

Lest We Forget

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On this date—May 15, 1252—Pope Innocent IV issued a papal bull entitled *Ad Expirada*, which was a significant piece in laying the ground rules for the more infamous Spanish Inquisition two centuries later, under Isabel and Ferdinand, and then for all the papal Inquisitions in the next couple of centuries that were created to destroy the Protestant ideas in southern Europe.

It was in the 15th and 16th centuries that the Catholic Church really began losing control over Europe and the Protestant Reformation, along with the Anglican break from the Catholic Church under King Henry VIII, who was responsible for this.

The May 15, 1252, papal bull was issued in the wake of the murder of the papal inquisitor of Lombardy, who was holding tribunals of those who had been considered heretics and not in accord with the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, which had become the ersatz Christian state religion for the Roman Empire.

This particular group of so-called "Christian heretics" were called Cathars by the Roman Catholic Church, and for the most part, they were dualists and gnostics. While much closer to the truth of the pre-4th century followers of Jesus Christ, most of them were still way off base in their beliefs. Of course, it's good to keep in mind that someplace within all these groups was the little flock that did indeed hold the truth and was the real focus of Satan's attack in the chaos and confusion of Catholicism, gnosticism, and dualism, just as it had been from the days of the apostles.

This is important to keep in mind during these days as we are headed into similar circumstances. In his May 15, 1252, decree, the Pope had told the inquisitors they could use whatever torture they considered necessary, short of amputation and death, to force a confession of heresy because the inquisitor knew for sure the person disagreed with the doctrines of the

Catholic Church. The decree then conceded to the state a portion of the property to be confiscated from the heretics. The state, in return, assumed the burden of carrying out the penalty.

It was this oppressive and vile collusion of church and state that drove the early settlers to the new world and was one of the driving forces of the US constitutional separation of church and state that has been uniquely American. It was also within this group of pilgrims that God was moving His small body of believers that had to hold on to the true "faith once delivered" while trusting in God's providential care and staying out of the fray as He continued moving His plan and promises to Abraham forward.

But this new government that gave the church of God the time to do the work without the constant threat of the political state-run religion did not eliminate religion from the soul of the nation, because as John Adams himself wrote, "The constitution of the United States was only fit for a moral and religious people and unsuited for any other." It's good to remember these things because we are on the cusp of another time of great persecution that will require God's people to remember His providential care and stay the course.

With this in mind, and within a country that has moved away from John Adams warning that "we cannot forget the truth"—both of the blessings to this country and to God's church within it—we *must* continue to teach the truth to our children and not the revisionist history of critical theory.

I'll take the next few minutes to cite a couple of things William Bennett wrote in the forward of his 2006 book, *America: The Last Best Hope*, because they may help remind us that it is up to those who live it to continue to teach the truth of God's blessings to our children. William Bennett writes,

I wrote this book for many reasons. The first and most important is the need for hope. When president Lincoln wrote to Congress in December 1862, shortly after he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, he wrote, "we shall nobly save or meanly lose this last best hope of earth." For nearly a century before that message—and easily for a century afterward—Americans would not have doubted that this country was indeed the

last best hope. In a speech scheduled for delivery in Dallas on 22 November, 1963, President John F Kennedy's text read, "We in this country are the watchmen on the walls of world freedom."

Kennedy's view was Lincoln's before him and Jefferson's before Lincoln. Later it was Reagan's. Democrat, Republican, Federalist, anti-Federalists... It hardly mattered. An abiding sense of American greatness, of American purpose, of American exceptionalism has long characterized many of our leaders and tens of millions of the rest of us as well. We have long had hope....

As William Bennett then wrote (again, back in 2006):

Some Americans seem ready to believe the worst about our leaders and our country. Thinking and believing the worst certainly is not hopeful. It is my humble wish that those who read this book will find reason to reclaim some of the hope and conviction we have lost.

William Bennett continues:

The second reason I wrote this book is to give Americans an opportunity to enjoy the story of their country, to take pleasure and pride in what we have done and what we have become.

