

The “American Dream” And Its Moral Delusions

“Early twentieth century America may very well be the most identifiable period dominated by change: Woman won the right to vote, blacks were overturning the racial blur, banks offered a so-called “credit”, a box in living rooms performed live music, classical art fizzled into dada rah-rah and moving pictures got a voice – just to mention a few. Amidst all the change, Union and Confederate veterans sat and waited as their grandchildren marched and died side-by-side in what seemed to be a ‘never-ending’ aimless war. The aftermath left those living with a lack of faith in the old ways; the traditional system of things was adrift.

Through the swelling of Industrialization and the insurgence of a ‘commodity’ that would sooner than later be responsible for manufacturing lifestyle choices and rewiring household rationality altogether, what was once only aristocratic luxury was progressively becoming middle class pleasure. It was bigger than just a technological revolution; there was a heartfelt need for change. Convictions and conventionalisms were being culturally challenged and toppled propelled by the teeming conveniences electricity ushered on an individual basis. A “Progressive Era” of not only lifestyle, but of ethics and law was afoot. To say the very least, life was getting fast, quick.

In a surplus of immigrant values, diverging multiculturalism and all that jazz, the “American dream” was the ethic of the age, an Ideal that overwhelmed the traditions of old, and simmered that melting pot of culture with a mutual trajectory for goods as good. Yet an alleged stubbornness to “ancient ways” provoked the sons and daughters to challenge authority with what was assumed to be the latest convention of liberation: *moral relativism*. The roaring twenties were uproar, without a doubt, and jazz clubs would soon house that sense of looseness, as it were, from those cultural restrictions. It was a clash of *culturalism*: old ideals versus the new, which to the few, was nothing new at all. Tradition pitched, “there is nothing new under the sun”, in spite of that catchy melody modernization was tuning in the kids of tomorrow, “For those whose faces are turned toward the past, the years roll by unheeded – their lives unchanged.”¹ To the modern folk, it was all a matter of perspective; that timbre of the time was God’s honest truth – and still is. As ambience grew into ballad, the moment-by-moment appetite for “buy now, pay later” paved the path for the Great Depression – and all *things* won were lost; that American Dream was shelved.”²

To skip forward a generation, since the division of church and state, ‘modernization’ and the economic upsurge of rational-secularized bureaucracy, representative governments, the welfare state and a greater access to commodities have reduced the social need for that cosmic vending machine – God – supplementing the “vestiges of superstitious dogma” for scientific rhetoric, political doctrine and material prosperity. In comparison to agrarian societies, postindustrial civilizations show that alarming decrease in religiosity³. Such inference suggests with the rise of scientific dissemination under philosophical secularization paired with a greater

¹ The Jazz Singer, 1927. Directed by Alan Crosland, screenplay by Samson Raphaelson, adaptation by Alfred A. Cohn; based on the short story “The Day of Atonement” by Samson Raphaelson.

² Extracted from Garafraza Film & Media Group’s *Online Cinética Publication: Visual Language and the Film Form: Visual Semantics, Aesthetic Analysis, Compositional Communication & Other Theories Corresponding To Our Human Condition*.

³ Attend weekly religious services: 44% versus 20%; Pray daily: 52% versus 26%; Religion to be very important: 64% versus 20%; extracted from Conflicts and Tensions: Inglehart & Norris, Why Didn’t Religion Disappear? Re-Examining the Secularization Thesis, 256.

resource of commodities, God subsequently converted into a theory amidst other theory. People trust social norms, state recognition and the *status quo*, so to speak, as a means to live life comfortably. And in this particular case, the American Dream is one of the most predominant undercurrents of the national embroidery.

The earliest defining characteristic of the American Dream was to provide equal opportunity for anyone and everyone to achieve happiness, success and prosperity through hard work, determination and initiative – a dream that has become scarcely recognizable from a nightmare. It ought to be established that the overarching idea by no means lacks respectable or responsible ethics, it is without a doubt honourable to earn what you work for. The fact of the matter is as we moved forward from wholesome family values to a sole-proprietorship minded society, such an ambition on the individual level, although appeared noble, neutral and free on the surface, was merely a marketing tactic away from being exploited – and that is exactly what happened – the pursuit of happiness became ‘manufacturable’. And what you earned was yours and yours alone.

Now I cannot blame the “Dream” for human conduct, in proper context that definition is not controversial. It is however an issue as a social initiative when that Dream is juxtaposed to the nature of what we believe to be real, true and virtuous because it means something very different. It is “success and prosperity” for what? – And for whom I might add? With the spike in moral relativism lured by the “love of money” and bolstered by the idea that material prosperity *equals* happiness, the means, motive and passion for living life quickly isolated normal intent to be about achieving goods and not *being good* all in the name of self-obsessed pleasure.

The excessive greed of Black Friday where hundreds of people are killed over toys, televisions or what not every year, the demanding expectation of holiday gifts, the gluttonous indulgence of food alongside the overabundant surplus of food wasted at supermarkets from non-purchased products. We don’t give – we expect others to earn. The American Dream has enterprised into a self-seeking circus of autonomous truth-makers. And mind you, it was never intended to mean that, it has only become to mean that because of the surrounding conditions and beliefs permeating in Western culture, specifically those waving the flag of *materialism*⁴.

For a century plus, Western society has been steamrolling classical thought with what has become *postmodern* rhetoric. Inasmuch as to remove *metanarratives*, overarching historical perspectives and the purpose for which underlies our cultural traditions. With the extraction of historical actuality and the ‘impossibility’ of authentic communication, the future seemingly became the only thing tangible for the next generation – and living for “right now” is the closest thing to it. That moment-by-moment appetite quickly monetized morality into a worthless commodity, one that distracts the immediacy of constant guilty pleasures, which inadvertently affects how we celebrate our traditions. As the traditional ways of thinking and tradition itself get removed from its purpose, the *meaning of why* swiftly falls into ambiguity.

If we don’t start looking at the American Dream through a spiritual lens it will quickly assemble families into businesses and friendships into sole-proprietorships manufacturing human interaction to be about what can you do for me. – How industrious!

⁴ Materialism refers to the material world, often associated as the ‘external’, perceptible to the senses, holds objective ‘true’ reality independent of the ‘internal’ mind or spirit; meaning mind or spirit is contingent upon material to exist necessarily. A materialist does not deny the existence of mental or spiritual processes but affirms that such ideals may emerge only as byproducts of material conditions moment rendering meaning, value, purpose and identity as monetary synthetic stimulants.

It is times such as these where we realize why the biblical significance of tithing ten percent is more than just financial security for a particular ministry – it is most significantly a matter of spiritual control, releasing the authority money and material may have over our lives, as God gave us life, the very things we own are His also (1 Corinthians 4:7).

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