined to the inter war period. No, it still goes on today. And, just as many decades ago, it is essentially unchallenged.

Autocracy disguised as democracy

Hugo Chavez run Venezuela, nominally a democracy, like a *de facto* autocrat. Under his rule, the state controlled oil production, the major source of economic wealth. He silenced the media and he persecuted his political opponents. All, of course, in the name of the greater good. You see, he was on the side of the historically dispossessed. Therefore, his strong-arm tactics against his opponents, (the old exploiters), were politically and morally justified, according to his many sincere followers. His successor, Nicolas Maduro, is continuing the same course of action.

Non democracies in Europe and at its periphery

And there is more. Look at Putin's Russia. Or Viktor Orban's Hungary. Of the two, contrary to what you may think, the most dangerous is the case of Hungary. In Hungary, now there is a Prime Minister who openly advocates "illiberal democracy" as a better alternative. But Hungary, unlike Russia, is a member of two "clubs of democracies", the European Union and NATO, the North Atlantic Alliance.

Now, you may argue that we shouldn't worry too much about what goes on in Hungary, a smallish, economically irrelevant country at the periphery of Europe.

Well, I strongly disagree. Hungary is a member (supposedly in good standing) of both the European Union and NATO, the security pact led by the United States. The European Union is a Union of real democracies. Likewise, NATO is an alliance that was created to protect the values of western democracies.

Democracy, not so good

And now we have this curious situation whereby the head of government of one of the members of both the EU and NATO advocates principles that are completely at odds with those ostensibly chosen and observed by all the others.

And yet, I haven't heard of any serious initiative aimed at kicking Hungary out of the EU or out of NATO. And this negligence tells me that we have a much bigger problem in our hands.

Democracies, unsure of themselves

Simply stated, liberal democracy is unsure of itself. And for this reason it does not put up a fight against those –like Orban– who treat it as a flawed and ineffective model.

The fundamentals

The fact is that we have forgotten that liberal democracy is a

lot more than just holding elections every few years. It rests on a set of great but complex ideas. The central idea is that the individual is sovereign and that his fundamental rights and prerogatives should be protected by a government that can claim legitimacy only if it acts with the consent of the governed.

Of course, individuals come together within an organized society. Through an orderly, agreed upon process they decide the boundaries between the individual and the state, always keeping in mind that the "common good" is defined by the members of society and not by those who hold executive power.

No autocrats, please

In other words, in a liberal democracy we cannot have a Vladimir Putin or a Hugo Chavez coming along and saying: "I have been elected. I know what needs to be done, and I'll do it. In order to make sure that I can advance national and social goals (as I see them), I shall get rid of all or most opponents".

In a real democracy, the task of government is first of all to secure all the basic liberties of all citizens. And there is more. America's Founding Fathers strongly believed that the condition of liberty was and is the essential ingredient for unleashing the full potential of all citizens. Through their ingenuity, their inventiveness and their creativity, free people would be able to build a prosperous society.

Delicate principles

Having said all that, it should become a little clearer that democracy rests upon critical but extremely delicate principles that can be easily distorted.

Indeed, it takes a great deal of shared maturity to establish reasonable and equitable boundaries between personal and

societal interests. And the way we set these boundaries up will influence how we draw laws regulating property rights, contracts, taxation, corporations and a lot more.

Doing it right

Doing all this “right” is extremely difficult. But doing it right is the only way to prove the validity of the connection between a well-functioning liberal democracy and a prosperous economy.

A dysfunctional democracy rarely creates prosperity. And this allows many people to conclude that “traditional democracy does not deliver”. So we may as well look at variations on the basic model in order to improve efficiency. And here is how we get to Orban in Hungary, or Putin in Russia.

So, what do you prefer? An inefficient democracy (India), or an efficient autocracy, (China)?

Do we have what it takes?

It is not easy to answer this question. Ideally we want both: democracy and efficiency. But, in order to get there, we need to ascertain that we do indeed have the necessary preconditions within our society to structure a well-functioning liberal democracy.

My suggestion is to look at ourselves and what we really believe in. Liberal democracy is a complex, sophisticated and fragile instrument. In the hands of people who have not truly understood and embraced its principles, it becomes a mockery, or worse an abomination.

No such thing as “illiberal democracy”

Still, whatever else can be said, at least one thing should be clear. Those who claim to follow genuine liberal democratic principles should at least be able to say that

“illiberal democracy” does not exist. There is no such thing. Period.

If the Hungarians really like Mr. Orban’s authoritarian ideas, so be it. But Hungary at that point would have to exit the EU and NATO, groupings of nations that welcome in their midst only genuine democracies.

All the others are not, *repeat are not*, welcome.

