

## **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

My most optimistic reading of our world today is that we are in a time of transition. It is a disturbing time for many and a confrontation with change and uncertainty is a threat to stability and a comfort level of living. So there are those who choose to try to revive the past and support any efforts to bring it back – this is true politically as well as spiritually. We are generally lacking the lens to understand all that is happening largely because we really know so little of our history. What has brought us to where we are? Should it be changed?

What can we learn from the past to understand the present and the time to come? Do we really have a crisis in our Democracy? Has this happened before? Are we facing a new kind of American government that places governing control in the hands of a Dictator or King? Are we threatened by any change in the relationship of men to women, or to white Anglo-Saxon males by new foreign groups that are growing in our land?

I am particularly thinking of the emerging crisis of church and state in America. Our Constitution calls for a separation of these centers of power. John Courtney, Murray, SJ, helped the work of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 to uphold this position as a good one. It means that the state cannot make any one religion dominant or privileged in the land. It means that religion cannot dictate legal prescriptions for the nation. In practice the law has been stretched a lot further than this. The mention of God or place of church is almost forbidden now in the USA. To mention either is often seen as an affront to those who have different beliefs, and values.

One historical analysis of America explains that the time of postmodernism, or deconstructionism, which developed in the sixties and seventies, did away with any sense of a transcendent power in our lives. Science and Business explain everything. No spiritual or transcendent power is needed and is really an obstacle to our development. While others may differ, I truly believe we have short changed our humanity in leaving God out of our lives. As I have written before, I believe human life needs a harmony in our relationships, namely to God, other humans, the created natural world, and to ourselves. I am not referring to any one religious tradition but to a personal sense of what is beyond us. We all can learn from the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous which admits one's incapability

## Monastic Scribe LXXXVI: February 28, 2025

of controlling one's life and the world and the need to surrender to a higher power.

As a Catholic I lament our concentration on the hierarchical institution of Pope, Bishops, Priests and finally lay people. The church is a help to preserve our heritage and get us out of our individualism which paralyzes our society. Yes, it is important. The sacraments, the liturgy, the sacred scriptures are all likewise aides to live our full human lives. It takes a long time and much effort to be able to find God's plan on our own. As Christians, though, it is the personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a following of his teachings that lies at the center of our human journey. Doctrines such as the Triune God and the Incarnation give us a base to understand that relationship is heart of the universe. We all know that humans fail, you and me included. This means spiritual leaders and the church as well who, being fully human, make mistakes. It is in keeping our eyes on the Christ that we keep going. I respect Jews and Muslims and others who are faithful followers of their spiritual traditions. Christianity is not superior or higher than them but we all need to adhere to some tradition and belong to some community. Life is too complicated to think we can do it all by ourselves.

The present crisis in world order, the divided sense of meaning in our own country, and the constant change that is part of the modern world needs our being awake to the values and traditions that give us a foothold in our whirling world. It is not enough to belong to some Religion and carry out some of its practices. It is a time to have faith and trust in God and hold on to our hope in God's dominion even when things seem bleak and uncertain. Nor is it enough to be a passive beholder of the rites and practices of our religion. It is time to face our faith and surrender to God. Those who simply want to go back to the old rituals (e.g. Tridentine Mass) and leave it all to the clergy to do, are not accepting their vocation from God. The times call for the faithful to be saints, mystics, prophets. The world, our country needs true believers.

While action and even resistance may be necessary, I do not advocate any political solution but a spiritual one. I believe people who have a religious tradition should profess it boldly and hold on to the values of faith, hope, forgiveness, social justice, non-violence, respect for each other, care for others and the common good, the place of redemptive suffering in our lives. Never giving in to despair or cynicism we believe there is a higher power that walks with us. We are never alone.

## **Monastic Scribe LXXXVI: February 28, 2025**

Rabbi Irwin Keller reminds us of how the news brings pain and wounds and suffering. He advocates admitting how vulnerable we are and must encircle ourselves in a robe of light as we witness the wounds of the world. Here is a prayer he suggests we say before reading the news:

My God, the soul you have placed in me is pure and vulnerable.  
I am afraid that looking at today's news will be painful.  
Encircle me in a robe of light so that I can witness the wounds of the world  
without being wounded myself.  
Let me learn what I need to know in order to be of greatest use,  
without being overwhelmed by despair.  
I feel your protective light now as I open myself to the world's suffering and  
the World's joys. Amen.

Mary Oliver also urged us, in her work on prayer, to pay attention to the world's joys as well as the suffering. It is the way of faith, hope and love.

Yes, we are in this difficult time of transition. Do you have your own ways to cope with all the change and uncertainty and not live in fear? Let me know at [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org).

**Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL**

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.