

O P I N I O N

We can be that City on a Hill if we try

In the spring of 1630, nearing 400 years ago, while embarked on the Arbela and voyaging to America, Puritan John Winthrop delivered to his fellow seekers what became known as the “City on a Hill” sermon, then titled “A Model of Christian Charity.”

The passion propelling the dangerous ocean crossing was the desire for spiritual freedom and civil liberty: the Promise of America. By his faith, Winthrop professed a covenant with God for himself and his people. A covenant to be true to the core principles of their Judeo-Christian heritage, to love God and to love their neighbor as themselves, selfless love.

Winthrop believed that having this “bond of love” for one another would unite the group as they worked to establish a new society in America with spiritual moorings. To accomplish that he called upon his people: “We must bear one another’s burdens. We must not look only on our own things, but also on the things of our brethren.”

He warned them that “the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us” if they failed to fulfill their mutual covenant to put the interests of others above the interests of the colony and their own self-interests. He admonished them that “the only way to avoid this shipwreck” and to provide for their mutual posterity was “to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man.”

If the people remained committed together to these things, Winthrop was hopeful that they could indeed establish a new society that would become a role model for others. He said the God of Israel would remain among them, and “He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding generations, ‘May the Lord make it like that of New England.’ For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.”

In 2020 we began a new decade. I am mindful that in 2030 we will reflect back upon the 400-year admonition by John Winthrop. We have 10 years to prove up. Ten years to demonstrate that we are committed to one another.

Today, what measure do we take of the promise of America, a city on a hill? Are we spiritual and caring or secular and selfish? Do we lift up our heroes for their examples of selfless love? Why does the 24/7/365 U.S. news

cycle drone on about hate group killings (even in churches and schools) and political parties habitually placing self-interest and partisan victory above the best interests of We the People? If we are not “knit together,” if there is no unity, then how can the United States aspire to be an example for the world — a city on a hill?

Maybe the divide between the present sad state of affairs and the Promise of America can be explained by the recurring history of democracies. Scottish historian Alexander Tytler’s theory set forth a cycle that every democracy goes through. He wrote that the cycle starts out with a society in bondage and then follows this sequence: bondage, spiritual faith, courage, liberty, abundance, selfishness, complacency, apathy, dependence. Then starting over with bondage.

Are we entering again into bondage? Our federal government is spending \$2 million a minute, the annual budget shortfall is \$24 trillion, and the unfunded liabilities of the federal government may exceed \$200 trillion. While the United States may still rank as the most blessed, successful and wealthy nation ever, then the loss of spiritual faith, courage and liberty may be the price of this abundance, fueling selfishness, complacency, apathy and dependence.

All of us know this path is not sustainable. We are anxious. When our government leaders, tending toward socialism, promise free everything, then anger, anxiety, complacency, apathy and dependence grow. With no accountability to We the People the out-of-control federal government is imposing debt on generations not yet born. This is a form of bondage or “soft tyranny.”

To continue to realize the Promise of America in the next decade I believe we all must come together in a commitment to self-governance, requiring our politicians to play by the same rules that our families must abide by: Nothing is free, constant fighting destroys unity.

In the next decade I resolve to be more engaged and caring. I am hopeful we will continue to realize America’s Promise for our families, our nation and the world. I am grateful for the opportunities of America and the luck to have been born in our amazing country, as described by Abraham Lincoln, “the last best hope of man on earth.”

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