When Moral Behavior Is Based Purely On Convenience

WASHINGTON – A retired elder statesman came up with wise advice for President Obama. He just wrote that, many years ago, when he was just getting started in politics, he was told by a seasoned politician in his own state that one should always be loyal to one’s friends. And he believes that this was and still is a valid guideline.

Loyalty pays

And why? Because –you see– in the long run, this is the smart thing to do. Staying loyal may carry a price. In some cases it may be inconvenient. But, look, that fact is that you will need your friends’ support when things get rough. Therefore, take my advice. Be smart: stay loyal to those who are on your side. You never know, but sooner or later you will need them.

Well, in principle this piece of advice may sound self-evident and unobjectionable, even though it is clear that, in practice, many leaders do not stick to this principle. No, they turn with the wind and change loyalties, if this seems to

be politically convenient.

No moral foundation

Anyway, my point here is not to debate the validity of the advice as it may apply to this or that issue.

My goal here is to point out that the advice of “staying loyal” is based entirely on what is politically smart, as opposed to being moral.

Here the advice to pursue loyalty is presented as the result of a careful and shrewd “cost-benefit analysis”. Even though it may cost you in the short run, in the long run the smart thing to do in politics is to be loyal to your friends. Trust me, when all is said and done, this is the wiser course of action.

Loyalty is smart

So, here we are talking about good or bad tactics, and what may or may not lead to long-term political advantage, and not about moral principles. A business-like approach tells you that being loyal will benefit you more than being disloyal.

So, don't be stupid. You assess the pros and cons; and, if you are smart, you will see that it is more convenient to stay loyal to your supporters than to betray them.

Again, note that no moral principle is invoked here. The wise advice is not that “You should be loyal because this is the moral thing to do”. No, “You should be loyal, because this is the shrewd thing to do. Because it pays. “

What if being disloyal pays more?

But what if in the real world the opposite were true? What if we discovered that betraying one's supporters in fact benefits the elected leader more? Then what? Well, then the smart thing to do would be to betray. Because –you see– being disloyal

pays more than being loyal.

Welcome to our unhinged world in which some do not even try to provide a genuine moral foundation for what they deem to be clever political behavior.

Monticello In The Spring

WASHINGTON – A while ago I found in a Virginia thrift shop an old color photograph of Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson. The frame was cheap and dented. But the photograph was undamaged.

Monticello in the Spring

I bought it because it shows Monticello in the Spring. The famous mansion is surrounded by bright green trees and bushes full of flowers.

But there was something else that attracted me to this old snapshot. Monticello, the home of the author of the Declaration of Independence, looks beautiful and almost resplendent in the bright sunshine, while lovely flowers surround it.

It seems as if the sunlight shines right on the front entrance. The white columns are stark. It all looks solemn, and at the same time serene and inviting.

A new frame

I ordered a new, beautiful frame for this photograph. And I picked it up from the frame shop just a few days ago. And now I placed Monticello in the Spring on the wall in front of my desk. As I look, with some reverence, at this historic home,

it makes me think about Jefferson and about the other Founders.

They had a dream about a workable free society that could endure, as long as its citizens and elected representatives had the wisdom to find and keep the correct balance between the protection of individual pursuits and the caring for the common good.

The Founders' vision

How is America doing, these days? May be not so great. However, as we just celebrated another anniversary of the Declaration of Independence that Jefferson wrote, I believe that his vision of a good society in which people are mostly wise is still viable and possible.

As I look again at Monticello, Jefferson's home, surrounded by beautiful flowers and almost resplendent in the bright sun light, I really believe that it is well within our powers to continue the good work of America's Founders.

The Fourth Of July Is A Reminder To Appreciate The Gift Of Freedom

WASHINGTON— Today is the Fourth of July, the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of 1776 –and America's most revered public holiday.

People are essentially good

Despite their determination to fight against an unjust King,

the Founders of the United States of America, children of the Age of the Enlightenment, "The Age of Light", were not bellicose people. In fact they shared a fundamentally positive view of human nature.

The pursuit of knowledge

According to them, human beings are naturally predisposed to pursue greater knowledge that will enrich their spirits, and to use their improved understanding of the laws of nature, of physics and mechanics to produce tools and machines that will improve economic processes and the quality of life.

The only real obstacle between people and their overall benign pursuit of knowledge is political oppression perpetrated by a tyrannical government that, by definition, does not acknowledge, let alone abide by, the will of the people.

Freedom

The American Revolution that started with the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, set in motion a process that was supposed to lead to freedom from oppression. After that, the Founders, after some initial hesitation, decided to create a Federal Government whose main objective was supposed to be the protection of liberty, via an unprecedented experiment in republican self-government.

And liberty, as we have seen above, was viewed as a blissful state in which people could pursue their interests and aspirations within the boundaries of fair laws, but without fear of governmental interference or arbitrary retribution.

