

FAULT LINES IN AMERICA

Written by Calvin Fox

Sunday, 09 November 2014 19:30 - Last Updated Monday, 10 November 2014 11:04

"In geology, a fault is a planar fracture or discontinuity in a volume of rock, across which there has been significant displacement along the fractures as a result of earth movement. Large faults within the Earth's crust result from the action of plate tectonic forces. Energy release associated with rapid movement on active faults is the cause of most earthquakes, such as occurs on the San Andreas Fault, California." - Wikipedia

This Summer (2012) I have been reading and re-reading books and relevant chapters in books about the Founding Fathers and Documents and particularly about the US Constitution and its Ratification and Interpretation throughout American History- all fascinating, illuminating- and very discouraging stuff. Over and over, though Presidents and the Country changed through the years, certain Themes that divide our Country came to the fore repeatedly. This paper is not about US History but those Themes. I see them as Fault Lines, which keep us divided and threaten our security, our future existence as a Nation no matter what the Issue of the Day may be.

I recognize, as you undoubtedly do, that Americans Evangelicals are also divided into camps :
On political subjects,
Evangelical interest ranges from head-in-the-sand Pietists
("What counts is Jesus and my personal, spiritual relationship with Him") - not interested in
"politics"- or in History
to
Neo Calvinists who believe that Biblical Principles are to be preeminent and sovereign over all
aspects of life, including Government and Political Policies (some of these folks are
Theonomists or Post Millennialists)

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to

Social and Economic Conservative activists (think Tea Party members or Libertarians) who are keenly interested in working to assure America shall be the Christian Nation they believe it was at its Founding

to

various self-styled Progressive Christian activists who have a lot in common with proponents of the Liberal Protestant Social Gospel and Left wing Politics.

Many non-Evangelical Americans are social or economic conservatives or Libertarians

or

they are "Undecided"

or

Liberal on the Issues.

Here are the Major Fault Lines that came up over and over in my reading of American History-

The Authority of the Constitution: Living or Static?

The majority of Americans of all types respect the Constitution as The Law of the Land and believe that our Nation exists under that Law- no one is above it.

A few see the Constitution as hopelessly out-dated and a strait jacket on our Nation, preventing a solution to our national problems and want to replace it. But for the majority adhering to the Constitution, there are two basic ways of interpreting it: "Original Understanding" vs "Living Document".

The advocates of the Constitution as a living document see it as one that must and can be changed to apply to the ever expanding needs of the Nation.

Advocates of the latter view usually read the Constitution in light of the their Liberal or Progressive interpretation of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the Gettysburg Address.

(Together, all four Documents form "The American Scripture" for many Americans).

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Those who advocate Original Understanding advocate interpreting the Constitution of 1787 as it was understood by those who ratified it (in 1788) and interpret the various amendments added since then, as well as the other "Scripture", accordingly. That these two views exist is exceedingly important to understand.

It is The Major Fault Line dividing our political policies and politics today.

The differences between those who see the Constitution as a Living Document and those who hold to the Original Understanding when applying it today can not be settled by reason and logic or history. This is because the differences are based in each interpreter's respective Ideology (which is an unproved or unprovable assumption or controlling view about how the world is supposed to work) .

Advocates of The Living Document approach, dominant for some 50 years now, see the the Constitution as a means or instrument to achieve a certain kind of Great Society.

They abstract principles of democracy, justice, and equality as they define them from the Constitution.

This, they claim, was the original "intent" of the Founders.

Those who advocate the traditional and historic approach of Original Understanding totally disagree. They insist the majority of the Founders had no such progressive, expansive social design in mind and the Constitution is strictly for governing the Government, not the People, restricting it to extremely limited, enumerated (not implied) powers with built-in checks and balances to curb any tendency toward the Government becoming despotic or totalitarian

Judicial Review: activist Judges vs active Judges.

The advocates of a Living Constitution dislike Judges, especially Supreme Court Justices, who actively insist on making their judgements based on "Original Understanding". The Supreme Court must rule, such Justices insist, on whether or not a particular law under their review is constitutional, ie according to the principle of Original Understanding.

They do not make new laws, let alone make public or political policy.

That would be the among the duties of the Congress.

To the contrary, Activist Supreme Court Justices, who reject the Original Understanding interpretation, feel themselves free to be creative and progressive, making new laws and

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determining legal policies as they will and as they deem best for the Nation (in keeping with what they believe is the "spirit" of the Living Constitution and what they believe are Principles of Equality, Democracy, Human Rights and Justice).

Notice the difference between

"active"

(conservative) and "activist" Justices (liberal).

America: Democracy or Republic?

The United States is just that- a union of States who retain certain powers within their individual geographic and political boundaries, but recognize a sovereign or central authority with specific (Constitutionally enumerated powers) but limited authority over them all.

This means America has a Federal System of Government. It is not and never was a Democracy in which the Government is directly of the People, by the People and for the People. The People participate in our Federal Government by electing some of their number to represent them in the Executive and Congressional Branches (the Senate and "House of Representatives") of that Federal Government (theoretically-they represent their collective will). The third or Judicial Branch of the Federal Government is not elected by the People and does not represent them, even though they increasingly act as though they do (and the Executive, likewise, increasingly makes Laws by his "Orders" without Congressional or the People's approval). The Justices are appointed by the President with the approval of the Senate (not the Representatives or the People). In other words our National Government is not a direct Democracy.

The actual Rights and Responsibilities of individual States has been an ongoing bone of contention throughout American History, most famously in the secession of some to become the Confederacy of Southern (slave-holding) States. There has always been tension between advocates of States Rights and the Federal Government. Conservatives tend to support the former, while Liberals have been more in favor of the Federal ("Big") Government over States.

Through the years, the very concept of "the People" has changed. In spite of being a collective

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noun that sounds all-inclusive,

it originally meant only elite land-owning Gentry.

That Elite group of The People expanded to include wealthy and powerful Bankers and Big Business men (think Rail Roads).

For many years, "We the People" included only Men and not Women or Blacks.

At times it included only people who met certain economic and social criteria (not, for example, the Irish or Italians immigrants or the Illiterate).

Many

people have not qualified to be among "We, The People".

Those qualifications being decided by the Government- often with political purposes in mind.

And more often than not, the power behind The People has actually been Special Interest groups.

Today, the slogan of "We The People" often means n no more than a number of separate Movements of self interested individuals and parties seeking Rights they insist are due them from everybody else.

World View: Socialism or Capitalism

Another Major Fault exists between those who have a Socialist World View and a Free Market Capitalist world view (allowing that there are problems with both and in practice we have a mixed economy). A

good illustration is the subject of Climate Change.

First it exists. But one group has the faith that Government can and must solve the problem, primarily by its

Regulation and Control of Business (ie- a form of Socialism). The other group rejects that role for Government and insists that the primary solution to the problem is individual behavior and private business --and Nature running its course.

The same differences are seen in the issues of Poverty, Public Education and Health Care.

In these Issues (and in many others) those with faith in a Socialist view advocate various degrees of the involuntary redistribution of private and corporate Property and Regulation by Government to "solve" the problems.

Whereas those who have faith in a Market Economy value Personal and Corporate Responsibility as well as Private Property and believe solutions to these problems come through private or local initiatives and entrepreneurship.

The latter approach has been an extremely important American Value since the Founding and was dominant until Hoover, FDR and the New Deal of the 1930s.

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Behind both Socialist (Communism and Fascism are variants of Socialism) and Capitalist World Views are different and internally contradictory views of Human Nature. Socialists tend to believe in the basic goodness and potential for improvement of Human Nature and are optimistic for Progress as long as Government or the Elite behind Government are in control of the Masses (for their own good).

This is evident not only in Economic theories and but in theories and practices of "Public" Education (read indoctrination).

Classic Capitalists (the original Liberals) have a far more pessimistic view of Human Nature and the prospects for Progress.

This is evident in their fear of "Big" Government.

Their concern is not about size.

"Big" means the extensive or increasing control by Government over the Nation, particularly in assuming non-enumerated powers.

Article I, section 8 of the US Constitution spells out those powers. Congress may exercise the powers that the Constitution grants it such as Taxation and Military Defense, but always subject to explicit restrictions in the Bill of Rights and other protections in the Constitution.

The 10th Amendment states that "The powers not delegated to the United States [Congress] by the Constitution ... are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

The problem here is that these "powers" are defined differently depending on which method is used to interpret the Constitution (see the above discussion) Advocates of the Socialist view use the Living Constitution approach while the Free market Capitalists go with the Original Understanding interpretation.

e's the rub!

Ther

Human Rights: Foundationalist or Post Modern

During the 18th Century much was made of Natural Rights. The majority of the Colonists believed in God-given inalienable Rights (Rights that could not be given away)

Although that historic Principle was used occasionally after the Revolution and over the years in

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US History it no longer carries weight.

The dominant view for at least the last Century is that Government determines Human (no longer Natural or God-given) Rights and in recent decades, a Person's Rights are what the Supreme Court says they are.

The belief that anything is absolute is gone (except, ironically, that common belief itself which is an "absolute").

Pragmatism (whatever works) has been the norm for years.

The very idea that Human Rights or Laws depend on any external authority (God, the Bible, Nature, the Original Constitution or Tradition) for their validity is totally rejected today in Academic and Legal circles.

The concept is called "Foundationalism" and the foundations of our Society as we have know them for centuries (including Christianity) have crumbled.

This negative critique of our Nation's Foundations has been going on for generations, especially in our schools depending, of course, on the curricula and the Teachers

- first on the graduate level but now down into the lower grades in many Courses, especially in the Humanities (Social Sciences, Literature, the Arts and in the special "Studies" Programs. (Many Academics don't do Truth today, they do "Theories".) The primary Academic Source of all this is a Movement known as Post Modernism.

That name is no longer in vogue, but its influence remains and prevails in the minds of educated youth and in popular Culture everywhere.

Tentative Conclusion:

Perhaps a Crisis, another World War or Natural Disaster of catastrophic proportion might bring us together as a Nation, one People, united for a time for survival. Other than that I do not see these Fault Lines disappearing, only deepening.

We ignore them at our peril.

I do see the urgent need for Evangelicals, especially parents and Teachers, to get involved with the Debates about all these matters and to seek what the Bible teaches about them and work to see His Word prevail- at least in the minds of our youth.

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