

OF EVERY NATION

In the Year of Our Lord Seventeen-hundred Fifty-three, Benjamin Franklin wrote the following to Peter Collinson, an English Quaker living in London, concerning the immigration of a certain people to the English colonies in America:

Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation, and as Ignorance is often attended with Credulity when Knavery would mislead it, and with Suspicion when Honesty would set it right; and as few of the English understand ~~the German~~ [their] Language, and so cannot address them either from the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain. Their own Clergy have very little influence over the people; who seem to take an uncommon pleasure in abusing and discharging the Minister on every trivial occasion. Not being used to Liberty, they know not how to make a modest use of it; and as Kolben says of the young Hottentots, that they are not esteemed men till they have shewn their manhood by beating their mothers, so these seem to think themselves not free, till they can feel their liberty in abusing and insulting their Teachers. Thus they are under no restraint of Ecclesiastical Government... In short unless the stream of their importation could be turned from this to other Colonies, as you very judiciously propose, they will soon so out number us, that all the advantages we have will not [in My Opinion] be able to preserve our language, and even our Government will become precarious.

Franklin was referring, of course, to the Germans. The Nazis of the twentieth century then believed, as the neo-Nazis of the twenty-first now believe, that the Aryan race is superior to all. Benjamin Franklin believed that the Germans migrating to the colonies were generally of an inferior sort, and he hinted at a reason why: they were not sufficiently influenced by the Christian religion. In the English colonies, some colonists held African slaves, and, believing the Africans to possess a beastly nature, they abused them, and neglected to convert them and baptize them. Nearly sixty years before Franklin wrote, Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister in New England, rebuked the English slaveholders of his time for their sins. He wrote:

It has been cavilled, by some, that it is questionable Whether the Negroes have Rational Souls, or no. But let that Bruitish insinuation be never Whispered any more. Certainly, their Discourse, will abundantly prove, that they have Reason. Reason shoves it self in the Design which they daily act upon. The vast improvement that Education has made upon some of them, argues that there is a Reasonable Soul in all of them. An old Roman, and Pagan, would call upon the Owner of such Servants, *Homines tamen esse memento*. They are Men, and not Beasts that you have bought, and they must be used accordingly. 'Tis true; They are Barbarous. But so were our own Ancestors. The Britons were in many things as Barbarous, but a little before our Saviours Nativity, as the Negroes are at this day if there be any Credit in Cæsars Commentaries. Christianity will be the best cure for this Barbarity. — Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized. An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity* (1706)

Mather understood what some others have failed to understand: that apart from the influence of the Gospel, men are beasts, but under its influence they are saints. Some have failed to understand the unity of mankind as sons of Adam. They have failed to understand the depravity of mankind inherited from their father, Adam. They have failed to understand the unifying and empowering work of the Spirit of their heavenly Father, and of Jesus, their brother.

When God created the world, He did so by fiat, which is to say, He did it command. The Scriptures say, God created the world in six days, and, on the sixth day, He created man in His image. So, when He created light, He simply commanded that it be. The Scriptures say, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3) God commanded that there be a firmament to divide the waters, and, the Scriptures say, “It was so.” (Genesis 1:7) God commanded dry land to appear, and it was so. (Genesis 1:9) God commanded the earth to sprout vegetation after its kind, it was so. (Genesis 1:11) God commanded lights to be in the expanse of the heavens, and it was so. (Genesis 1:15) God commanded that the earth bring forth living creatures, and it was so. (Genesis 1:24) God created mankind, commanded that they be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, it was so. As with the vegetation and the living creatures, so with man: everyone reproduces after its own kind. Just as the apple tree and the dog reproduce necessarily after their own kind, so do men. Genetically, there is one kind of man: mankind. So, if ‘race’ be defined as “The lineage of a family, or continued series of descendants from a parent who is called the stock,” then all mankind are the race of Adam. (Webster 1828)

God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Genesis 1:27) God gave them a special prohibition: He forbade them eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They did eat of it, however, and so transgressed the command of God. As God warned them, they died. Estranged from God, they had no spiritual, and no physical life. What is more, every one of their offspring comes into this world in the same state of sin and death. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12) Every man comes into the world “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1) They are sinful through and through; totally depraved in nature, and, left to themselves, totally depraved in thought, word, and deed. Saint Paul described sinners this way:

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. (Romans 1:29–31)

