"THIS VISION OF A GREAT SOCIETY"

TEXT: "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10)

INTRODUCTION Abraham was a tent-dweller, a nomad, a man without any fixed place of abode. But he carried in his heart a vision of another and a better mode of existence - well-ordered, secure, prosperous, permanent. This vision impelled him to depart from Ur of the Chaldees; he was a trail-blazer, a pioneer. He followed his best light and kept on believing in it. He was a man of faith, confident of what he hoped for, convinced of what he did not see. "He looked for a city which hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God".

I think we could say that Abraham is the ancestor and the prototype of all who in age after age have carried in their heart the vision of a great society. Take the Hebrew prophets, for example. What imperishable visions they cherished - visions of a warless world where the lion would lie down with the lamb, where men would beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, where integrity would be universal, where injustice would be eliminated. It is impressive to reflect that a group of men living in a land that was constantly menaced, subdued and overrun by mighty and merciless neighbors, should have had the spirit and the will to dream such dreams.

UTOPIA BUILDERS Think of the Utopia builders - Plato's Republic, Augustine's City of God, Bacon's New Atlantis, William Blake's New Jerusalem, H. G. Wells' New Worlds for Old. They were impatient with the world of their day, its disorder, violence, injustice, inequality, and they longed for a fairer, better society, for the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Take the case of our own country. From the colonists at Jamestown and the Pilgrims in New England this was the Land of Promise. Their optimism as to its future was tremendous. It was the place, the Pilgrims said, where the Lord would build a new heaven and a new earth. It was possible, even probable, Jonathan Edwards thought, that God might be able to complete in America his age-long work in history by ushering in the new and final order. Such was the faith of our forefathers in the future of this land that they welcomed to its shores the oppressed and downtrodden of other lands and there was set up in the waterways approaching New York the Statue of Liberty with at its base these words:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

Henry Clay talked and wrote about the American Dream. It seems to be indestructible. The Depression Years did not put an end to it; two World Wars have not killed it. There was the New Deal, then the Fair Deal, then the Square Deal, then the Mandate for Change; then, with a tremendous upsurge of hope felt all around the world, the New Frontier; and since then the Great Society.

THE GREAT SOCIETY Let us think today - on this Sunday nearest to the Fourth of July - let us think about this vision of the Great Society. Growing out of the civil rights struggle, the conscience of our nation has undergone a remarkable awakening as to the scandalous evils of poverty, slums, ghettoes, inadequate education, crime, economic insecurity in general. The President was on
incontrovertible grounds when he said:

"In a land of great wealth, families must not live in hopeless poverty. In a land rich in harvest, children just must not go hungry. In a land of healing miracles, neighbors must not suffer and die untended. In a great land of learning and scholars, young people must be taught to read and to write".

Surely there is consensus on that score. A nation-wide effort is being made to master those problems. And already the positive achievements are considerable - the Civil Rights Bills, the Education bill, the Medicare Bill, the Anit-Poverty measures. We are moving in the direction of a more equalitarian society. A social revolution, a benign revolution, is going on in the United States. The seeds of what could be the Great Society are being planted. Better housing, better schools, better hospitals, poverty reduced, ghettoes destroyed, cities modernized, natural resources conserved, squalor and crime diminished - these need not be Utopian dreams.

PESSIMISM ABOUT IT And yet there is widespread misgiving about the Great Society, in some quarters pessimism and cynicism. The period in which we live is not one of immense and indomitable optimism. People generally have not been stirred to their depths by the challenge to build the Great Society. Many regard it as a political stratagem; others see in it one more Utopian dream. Why - in this land of opportunity, so rich in material resource, is there such a strong current of pessimism.

Is it not because it is being brought home to us by the thunder of contemporary events, by the mounting crises that beset us wherever we turn - at home and abroad - that our real problem is not technological or economic, but moral and spiritual. There would seem to be no limits to our achievements but in the main they are material: sky-scrapers, housing projects, shopping centers crammed with goods, speed ways, computing machines, jet planes, rockets to the moon. We are gaining so much control over our environment that we are more and more coming up against fundamental questions about our aims and ends. This was what made our President ask soon after his inauguration:

"Not only how much but how good; not only how to create, but how to use it, not only how fast we are going, but where we are headed".

It seems to me that the biggest obstacles to the building of the Great Society are not so much in men's brains as in their hearts!

HUMAN NATURE AND UTOPIA Now modern man has made nature his servant, he has bound the continents together, has created for himself numberless comforts and luxuries, but he has not rooted out of his soul the instincts of greed, pugnacity and cruelty. He has conquered Nature, but he has still to conquer himself. He has multiplied his powers, but his designs are sometimes as selfish and narrow as when his forbearers dwelt in squalor and ignorance. Will Durant, the historian, is emphatic about this:

"We are spiritual pygmies in gigantic frames. Utopia has come everywhere except in the soul of man. Human nature has ruined every Utopia."

