

The Potential Ichabod in America: Kirk's *The Roots of American Order*: Clues for National Decline; Our Spiritual Roots & Common Culture Are in Jeopardy

During the past half-century, the center [Pivot] has failed to hold in many nations. Yet once revolution or war has demolished an established order, a people find it imperative to search for principles of order afresh, that they may survive. Once they have undone an old order, revolutionaries proceed to decree a new order—often an order harsher than the order which they had overthrown. [Pete Townshend, “Meet the new boss; same as the old boss.”] (p. 7)

Our times resemble those of the concluding years of the Roman Republic, the age of Marcus Tullius Cicero. As disorder washed about him, Cicero examined the causes of private and public confusion. He wrote in his treatise *The Republic*, “Long before our time the customs of our ancestors molded admirable men, and in turn those eminent men upheld the ways and institutions of their forebears. **Our age, however, inherited the Republic as if it were some beautiful painting of bygone ages, its colors already fading through great antiquity and not only has our time neglected to freshen the colors of the picture, but we have failed to preserve its form and outlines.**”

Cicero understood that the problem of order is simultaneously personal and social: Roman men and Roman justice had declined together. It is so still. (p. 8)

Upon our knowledge of those roots may depend what sort of order America and the world will have by the end of this century. It may be the order of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, rich and dehumanized; it may be the garrison-state controlled by ferocious ideology, as in George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*; or it may be an order renewed and improved, yet recognizably linked with the order that arose in Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, and London.

The higher kind of order, sheltering freedom and justice, declares the dignity of man. It affirms what G. K. Chesterton called “the democracy of the dead”—that is, it recognizes the judgments of men and women who have preceded us in time, as well as the opinions of people living at this moment. **This higher kind of order is founded upon the practical experience of human beings over many centuries, and upon the judgments of men of vision and intellect who have preceded us in time.**¹ (p. 9)

17- Dr. Kirk's second chapter takes up the spiritual roots of our nation:

¹ Russell Kirk, “Order, the First Need of All,” chap. 1 in *The Roots of American Order* (La Salle: Open Court, 1974), 4-9.

All the aspects of any civilization arise out of a people's religion: its politics, its economics, its arts, its sciences, even its simple crafts are the by-products of religious insights and a religious cult. For until human beings are tied together by some common faith, and share certain moral principles, they prey upon one another. In common worship of the cult a community forms. At the heart of every culture is a body of ethics, of distinctions between good and evil; and in the beginning, at least, those distinctions are founded upon the authority of revealed religion. Not until a people have come to share religious belief are they able to work together satisfactorily, or even to make sense of the world in which they find themselves. Thus all order could not have come into existence, had it not grown out of general belief in truths that are perceived by the moral imagination. (p. 14)

The judgments of God are manifest in the world of today. The time has come to bring home to men that these are right judgments on human sin; that men bear these consequences inevitably, because they are morally responsible beings who have denied their own nature in denying their responsibility to their neighbors.² (p. 15)

- 18- These principles presented by Dr. Kirk highlight the essentials required for the continuance of a civil social order. And the key element which he emphasized is the statement, "At the heart of every culture is a body of ethics, of distinctions between good and evil; and in the beginning, at least, those distinctions are founded upon the authority of revealed religion."
- 19- Cicero in *The Republic* compared Roman culture to a picture whose colors had faded over the centuries. This is a way of stating that the glory of Rome grew dim and could only be brightened by a return to the permanent things found in the absolutes of a moral and civil order.
- 20- The colors of our nation's glory have faded over the past forty years. We have lost touch with our founding principles that were based on revelations from Sinai and it is reflected in the loss of harmony within the institutions of the commonwealth.
- 21- When any client nation allows the spiritual underpinning of its culture to fade it will be replaced by the human viewpoint, human good, and evil provided by the devil's lie communicated to the masses by duplicity and deceit.
- 22- For over six decades the nation's consciousness has absorbed these doctrines of demons and as a result we have replaced the essential standards required of a free people with notions and opinions that cannot withstand the wrath of a righteous God that demands justice upon deviations from His righteousness.

Proverbs 12:15 - The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Proverbs 23:9 - Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.

² Kirk, "The Laws and the Prophets: From Mount Sinai to Massachusetts Bay," chap. 2 in *The Roots of American Order*, 14-15.