Knowledge comes because of freedom

Assuming fairly educated and entrepreneurial people, freedom would be the magic yeast that would lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, more progress and therefore increased prosperity. (It is no accident that Thomas Jefferson

and Benjamin Franklin, among the most intellectually gifted individuals of their age, were also the founders of universities).

America attracted original thinkers

If you wonder why America has been and still is a large laboratory and workshop where innovators from all over the world felt and feel at home, the answer is in the optimistic –and ultimately true– assumptions of our Founders. Indeed, ground breaking new ideas are hatched and grow better within a terrain made fertile by freedom.

Other countries that today want to emulate America and become laboratories of innovation, should reflect on America's history. It is not by accident that America became a magnet for people with big new ideas.

They came (and they still come) here because they understood that a free society that protects freedom and private property, including intellectual property, (as in patents, trademarks and copyrights), would be a better place in which to establish their home and their base.

Prosperity is the result of freedom

It sounds so simple. And yet it is profound. The Founders believed that human beings were mostly good and driven by a healthy desire to pursue new knowledge. This knowledge would broaden their minds and at the same time it would increase societal maturity and wisdom. Some of this new knowledge, once developed into inventions and machines, would improve the quality of life.

As we know, this linear concept of a free and happy society that would move from success to success was a bit too optimistic. Many failures along the way attest to that. Still, all in all, it was and is mostly true.

Nurturing freedom

The Fourth of July is an opportunity to reflect on the value of this incredible gift of freedom. The Founders believed that it was a “natural right”. And yet they also understood that freedom was difficult to obtain, (hence the Revolution), and still quite fragile once acquired. Freedom is precious. It must be protected and nurtured, because it is the essential precondition that makes everything else possible.

Unfortunately, if we take freedom for granted, then we do not value it, and therefore we lose sight of the infinite possibilities that it opens up.

How do we use our freedom?

The Founders knew from experience that freedom was the coveted condition that made life good and enjoyable. And we? What do we think of freedom –today– as we celebrate the revolution that gave it to us? What can we do –today– because we are free?

These are no idle questions. Indeed, unless we modern Americans can give a good answer –an answer that includes optimistic hope and the unleashing of positive energies, as opposed to confusion and self-doubt– then America’s future becomes uncertain and very cloudy.

Let us treasure and put to good use our freedom –our Founders’ precious gift.

The Meaning of “American Exceptionalism”

WASHINGTON – A few years ago, when asked about the meaning of “American Exceptionalism” during a trip abroad, President Obama, who knows why, dodged the question with a silly answer. *“Well, America is exceptional in its own way, but so is Greece and so is Britain, blah, blah, blah...”*. It is sad when the American President cannot explain to a foreign audience what makes America unique, perhaps for fear of appearing presumptuous and therefore not likable. Obama could have explained. But he preferred not to. I have no idea why.

American Exceptionalism is about a unique history

In truth, “American Exceptionalism” has nothing to do with a feeling of national superiority, or with an ideology that justifies American world hegemony. It has to do with the historic uniqueness of the American experience.

Unlike other nations, America is not founded on race, religion, a shared language or a long history of a people living on a specific piece of land.

The state protects individual freedoms

America was conceived as democratic republic founded on and legitimized by a few basic concepts deemed by the Founders to have universal value.

The most important and indeed revolutionary concept is popular sovereignty. This means that governments are established in order to serve the people. The most important government function is to protect individual freedoms. And these include freedom of expression, (in whatever form), and economic freedoms. Indeed, as long as he/she respects the laws, anybody can try to do anything in America, without fear of government

interference or retribution.

Citizenship open to all who believe in the basic principles

Furthermore, citizenship is open to all. As long as an individual, regardless of origin and status, understands and subscribes to these basic concepts (and a few others) he/she can join in.

Therefore, becoming an American is not about renouncing one's identity, religion, culture or language. It is about embracing, in good faith, (*"...and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion..."*), these basic principles.

In other words, if you do understand and freely subscribe to America's basic principles as enshrined in the US Constitutions, you can become an American, no matter where you come from.

Freedom also means access to opportunity. And this translates into giving ordinary people chances that would have been unthinkable in European societies characterized by rigid class structures that implicitly or explicitly denied equal opportunity.

Still exceptional?

Of course, you may argue that nowadays most of these principles have been adopted by the Constitutions of many other countries.

So, what's so exceptional –today–about America?

Well, call it the privilege of having been the first one. Yes, other countries followed over time and adopted similar principles. But not entirely. In Japan, for instance, immigrants are not particularly welcome. In Britain there is an institutional Church. In other countries, until recently, citizenship was a matter of recognizable blood lines, not

about conscious choices.

Yes, America is a young country. But it is the very first Modern Republic. The US Constitution was drafted in 1787, and it was ratified in 1789. The US Constitution established long ago the protection of individual freedoms as its core principle.

Exceptional, until we believe it is so

For millions of immigrants this constitutionally granted freedom meant unprecedented access to opportunity. Opportunity yielded new enterprise. And enterprise translated into economic progress and higher growth.

This was Exceptional.

To the extent that we, as a Nation, continue to nurture the very basic principles this Republic was established upon long ago, America will continue to be Exceptional.

The Tea Party Has Become An Ideological, “Anti-Everything” Group – The Republican Party Needs A Strong Message Of Opportunity

And Inclusiveness – Chris Christie Could Articulate It

By Paolo von Schirach

November 11, 2013

WASHINGTON – At the very beginning, the Tea Party insurgency had some real merit. But now it has become a motley crew of “anti-everything” libertarians mixed with social conservatives profoundly out of step with the minimum standards of modernity. Anti-abortion, anti-gays, prayers in schools, guns for everybody principles will get you some votes; but not enough to win national elections, or even statewide contests as Virginia has shown.

A good start

The Tea party Movement had a good start as a grassroots rebellion against ever-growing government and its exploding cost. The Tea Party activists could claim that their advocacy for limited government and low taxes was and is in keeping with basic American principles and traditions. ***“This is America and not France. We believe in the private sector and in a modest safety net for the truly disadvantaged. The rest is unnecessary welfare paid out to voters, so that they will keep re-electing unprincipled politicians who will keep the gravy train going, even though they know full well that this will cause higher debt and eventually fiscal disaster.”***

Now the Tea Party is the anti-everything movement

But now this “small government” platform has become a bad mix of strident politics and ancient conservative values that as a minimum do not resonate with the broader public, while in too many instances (take abortion) they are perceived as deliberately offensive. The worst thing is that the Tea Party

adherents seem to be “anti-everything”, while they are unable to rally large constituencies around programs “for something”.

Beyond that, their anti-spending platform is very thin on detail. It is easy to pick examples of stupid, wasteful and poorly conceived public spending. However, the problem is that the bulk of federal spending is about entitlement programs, and not about funding for –say– “artichoke research in Iowa”. The Tea Party people are really disingenuous when they claim that most of America’s fiscal issues are about eliminating the classic mix of “fraud, waste and abuse”. As for a well thought Tea Party entitlement programs reform plan that would take care of the elderly while bending the spending curve, we have not seen any of that.

Bad tactics

And then we have the additional problem of bad tactics. The attempt to repeal Obamacare “by force”, through a government shutdown is an indication of political stupidity. Most conservatives agreed that it was a bad idea. But the Tea Party people in the House pushed for it anyway, with disastrous political results.

And now, in case we needed more lessons, we have the defeat of Ken Cuccinelli in the Virginia gubernatorial race. While Cuccinelli in the end did much better than expected as he could capitalize on the Obamacare launch debacle, Cuccinelli’ lost in large part because his strident socially conservative themes alienated women, minorities and young voters. How on earth can anybody run against women in today’s America, as they are now more than 50% of the voters? Only die-hard ideologues want to fight again over abortion, contraception, and then prayers in school, gay rights and more.

Of course, if your goal is to fight for your principles, you have every right to do so. But if these principles constitute the platform of the Republican Party, then it may as well

forget about winning major elections.

Chris Christie can lead

And this brings us to Chris Christie. He sailed to a triumphant re-election as Governor of New Jersey. In a sense, he is a new and improved, truly personable Mitt Romney, minus the Mormon faith and the Massachusetts health care reform (too close to Obamacare) issues. In a word, he is a non ideological reformist who promotes pro-growth policies. Christie combines in a nice way a combative spirit, charisma and pragmatism.

That said, it would help him immensely if his "style" (and this is not to deny that there is real substance in Christie) could be enshrined in a new, principled, easy to understand policy framework that would outline the goal of making America into an "Opportunity and Inclusiveness Society". The Republican Party would gain a great deal by having a convincing national leader convincingly reasserting its credentials as the political force championing a modern Opportunity Society. Not a Welfare Society; but an America in which the private sector and government work together to enable people to become smart and strong, so that many more of them will make it on their own.

Smart, inclusive conservatism

This is not about hand outs, special subsidies or tax relief. No, this is about a serious effort to modernize public education so that it will provide a real foundation for competing in this globalized economy. This is about simplifying regulations and the tax system, so that it will be easier to start a business and hire people. This is about an energy policy aimed at capitalizing on the huge advantage created by America's low cost natural gas. At the same time, it would be great if the Republicans could articulate a sensible immigration policy reform that would provide a path

to legal status for millions of illegal immigrants while making it easy for smart would-be immigrants who bring their talent, energy and entrepreneurial spirit to America.

Christie can do all that, this way leading a GOP revival.