When God made mankind, he said to them, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28) Adam and Eve did produce children, and their children did the same. Mankind reproduced, but they resisted God’s command to fill the earth. They said, “Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:4) They determined to be one people in one place. God would not allow it, however. He would force them to spread out over the earth. He said, “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.” (Genesis 11:7) When the people could not communicate, they could not cooperate, and so they separated. (Genesis 11:8) This was the origin of clans, languages, lands, and nations. (Genesis 10) So Moses sang, “When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” (Deuteronomy 32:8)

The world was ruined by sin, but God sent His Son into the world to save it. He sent His Son into the world, not only to atone for the sins of men, but to unite them with a bond greater than family, greater than nationality. He came to unite them by binding them to Himself through His Spirit. Jesus, on the night before His crucifixion, told His apostles:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (John 14:12–17)

Jesus told His disciples that He would have to leave them, because He would ascend to His Father in heaven. Those who believe in Him do works greater than the works He did. Jesus in His lifetime had a few hundred followers in Palestine; His apostles would convert the nations. His apostles would accomplish this great work by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would not leave them alone,. He would send His Spirit who would be in them, and would be with them forever. He also prayed for them, and for all His people. He prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:20, 21)

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus did send His Spirit into the world. Saint Luke records:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1–4)

The Spirit came, as promised. He filled Christ's followers, and enabled them to speak in languages they had never learned. Saint Luke records what happened next:

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. (Acts 2:5–13)

There were in Jerusalem at that time Jews of every nation. They heard the Christians speaking their own languages, and they wished to understand the significance. Saint Peter explained that God had poured out His Spirit, and that, if they repented of their sins, and believed in Jesus, then their sins would be forgiven, and they would receive the gift of the Spirit. By the grace of God, they did repent and believe. At Babel, God divided the people into clans and nations; at Pentecost, He united people of different clans and nations into one clan and one nation.

Saint Paul, in his address to the pagan philosophers of Athens, told them of the unity and depravity of the human race:

[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.” (Acts 17:26–29)

God in His providence determines the time and place of people; He determines nations. This is not prescriptive, but descriptive. God does not forbid migration, or intermarriage, any more than He forbids the learning of a second language. God at Babel dispersed mankind. Since that time He has in His providence determined the times and places of nations, and He has done this so that men will seek him. The ancient Greeks believed that they were naturally superior to other races of men, and that it was natural that they should dominate them. In Euripides’ play, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Iphigenia says, “And it is right, mother, that Hellenes should rule barbarians.” (*Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1400) This, Aristotle, in his *Politics*, cites approvingly when he writes, “Wherefore the poets say, ‘It is meet that Hellenes should rule over barbarians.’” (*Politics*. 1.2.6) Saint Paul preached that all men are kindred, one blood, inasmuch as they all are descended from the first man, Adam, and all men are made in the image of God. Moreover, as God made them and takes care of them, they ought to worship Him, and Him only. So Paul told the Athenians:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:30, 31)

Union with Christ does not supersede other unions, but it does surpass them in priority. It is greater than the unity of clan or of nation. Jesus said he divides earthly families. He said:

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (Luke 12:51–53)

A man may lose His family because of Jesus, but he will be part of a greater family. Jesus said, “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Matthew 19:29) Saint Peter taught that those who believe in Jesus are God’s chosen race and holy nation:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9, 10)

The Christian will always be a member of a certain family, but his position in the family of God is supreme, as Saint Paul wrote to the Romans:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:14–17)

The Christian may always be a citizen of a certain nation, but his citizenship in heaven is supreme, as Saint Paul wrote to the Philippians, “For our conversation is in heaven.” (Philippians 3:20) The Christian is to love all men, but his devotion to his Christian brethren ought to be supreme, as Paul wrote to the Galatians, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10) The church father, Tertullian, argued that Christians have a sincere love for one another because of the bond of the Spirit, but that pagans have only a bond of blood, and so their love for each other is but a pretense. He wrote:

But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death. And they are wroth with us, too, because we call each other brethren; for no other reason, as I think, than because among themselves names of consanguinity are assumed in mere pretence of affection.” (Tertullian, Apology, XXXIX)

The church father, Cyprian, observed that, before men are Christians, they cannot live together in peace, but rather hate and destroy each other. When they become Christians, however, they love each other and all mankind, even their enemies. He wrote:

We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all. (Justin Martyr, First Apology, 14)

Let us recognize that all mankind are sinners in need of redemption. Let us be glad that Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit who unites us and empowers us. Let us understand that we are a chosen race and a holy nation.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen.