THE AMERICAN QUEST FOR THE CITY OF GOD:
Errand into the Wilderness
LELAND D. BALDWIN

The walls of Rome had not been breached for eight hundred years by a foreign conqueror, and in the midst of a decaying empire its citizens still spoke of it as the Eternal City, the inviolate center of civilization and world power. It is difficult for us to imagine the shock to the Mediterranean world when in the year 410 Alaric's Goths burst into the city and subjected it to sack. To pagan Romans the fall of the city was a just punishment by the old gods because they had been displaced by Christianity, and the belief seems to have found some credence among a populace not yet generally confirmed in the new religion.

It was to combat this belief that in 413 St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in what is now Algeria, began to write his City of God, which was to become the guiding light of the Middle Ages. Rome, he assured Christians, was temporal, the City of this World. Their eyes should be fixed on the truly eternal city, the City of God. He opened his great work with these words: "Most glorious is and will be the City of God. That city belongs to two spheres. The one on this earth lives by faith, a stranger among unbelievers, but when justice issues in judgment she shall be established in her eternal heavenly home."

In his long disquisition on this theme St. Augustine introduced for the first time an evolutionary philosophy of history — that God is working out his divine purpose in human society. In the light of the final judgment all things will be made clear; human sufferings and the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms will be seen as divine instruments in preparing the way for the coming City of God. But meanwhile we need not despair; the City of God endures on earth in the form of the church; moreover, it is within us, in the love and trust of the pure in heart.

The medieval papacy followed St. Augustine in holding that the

Leland D. Baldwin is Emeritus Professor of History, University of Pittsburgh. He was a member of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey (1931-1936), and was editor of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Series, to which he contributed Pittsburgh, the Story of a City, Whiskey Rebels, and The Keelboat Age on Western Waters. In later years he published additional monographs, several textbooks, and collections of readings. He now lives in Santa Barbara, California.—Editor
Catholic church was the visible City of God on earth, the imperfect Platonic shadow of the invisible heavenly city, but nevertheless the organization to which all men owed fealty. The spirit of the Middle Ages was that though church and state each had their functions, they were still a unit in promoting the building of the City of God on earth. Of course popes and kings battled over the problem of which should rule on mooted points, but there was little contention over the basic thesis.

This was also the theory bequeathed to the Reformation, but the princes of Germany and England saw their chance to place themselves in the role to which the popes had aspired. Thus, no one can deny that there were economic and political springs in the Reformation, but it must also be realized that the reformers believed that the church was falling short of its mission of striving for purity.

Our concern here is with England. By the Elizabethan settlement the monarch was the head of both church and state, and in order to make this more palatable the queen welcomed a certain amount of looseness in theological tenets. By the time of her death in 1603, the Church of England had become Arminian — that is, it held that individuals could accept or reject salvation. Elizabeth was less interested in fine theological points than in imposing a tight church organization in which the bishops should be able to root out any religiousists who taught doctrines which called royal authority in question. This also was the theory of the Stuarts; as James I put it, "No bishops, no king."

Even before the death of Elizabeth there had developed a strong party of clergy and laity who wished to purify the Church of England of what they called "popish practices" — hence they were called Puritans. They wished, in effect, to separate church and state, but to make the state subject to the church through the interpretation of the divine will as expressed in the Bible and expounded by a trained and learned clergy. Anglicans respected the Bible but pointed out that its rules could not cover every aspect of modern life; on the points left uncovered men should be able to use their reason. Anglicans reduced scriptural guidance to spiritual and moral matters; Puritans extended it to the whole of existence. Puritans did not reject reason, but relied on the clergy to apply its rules in interpreting the Bible.

There were basically three kinds of Puritans who were to be transferred to America and who were to affect our history profoundly. The Presbyterians advocated a more or less well-knit church as a means of religious and social control. Everyone would belong to it, but it would be ruled by an elite of wealth and position and a learned clergy.
Congregationalists insisted that each congregation should govern itself and should be composed of "visible saints" — that is, those who had been saved from sin as proved by a deeply emotional religious experience. They were willing to remain in the Church of England providing that the church did not attempt to dictate to them. Both Presbyterians and Congregationalists wished to separate church and state, but only in order to enable the church to organize on a scriptural basis without state interference. The state, they felt, should merely be the "nursing father" and the "police arm" of the church.

There was yet a third faction. The Separatists were Congregationalists who wished to leave the Church of England altogether.

The parliamentary opposition to the Stuarts was primarily economic and constitutional, but it was given a religious coloration by the support of the Puritans. It has long been a convenient shorthand expression to speak of the Puritans as Calvinists; perhaps it would be more exact to say that the Puritan clergy by their study of the scriptures had arrived at some of the same conclusions as Calvin. Certainly they agreed on the necessity of conversion and on their mission to build the City of God on earth.

Even before the migration to America, Puritan divines had eroded Calvin's doctrine that God in his inscrutable wisdom had predestined every man to salvation or damnation regardless of what might seem to be his merits. By the so-called federal theory, the Puritans held that Adam had lived under a "covenant of works" which blessed him so long as he was obedient. "With Adam's fall, we sinned all" — as the Puritan doggerel had it — but now men lived under a "covenant of grace" which gave the same blessings to all who believed in Christ, the "federal head" of the church. Among strict Puritan Congregationalists admission to the church followed only on the definite personal emotional experience which was the witness that the person was accepted by God into salvation.

Historically we have been enchanted by the ideal of democracy and have seized on wisps of fact and fancy and odd sayings taken out of context to assert the myth that the American colonies were settled to ensure political and religious liberty. Doubtless some of the settlers did have this aim, but in by far the most cases they refused liberty to others. The shining exceptions were the Quaker colonies; there were flaws even in the liberties of both Rhode Island and Maryland.

The learned and pious John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Bay, in a sermon preached aboard his flagship, settled the matter
before any of his thousand Puritan settlers landed. God, he asserted, had organized men in a social hierarchy so that "some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection." The settlers, he continued, had entered into a covenant with the Almighty and had been assured of his blessing in seeking out a place of cohabitation under a "due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical." By this Winthrop meant that they were erecting a Bible commonwealth, founding a City of God whose chief function would be to foster the true faith — as Puritans saw it — and to root out any taint of heresy.

Winthrop was by no means a lone voice crying in the wilderness, for the civil and religious establishments of Massachusetts Bay agreed with him. State and church were separate in Massachusetts, but the state could and did join in persecuting heresy. Baptists were scourged and Quakers hanged. Even the eminent Roger Williams escaped arrest only by flight. John Cotton, it may be remembered, aligned himself with Torquemada and Lenin when he declared that "it is wicked for falsehood to persecute truth, but it is the sacred duty of truth to persecute falsehood."

Though the phrase "errand into the wilderness" was first used about 1670, probably by the Reverend Samuel Danforth, the concept that the Puritan immigrants were founding a holy city was imbedded in their consciousness. That is not all. Perry Miller, a perceptive expositor of this errand, pointed out that Catholic Maryland, utopian Pennsylvania, philanthropic Georgia, and Episcopalian Virginia, all were based on some form of a holy errand into the wilderness.

It cannot be denied that among the reasons given for the settlement of America there were frequent echoes of assurance that there was 10 percent to be gained on the investment. Still, it would be unfair to assert that the settlers were hypocritical in expressing their desire to glorify God by converting the heathen and expanding God's kingdom.

To understand this one must understand the times. The first settlers of America inhabited "a mental universe in which religion was the main ingredient in human motive." Politics and religion, state and church, were one in seeking first the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. God's will was looked upon as the "first cause" and the "second cause" lay in the natural phenomena and human actions through which God worked. Thus wars, pestilences, and earthquakes were divine retributions for human wickedness. Actually Anglicans and Puritans agreed on so many points of theology that the modern
reader may wonder why they quarreled. The answer, of course, is that they differed on special points which to them seemed so vital that they were worth fighting for.

Take Virginia as the first example of the belief that settlers in America were engaged in carrying out the will of God — an errand into the wilderness intended to fulfill God's grand design for humanity. From the outset the province was proclaimed to be a holy experiment. The literature about Virginia, whether written by Virginians or English stay-at-homes, breathes the same piety and advocates much the same standards of conduct as we find in New England. In 1625, five years before John Winthrop came to Massachusetts Bay, Samuel Purchas was explaining God's design in opening up the New World to Christians. In doing this Purchas gave a quick sketch of world history, unfolding God's grand plan by which mankind could regain the grace and dignity lost by Adam's fall. The Christian's task was to convert the savages and subdue the wilderness and in doing this there would ensue a material reward. But let the Christian beware. If the savages were abused and profits were set ahead of the divine mission, then the settlers would suffer from God's wrath; the late Indian massacres in Virginia were but a foretaste of more that could come. It is true enough that Virginia's piety faded after the first few decades with the rise of tobacco culture and the growth of a plantation aristocracy. And yet it would be wrong to hold that Virginia and its neighbors consciously violated what they took to be the will of God. The modification that took the place of the pristine sense of mission was the concept of a divinely structured patriarchal society, handed down from the Middle Ages and interpreted by Sir Robert Filmer in his Patriarcha. This patriarchal concept was suited both to a plantation system based on slavery, and to white, nonslaveholding, rural dwellers, and was in time to spread across the South and become one of the standards around which the Confederacy rallied its forces.

