

This Is A Promised Land

HTH-November 6, 1991

(Taken from a Sacrament Meeting talk delivered on Sunday, February 6, 1976. Bishop Baird had asked me to speak to this subject from a *scientist's point of view*).

Most of us have seen the painting of Jesus gently knocking at the slender United Nations building but is refused admittance. It has no place for God or our Lord and Savior. The creators of this institution held that only history and society shape the destiny of mankind. Contrast this with the founders of our own United States of America who gratefully acknowledged God's hand in the creation of our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Surely, a society's overweening confidence in its ability to be the collective "captains of our collective souls" is admirable but it must be tempered by the sure knowledge that God exists and that he has a plan for this world.

Our country, a promised land, figures in that plan. The prophets have told us so, particularly with regard to its constitution and its founders.

Consider the founding father Thomas Jefferson. A leader of such stature, breadth and vision is rarely born. Did you know that this genius had active interests in higher mathematics, mechanics, literature, geology, botany, paleontology, architecture, geography, zoology, medicine, surgery, aeronautics, and agriculture and that he corresponded with the intellects of the day on these subjects?

Besides that, he had a good knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian and as a youth learned Gaelic in order to translate Ossian (an Irish hero of the 3rd Century). Not only that, he played excellent violin, sang well, and was a good dancer.

Additionally, he was a great statesman and philosopher (he was president of the American Philosophical Society for many years and gave forty years of public service to our fledgling nation). Perhaps, more important than all the rest of his accomplishments, was the fact that he was the author of the Declaration of Independence.

Would that we had men of his character and ability walking the halls of congress and serving in other branches of government today!

The founding fathers acknowledged the existence and power of God. In his first inaugural address, April 30, 1789, Washington declared: "It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that almighty being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations and whose providential aids can supply every human defect..." The last line of the Declaration of Independence reads "And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor".

Earlier in 1774, Jefferson wrote: "The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time". Jefferson's vision encompassed limited government providing the maximum possible freedom for its people in order to unleash their creative ability. I repeat: "...to provide maximum freedom in order to unleash the people's creative ability. Science, in particular, thrives best under this maxim!

On Sunday, July 20, 1969, Neil A. Armstrong hovered the "Eagle" for about one and a half minutes beginning at a height of 500 feet above the lunar surface. At the end of that time, probes indicated contact with the ground. One second later, the descent rocket engine was shut down and the entire world heard, "The Eagle Has Landed!"

What I say below, was not said in the February 6, 1976 Sacrament meeting, but with the passage of some twenty-two years, I feel free to say it now. I was the stake clerk and auditor of a certain BYU student stake at the time of the moon landing. This Stake Presidency and a number of other BYU stake and ward officials in this stake were outspoken in their opinion that the Lord would not allow men to set foot on the moon. As a test of faith for skeptical stake and ward leaders, the stake presidency called a special meeting to be held during the scheduled time of the moon landing since they were certain that the attempt to land on the moon would fail.

I hope that this does not presage where I will be at the Lord's second coming, but I walked out of the meeting and hurried home to view the landing on Jens and Helen Jonssons' television set. You see, I had read, as a young farm boy, that men might land on the moon someday by using rockets to propel a vehicle, and I was absolutely not going to miss an event that I had looked forward to for 41 years.

The moon landing succinctly symbolizes Jefferson's idea concerning unleashing the creativity of the American people. The results of this creativity started slowly, gained momentum, and now comes in such a flood that it almost escapes attention. Polyethylene, high octane gasoline, penicillin, Boeing 747s, pocket calculators, computers, hybrid corn, five gallon cows, 20¢ coast to coast phone calls [a penny used to be worth a lot more], central heating & air conditioning, electric light, harvesting machines, textile machines, and printing at a mile of paper a minute. I have listed but a trickle in this flood.

The constitution encouraged creative endeavor. Article 1, Section 8, clause 8 states: "The congress shall have the power...to promote the progress of science and useful arts by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive rights to their respective writings and discov-

eries". From this, came the patent and copyright laws of 1790.

Today, a new U.S. Patent is issued every 10 minutes and the total number of patents issued is over 3 million [today (1991) this number has tripled].

What are the greatest patented American inventions? It would be difficult to decide, but in 1940 twenty-five scientists, industrialists and statesmen were brave enough to make a selection from all the patents issued up to that year. They chose eighteen, the earliest being Eli Whitney's cotton gin (1794) and the latest William Burton's oil-cracking (to produce gasoline) (1913). Some other selections were Cyrus Hall McCormick's reaper (1834), C.L. Sholes typewriter (1868), Edison's phonograph (1880) [by the way, Edison considered this to be his greatest invention], Charles N. Hall's production of aluminum (1889), and Baekeland's Bakelite, a thermosetting plastic (1909).

Jefferson, I am sure, would be pleased, for he was remarkably apt in the practical application of mechanical and scientific principles. He, himself, discovered the exact formula for "mould boards of least resistance for ploughs", which required the use of geometry, trigonometry and differential calculus.

I have emphasized invention as creative endeavor because of my acquaintance with it. Nevertheless, creative endeavor in all fields has truly been unleashed as a special blessing to Americans.

Will we accept this blessing as the sole product of history, society, and man as many intellectuals of this day do? I aver that we accept it with the "faith-in-God vision" of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America who saw His will guiding the destinies of men?

Invention and other creative endeavors can be for man's good, or unfortunately, for his destruction. One could write a large essay on the latter.

Nevertheless, I place my faith for our future in institutions where the leaders genuinely believe in what we print on our money; namely, "In God We Trust".