The War on Patriotism

What are the intellectuals of our nation saying about the war against terrorism? Should we expect wisdom from the faculty of our elite universities? Are they glad participants in the recent surge of patriotism and national unity against the terrorists? Don't expect much.

In an article titled Terrorism and the Intellectuals, (The Intercollegiate Review) Donald Kagan, professor of classics and history, Yale University, exposes the anti-patriotic attitudes of his colleagues. "At Yale," writes Kagan, "we have been told that we must seek the 'underlying causes' of these attacks (against America); that 'offensive cultural messages' spread by the United States understandably provoke hatred, as they would in us if the roles were reversed."

We are urged "to consider the killers' anger and resentment, provoked by their poverty in a world dominated by American wealth, by their understandable hatred of American power and influence throughout the world, by their appropriate dismay at the alleged errors or wickedness of American policies, whether political, economic, military or environmental." This is more than a "let's share the blame with the terrorists" mentality. The important message coming from the academics is that "the attackers are really the victims, that responsibility for September 11 really rests with the United States." And, as Kagan observes, "what is most striking about such statements is their arrogance. They suggest that the enlightened commentator can penetrate the souls of the attackers and know their deepest motives. Yet strangely enough, their conclusions square with their own prejudices."

Although America has not acted blamelessly in the world, these anti-patriotic words coming from the faculty are disrespectful expressions of ingratitude. An Englishman writing for the London Sunday Times put things in perspective. "Let us ponder exactly what the Americans did in that most awful of all centuries, the twentieth. They saved Europe from barbarism in two world wars. After the Second World War they rebuilt the continent from the ashes. They confronted and peacefully defeated Soviet communism, the most murderous system ever devised by man. America, primarily, ejected Iraq from Kuwait and stopped the slaughter in the Balkans while the Europeans dithered."

Another observer suggested that the world without American leadership, with all it's flaws over the past sixty years, would be a bit like hell. "It does not take an American to find some small virtue in a country that has helped save the world from Wilhelmine Germany's right-wing imperialism, Hitler's Nazi tyranny, Stalin's totalitarianism, and Japan's militaristic domination. Yet voices here and abroad from the world of leftist intellectual orthodoxy condemn and blame the U.S. ..." (David Halberstam)

The assaults on patriotism come not only from the corridors of the Ivy leagues; some Churches promote anti-patriotic attitudes. Viewing themselves as advocates of the underdogs, these Churches indirectly side with those who want nothing less than the total annihilation of America. In a published statement, Osama bin Laden said, "To kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able."
Some of these Churches simply parrot the anti-American rhetoric of the intellectuals; others fear a conflict between divine and civic devotion. Both responses do not adequately recognize the God-ordained role of human government to punish evildoers. They also fail to recall the biblical admonition to "give honor to whom honor is due" (Romans 13:7).

Whether from intellectuals or Churches, Kagan accurately states that, "The fashionable assaults on patriotism, in the end, are failures of character. They are made by privileged individuals who enjoy the full benefits offered by the country they deride and detest - its opportunities, its freedom, its riches - but who lack the basic decency to pay their country the allegiance and respect that honor demands."

If the intellectuals or Churches think that an increase in national modesty or changes in American policies will change the hearts of the terrorists, they are self-deceived. The terrorists hate the U.S. for two main reasons: first, because we refuse to hate Israel, and secondly, because our free, democratic republic is "a powerful competitor for the allegiance of millions of Muslims around the world."

It is our patriotism, and common vision of such a republic, that directly supports our national security. Kagan perceptively suggests that "Free countries like our own have an even more powerful claim on the patriotism of their citizens than do others, and our country has an even greater need of it than most. Every country requires a high degree of cooperation and unity among its citizens if it is to achieve the internal harmony that every good society requires. Unity and cooperation must rest on something shared and valued in common. Most countries have relied on the common ancestry and tradition of their people as the basis of their unity, but the United States of America can rely on no such commonality. We are an enormously diverse and varied people, almost all immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. The great strengths provided by this diversity are matched by great dangers. We are always vulnerable to divisions among us that can be exploited to destroy the unity that has enabled us to flourish."

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