

Summer History & Heritage -- #4 (July 22)

How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.
Still to ourselves in every place consign'd,
Our own felicity we make or find . . .

(Samuel Johnson, 1709—1784)

Many Americans don't seem to appreciate Johnson's rhyme. If they do, how come they spend so much time and treasure on polls, politicians, pundits, parties and the rest? The country long ago surrendered its birthright: a limited, rule of law politics intended to safeguard society's structures and interests—the natural and customary means by which men pursued happiness, finding personal and vocational fulfillment. Instead of the old primacy of small societies (families, farms, churches, schools, markets, guilds, town councils, etc.) for the discipline and nurture of citizens, we opted for the primacy of all the people (the democratic mass of theoretically free and equal individuals) and the people's state (a powerful central government). Thus, politics nowadays, overstepping our fathers' bloodstained bounds, has evolved into the rule of universal, abstract ideals (equality, freedom, opportunity, choice, tolerance, etc.) aimed at uplifting otherwise helpless individuals and subgroups (above all, allegedly victimized minorities). Their status, their rights, & their welfare are purportedly the prime objects of modern democratic governments, no matter the cost, spiritual and material, to the traditional civil social order or to liberty and virtue as defined by our ancestors. The centralized people's state, acting in their sacred name, cannot resist the temptation to aggrandize itself at the expense of society. It feigns superior wisdom, goodness, and power and insinuates itself into everything, all the while swelling to such size, regulatory complexity, and contradiction as to make way for a mythical monster—today's leviathan—beyond domestication or reformation. Beware when the state tramples upon society, politics trumps culture, and sweet-sounding ideas are substituted for tradition and experience. The people, to use a biblical metaphor, come to resemble sheep without a shepherd, unable to find their way home. The crowd culture will not break its addiction to big government anytime soon. The people's state (a remote power-center) offered its service to its theoretical masters as a righteous refuge from the prejudices and abuses of authorities and institutions closer to home. And the people consented to it. Someday the people may see that they exchanged flawed, natural headship for tyrannical, unnatural coercion to their ruin. Democracy, unlike the old federal republic with its constitutional restraints, is one of our idols, chief among the nation's gods that will fail.

Renaissance Worldview --- (*Christian Almanac*, May 28; Grant/Wilbur)

This European era's prevailing worldview, a development from 1300—1500 roughly, initiated an historic and consequential turn away from Christianity in Western culture? Many of the movers and shakers of the era reverted consciously to the pagan patterns of ancient Greece and Rome, judging them superior to those of medieval Christendom. Thus, having opted for sub-Christian thought over Christian, they set the stage for the anti-Christian Enlightenment (1600—1800) and today's post-Christian culture.