On to the third reason:

The third reason I wrote this book is to give thanks and remind my fellow citizens of their obligation of gratitude to [God and to] those who made it possible for us to lead free and happy lives. To Lincoln, to the founders before him, and to many historical figures afterward much is due! Obscurity and oblivion are not what they deserve!

Americans can be grateful that, time and again, our ancestors and our contemporaries have chosen wisely and have by their demeanors defined us as a people, standing fast against totalitarianism during the Cold War; Americans coming together to rebuild this nation after the long and devastating Civil War.

At the same time, it is regrettable but true that any number of American choices were not wise. For example, we failed to eliminate slavery when this nation was founded. For too long, we failed to uphold our stated principles in the face of Jim Crow segregation laws.

We can be grateful that leaders like Frederick Douglass and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., rose to prod our consciences and to force us to look into our mirror of our own souls, however belatedly. We needed them to help us right those wrongs.

It is important to note that when such leaders step forward, they acknowledge the debt of gratitude—both Frederick Douglass and Dr. King appealed to the ideals of Americans founding fathers . . .

The fourth reason I wrote this book is to tell the truth—get the facts out, correct the record, and put forward a reasoned, balanced presentation of the American story.

In this work, I will not try to cover up great wrongs. Injustices need sunlight. Always, as Justice Brandeis said, the best disinfectant is sunlight. I will try to paint America as Oliver Cromwell asked to be painted: warts and all. But I will not follow the fashion of some today who see America as nothing but warts.

We must remember that America is still a great success story. When we criticize—as criticize we must—we should play the part of what James Madison called “a loving critic.”

Bennett continues a bit further down:

The fifth reason I wrote this book to encourage a new patriotism—a new reflective, reasoned form of patriotism.

Ronald Reagan was especially proud of that new patriotism he had helped spark during his two terms. It was something even his opponent Fritz Mondale was gracious enough to praise him for. But

Reagan recognized that this spirit would not last unless it was an informed patriotism!

Interestingly, the Old Man who dreamed dreams and lived to see those dreams become reality, looked back in his farewell address to the American people. It was something he rarely did.

President Reagan said in that address

There is a great tradition of warnings in presidential farewells, and I've got one that's been on my mind for some time. But oddly enough, it starts with one of the things I'm proudest of in the past eight years: The resurgence of national pride that I called the new patriotism. This national feeling is good, but it won't count for much and it won't last unless it's grounded in thoughtfulness and knowledge.

An informed patriotism is what we want. And are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world?

Those of us who are over 35 or so years of age grew up in a different America. We were taught, very directly, what it means to be an American. And we absorbed, almost in the air, a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions.

If you didn't get these things from your family, you got them from the neighborhood, from the father down the street who fought in Korea, or the family who lost someone at Anzio. Or you could get a sense of patriotism from school . . .

But now, we're about to enter the 90s and some things have changed. Younger parents aren't sure that an unambivalent appreciation of America is the right thing to teach modern children. And as for those who create the popular culture, well-grounded patriotism is no longer the style! Our spirit is back, but we have haven't reinstitutionalized it. We've got to do a better job of getting across that America is freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of

religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare. It's fragile; it needs protection.

So we've got to teach history based on not what's in fashion but what's important—why the pilgrims came here, who Jimmy Doolittle was, and what those 30 seconds over Tokyo meant. We must never forget what the boys of Normandy did.

President Reagan finished:

If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are. I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let's start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual.

Bill Bennett finished his introduction with:

The American dream, despite obstacles, setbacks, stupidities, and atrocities, there is an unparalleled and documented record of this dream's being real. America was, is, and—we pray—will continue to be the place where, more than anyplace else, dreams actually do come true.

Brethren, in a time when memories are being destroyed, we must gratefully remember and teach the truth, warts and all. We must remember President Reagan's words of truth and especially what they should mean to us who are genuinely aware of God's continuous work with us. If we forget what we did, we will not know who we are.