While the sense of mission was faltering in Virginia it was also weakening — or at least changing form — in New England. Winthrop had proclaimed that "we shall be as a city set upon a hill; the eyes of all people are upon us." New England's divines did not regard themselves as fugitives, but rather as engaged in a "flanking maneuver" — as Perry Miller put it — which would prepare the way for the future. The vision of St. Augustine was a continual inspiration to them. If the City of God could be erected in New England the time would surely come when Old England would rouse from its spiritual slumber and
seek to follow this holy example. Winthrop confidently expected Massachusetts Bay to become the model for a second English Reformation.

Winthrop and his colleagues had high hopes of the parliamentary revolution of the 1640s, so what must have been their despair when they saw Cromwell ignoring their holy example and welcoming religious toleration and edging toward a complete separation of church and state not merely in name but in fact? More than this, a committee of English independent clergymen wrote to Massachusetts censuring it for its religious persecutions. No wonder that Massachusetts Bay refused to obey Cromwell's Parliament!

The truth was that New England had been left behind by history, and there now followed a half-century or more of agonizing over the failure of the errand into the wilderness and over the problem of whether or not to catch up with the times. William Stoughton consoled himself in 1668 by proclaiming that "God had sifted a whole nation, that He might send choice grain into the wilderness." Nevertheless Stoughton was whistling in the dark. The stalwart founders had died or become senile, and their successors were, he complained, given to frustrating and deceiving the Lord's expectations; perhaps he saw himself as carrying on with the errand when he presided with such severity over the Salem witchcraft trials. Certainly he saw crop failures, epidemics, and King Philip's War as just punishments for causing the "workings of God's salvation to cease."

This was the period of what Michael Wigglesworth called "God's controversy with New England," because it had broken the covenant the founders had made with God to erect a holy commonwealth ruled by "visible saints." This was the time when Samuel Danforth preached his sermon entitled A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness, in which he accused the people not only of failing themselves but the God who had sent them on the errand. As proof of this failure upholders of the old order pointed to the Halfway Covenant of 1662. Hitherto, as stated above, among strict Puritan Congregationalists church members were the so-called "visible saints," those who had undergone the definite personal emotional experience which was the witness that the person was accepted by God into salvation. Now the "unawakened" children of baptized persons could be admitted to baptism and church membership even though they had not received the witness of divine approval by the personal emotional experience of justification.

Richard Hooker, the English divine, in his Ecclesiastical Polity,
had laid the foundation of modern English polity by reinterpretating the compact theory of government inherited from the Middle Ages. The Puritans had adopted one of its forms. They held that governors ruled by the consent of the people, even though they might be elected by the chosen few, the "visible saints." All men, whether citizens or merely "inhabitants," were bound to obey the laws. Now with the erosion of the connections between church and state, men came to view the compact as secular rather than religious and came also to view their rights as naturally rather than divinely given.

It may be observed that men were now inclined to insist on their rights and ignore their duties — thus introducing the great failing of modern democracy. The concept of natural rights found defenders in two prominent clergymen, John Wise and Jonathan Mayhew, and, of course, in John Locke. Meanwhile Isaac Newton had destroyed the medieval view of natural phenomena as divinely inspired when he showed the connection between cause and effect. Thus he prepared the way for the Enlightenment with its deistic belief in a transcendent God, creator of the world and final judge of men, who had implemented a divine plan as revealed in nature. But while this plan unfolded, the deity had left the universe to run itself like a perpetual motion clock.

The way was now cleared for the defense of the American Revolution as an assertion of natural rights against a tyrannical king. Moreover it was now possible to shear the errand into the wilderness of its religious meaning and reinterpret it in secular and political terms. Winthrop's City of God could now become the City of Man. It did not deny God; it merely engraved over its portals Benjamin Franklin's motto, "What is serving God? 'Tis doing good to man."