It is human nature that poses the biggest problem in the building the Great Society. Our real difficulty is not technological or economic, but moral and spiritual. We have got to get behind the social system to the men and women who constitute it, who make it what it is. A society cannot be great unless its citizens are great in spirit.
This suggests this question to us: what can be done to change human nature. Some believe that nothing can be done. They point to basic emotional instincts like greed, hatred, egoism, and cruelty and remind us that they are as strong today as ever before. They direct attention to the fact that every attempt to build a great society has hitherto failed, not because of any dearth of intelligence in the technical sense, but because of internal discord due to a clash of self-centered wills.

Nevertheless "hope springs eternal in the human breast" - the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the Square Deal, the Mandate for Change, the New Frontier, the Great Society. There are multitudes who do not despair of human nature. In illustration I quote what Aldous Huxley wrote:

"No society can become conspicuously better than it is now, unless it contains a fair proportion of individuals who know that their humanity isn't the last word and who consciously attempt to transcend it. That's why one should be profoundly pessimistic about the things most people are optimistic about - such as applied science, and social reform, and human nature as it is in the average man or woman. And what's why we also should be profoundly optimistic about the things they are so pessimistic about that they don't even know it exists - I mean, the possibility of transforming and transcending human nature. Not by evolutionary growth, not in some remote future, but any time - here and now if you like - by the use of a properly directed intelligence and goodwill."

That's where some put their faith - on "properly directed intelligence and goodwill" on education. If they are undiscouraged about human nature and optimistic about the future of the face, it's because of what they believe education can do, provided it is given a chance and on a big enough scale - the ignorance it can dispel, the prejudice it can overcome, the miraculous transformation it can work in broadening and elevating men's minds, in refining and enriching their character and in lifting the level of society. All of which is true - but is it all there is to say. There is a recognition on the part of many educators that something more than a properly directed intelligence and goodwill is needed for remaking human nature and society. To quote one educator from Oxford:

"We and our education have been too absorbed in the matter of life to think of its spirit. We must restore to it a vitamin, deficient both there and in our life - a religion, a philosophy off living, a definite ideal to guide, disciple and dominate the lives of individuals and through them - national life."

**OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH** Our Christian faith puts the stress not only on an educated enlightened mind, but also on the changed heart. Indeed it puts the prior stress on a change of heart. Its watchword is not education or legislation, though it says nothing to discount either - but regeneration. Its imperative is "You must be born again". "Make the tree good" said Jesus, "and the fruit will be good also". "From within... outward" was his ruling principle. "Clean the inside of the cup first; then the outside will be clean also". Change men at the core of their being and their actions will be transformed, and their relations to their fellow man. Without that inward change there can be no lasting outward reform. Greatness in man is a prior requisite of a great society. The obstacles to a Great Society are in the heart of man - self-centeredness, his will to power, his greed, his destructive impulses. These are the obstacles that we must concentrate on overcoming if we are to build the great society.
Our Christian Faith addresses itself to the heart of this problem. It says NOT that man can change by willing it, but that he CAN be changed - changed by a power NOT his own - divine, not human - changed in the hidden depths of his being. He can become a "new creature" as Paul put it. He can be transformed by the renewing of his mind. It points to Jesus Christ as the One who can bring about this change. By association with Him, by opening their lives to His presence, His power, by sharing His mind and by catching the grandeur of His spirit, men and women can become new persons, liberated from self, rid of this will to power, this egoism, and inspired to devote themselves to the service of their fellows and to the building of all the greatest society of all - the Kingdom of God. This is the church's distinctive message. This is the Gospel - the Good News - the power of God made known in the person of Jesus Christ. Do we who profess and call ourselves Christian really believe it? Can it be said of us that we are men and women who have become "new creatures" in Christ Jesus - "transformed" in action and in our relationships to our neighbors, dedicated body mind and soul to the building of the Kingdom of God?

LET US PRAY

O God and Master of us all, help us to put into practice in our daily lives these things that we believe and think so sincerely and so seriously; and as we go about our way, help us to live that we may be more nearly measured by the character of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray.

Amen
The signs of the times, ichthyologically speaking, are looking up. At least, at the city's Aquarium at Coney Island. No longer need a visitor feel that, to understand the habits and curiosities of a fish on display, he must be armed with scientific treatise and dictionary. Today, as part of a long effort to provide the public with the information it wants, a visitor can learn from a simple, nontechnical label, or sign on a tank that as many as twenty species of sharks may be found in the vicinity of the city. Further, comes the warning that sharks are remarkably unpredictable, given to either placidity or the most violent of habits—and appetites.