It should not be assumed that this tremendous change came about through purely intellectual exercises. By the middle of the eighteenth century American society had changed greatly. Not only had it become secularized to a large extent but it was developing a merchant economy devoted to trade, especially in timber and agricultural products and in semifinished articles such as bar iron.

Democracy did not spring up suddenly; even when the vote appeared under Quaker auspices in Pennsylvania and western New Jersey it was confined mostly to freeholders. As was pointed out above there were even in Rhode Island and Maryland flaws in what we like to claim was their political and religious liberty, and in Pennsylvania Catholics were barred from holding public office unless they took an oath abjuring the authority of the pope. It is difficult to see how
democracy as we understand it could have developed without the existence of the vast tracts of land and the enormous natural resources that lay ready for the axes and plows of the colonists. For the first time in history democracy had a fighting chance to win in the age-old battle with authoritarianism. The riches of North America bred a society in which abundance took the place of scarcity; for the first time privilege could not snatch all the economic power for itself and tread down the common man.

The end of government and industry, Americans learned to insist, was to serve the whole community, not merely the elite. They demanded that cultural and material resources should no longer be the exclusive property of a chosen few but must become of service to all. Democracy came into its own, and with it came the atmosphere of freedom which science and technology needed in order to grow. Not only was this true in the United States, but the riches of America operated to extend much of the same atmosphere of freedom to the remainder of western civilization and gave England, the champion of emergent democracy, the strength to survive. Out of the blood and oppression of the Anglo-American sweep to the Pacific and out of the rape of this splendid continent has come the opportunity that we hold in our hands today. One can only stand in awe before the mysterious processes of history. It is more than mysterious — it is mystical.

Colonial merchants and planters were not merely tradesmen or tobacco growers but were land speculators, seeking added wealth in the unearned increment of their land holdings. Merchants and planters thus had vested interests which they eventually defended by revolution. The English governing class had historically included only those who had a “stake in society” because of their ownership of land. Now the common people of the colonies, unlike their British progenitors, had a stake in society in the acres which they had wrested from the wilderness with such labor and peril. As a consequence they had developed an independence of spirit — not to say intransigence — which made them willing to defend their hard-won gains by revolution.

The American society of 1776 was in large part bourgeois and at the same time leveling and democratic. I mean bourgeois in the sense of owning property and democratic in the sense of asserting that government should be of, by, and for the people. Of course the merchant and planting plutocracy of the seaboard disapproved of the leveling aspirations of the common man, and joined in revolution in the hope of promoting and confirming their own ascendance. Still, even as they
did so, they were panic-stricken by evidences that they were assisting in a movement which could result in their own downfall. American society had gotten too far beyond Winthrop's model to be willing to suffer any further under elite controls.

The American evolution toward democracy was an apt illustration of St. Augustine's philosophy of history, though the good saint might have doubted that it was the unfolding of God's purpose. Alan Simpson, in his perceptive monograph, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, lists a number of ways in which the Puritan movement influenced the future. Stripped of detail, the Puritans' distrust of arbitrary power helped promote our allegiance to limited government; their self-reliance contributed to self-government; their elite of "visible saints" cut across class boundaries; they contributed profoundly to education — Massachusetts Bay was the first English-speaking government to make elementary education the business of the state; and they inculcated morality with its "habits of honesty, sobriety, responsibility, and hard work."

Finally the imprint left on Anglo-Saxon religious ideals was profound, though hardly what John Winthrop would have favored. This refers to the Puritan's insistence on searching the Scriptures for himself, with the result that sects multiplied to the place where no one of them could dominate, thus leading to the discovery that they could enjoy liberty only if they tolerated others. To paraphrase Voltaire's famous quip: one religion, despotism; two religions, civil war; thirty religions, toleration, peace, and happiness. Of course Voltaire exaggerated a little, for the narrow conservatism and religious bigotry of the Bible Belt are the creation of forces that emerged from the decaying corpse of Puritanism.

In order to understand the American society of 1776 let us turn for a moment to the two giants who bestrode the pre-Revolutionary scene — Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin. Of the two, Edwards possessed by far the most profound intellect. He is remembered as the avatar of the evangelical movement—that is, the Great Awakening of the 1740s—who in his sermons preached of an angry God who shook sinners over the blazing pit of hell as one held a spider over the fire.