No Strained Curiosity

In these modern, more enlightened days, a visitor looking at an unusual creature does not have his curiosity strained and left unanswered when he sees, for instance, a Hippocampus Hudsonius. Today's sign outside the tank provides this information: "The common name of this creature is the sea horse. They do not grow big enough to ride. The biggest is probably not longer than 12½ inches. And it is found from Nova Scotia to Texas. It is hard to keep in captivity because it eats only live food."

Ookie, possibly the only Pacific Coast walrus on display in a zoo, was captured off Alaska and flown here about a year ago. She weighs nearly 400 pounds and ultimately will weigh more than a ton. If she survives the stones, plastic toys, sails and other indigestible items tossed into her pool.
Dr. Bonnell Calls for Action to Restore People's Faith in Nation's First Purpose

"America's freedom trumpet has been giving an uncertain sound lately," the Rev. Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell told his congregation yesterday. "We are bewildered and uncertain and lack faith in ourselves as a nation," he said.

In the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, at Fifty-fifth Street, Dr. Bonnell preached on "What Has Happened to the American Dream?"

This dream, Dr. Bonnell said, was a vision of America's founding fathers, such as Washington, Jefferson and other leaders of the Revolution who saw "America as a free, enlightened and great nation, setting an example of greatness and benevolence for the world."

"For more than a hundred years the eyes of oppressed people in every quarter of the globe were turned toward this new republic springing up in strength and freedom," he added. "The image of America was that of a protector of the inalienable rights of everybody."

"If you asked fifty years ago about our national purpose, you would have received a ringing answer. Today, when foreign leaders tell us that our way of life will be replaced by Marxism within two generations, there doesn't seem to be anyone around to challenge them," Dr. Bonnell said.

"Wherever President Eisenhower has gone lately, he says the words 'freedom and justice for all.' But somehow these words sound hollow and unconvincing. The President received a wonderful personal welcome in India, Pakistan and other countries, but his words were received with incredulity and sad smile.

"We are confused and uncertain because our nation has a divided soul. Commercialism and self-interest have clouded our concept of liberty. We do not know where we are going," Dr. Bonnell said.

"When we have done everything that is possible to match profession and practice in this matter of freedom and justice, we can look at the world without shame and with full hearts."
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SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
July 2, 1967
ORDER OF WORSHIP
11 a.m.

ORGAN
"Meditation" T. Dubois
"Postlude"

CALL TO WORSHIP
HYMN NO. 498 "O Lord, our fathers oft have told"

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)

Most merciful Father, we have done little to forward thy kingdom in this world, to foster the brotherhood of man, and to establish love as the law of life. We have allowed self to blind us, pains to embitter us. Pardon our shortcomings; forgive our neglect; give us a pure heart intent on pleasing Thee. Help us in all our seeking to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness. And make us to come, as came Thy Son, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen

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GLORIA PATRI

APOSTLES' CREED Page 512

SCRIPTURE Hebrews 11: 1-10

PASTORAL PRAYER

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN

OFFERTORY SOLO "The Lord is My Light" F. Allitsen
(Miss Margaret Wheeler, mezzo soprano)

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 509 "Great God of nations"

SERMON "This Vision of the Great Society"

HYMN NO. 512 "These things shall be"

Benediction

ORGAN "Allegro Maestoso" J. E. West

*** Interval for ushering

AN INVITATION

Punch and cookies will be served in the Community Room after the service. We invite both members and visiting friends alike to share in these moments of fellowship that we have together every Sunday following the worship service. Hostesses today are Mrs. McDonald, Mrs. Chun, Mrs. Emy, and Miss Parks.

USHERS

The ushers for today’s service are Mr. Bowater, Mr. Merget, Mr. Montaneli, and Mr. Tower.

CHILD CARE

During the summer months, child care service is available from eleven to twelve on the fourth floor. This service is primarily for infants and pre-school children. Mrs. Levy is in charge.

UPPER ROOM

Copies of the July - August issue of the Upper Room is available in the narthex. Pick up your copy.

INTERFAITH NEIGHBORS SUMMER APPEAL

Interfaith Neighbors is an inter-denominational and inter-faith community organization making a constructive contribution to curb delinquency and help troubled boys and girls in our community. Each year at this time we appeal to the members and friends of our parish to send their supporting gifts to this organization, or if you prefer, place your check on the collection plate today. The need is great. The work performed by this community organization is outstanding. Lend it your support - either time or money.