The Great Awakening has been presented in two ways. One is as a facet of an evangelical movement that originated in the hunger of ordinary folk for the spiritual provender which the rationalism of the Enlightenment was withholding. This movement affected much of
Western Europe and was represented in England by John Wesley and George Whitefield. The other view would have it that the movement arose from certain cultural developments within the colonies — notably the loosening of the bonds of authority and the rising emotional instability which was to become a continuing element in American history. Perhaps it is not too much to assert that both views have validity. Certainly Edwards was in many respects a Calvinist. He believed in predestination, original sin, the final judgment, and eternal damnation. Nevertheless he combated the new current of deism by putting a certain amount of warmth and emotionalism into Calvinism, and with melting heart invited the sinner to repent and partake of the "surpassing sweetness" of the covenant of grace. In preaching the accessibility of salvation to all, Edwards unconsciously opened the way for modern fundamentalism with its denigration of science and learning; for evangelical mysticism and antiintellectualism; and even for Emersonian pantheism.

Perhaps more to the point of our thesis, Edwards realized that the magistrates and the clergy no longer ruled by divine right but were now ruling by sufferance of the people. He looked about him in the Connecticut River valley and saw the rich men he called "river gods" engaged in usurping the powers of government in order to promote and secure their fell business of gouging the people in trade and land sales.

In the end the "river gods" drove him out of his pulpit. In the sermon, which might be called his Parthian shot at his enemies, he denounced their "get-rich-quick" schemes less for their immorality than for their betrayal of the public welfare. He portrayed the magistrate not as a democrat — for Edwards was no democrat in our sense — but as a man of ability, learning, wisdom, and experience, who listened to his people and encouraged them to speak up. The business of the leader was to conform to human and social realities, to fight against those who "screwed upon" their neighbors, to seek the public welfare, and to forefend calamity.

In saying this Edwards proclaimed the passing of the medieval concept behind the errand into the wilderness — the belief that commoners were incapable of recognizing and promoting their own welfare. Only as an addendum did Edwards list piety, property, and good family as qualifications of the leader. Quite apparently he rejected Winthrop's assertion that these qualifications were first and foremost the sine-qua-nonities of the magistrate.

Edwards portrayed one side of the developing American character
— the leveling influence of the frontier with its release of emotions and its opposition to the cool rationalism of deism. Indeed it may be that his vendetta against the "river gods" and their Harvard allies was partly actuated by the growing encroachments of deistic reason on what he conceived to be biblical revelation.

When we turn to Benjamin Franklin we find that he was an amalgam of much that Edwards rejected, for he was at once a deist, a democrat, and a land speculator.

Franklin's roots, like those of Edwards, were in Calvinism or some reasonable facsimile thereof, and in Poor Richard's saws he blended it with conventional morality — but with something withheld, even as Shakespeare subtly ridiculed the folk wisdom which he placed in the mouth of Polonius. This was by no means understood by the nineteenth century, which saw Franklin in the light of Poor Richard's Almanac and took him to its bosom as the exemplar of middle-class virtues. Poor Richard became the guidebook of the dawning bourgeois civilization not only in America but in Europe. It was translated into all the European languages, including the Scandinavian, and was published in innumerable editions by associations devoted to uplift, among them the Society for the Preservation of Property against Republicans.

True it is that there was a shrewd materialism included in Franklin's philosophy, a willingness to conform to society's demands in exchange for filthy lucre. But materialism is not the key to his character any more than it is the key to the character of the nation he helped to mold. Carl Becker has said that in all of Franklin's dealing with men one feels that he was nevertheless not wholly committed, that something remained unexpressed. Was this, perhaps, because of his ability to look at life from the outside, to see every matter in its due proportion? At any rate, Franklin's aphorisms were primarily for others; himself, he worked pragmatically from the practical to the theoretical, from experience to generalization.

This is not for a moment meant to imply that Franklin would not have agreed with Poor Richard in recommending hard work, frugality, thrift, and all the other humdrum virtues in the Calvinist showcase. However, it seems apparent that he would have felt they were chiefly for the man on the make, and that the arrivé should let up, at least on hard work and frugality. One may doubt that he would have recommended the Calvinistic virtues simply because they were virtues or because the community demanded conformity; rather he would have pointed out their usefulness both to the individual and to society, and
asserted that philosophy could not thrive on an empty belly. If Franklin in his young manhood conformed to community sentiments it was a means of getting money in order to live the kind of life which was dictated by his insatiable curiosity and his love of doing good. When at forty-two he had attained sufficient wealth he retired from active control of his business and announced his intention of devoting the remainder of his life to science. As it turned out, his active life was only beginning; his careers as politician, propagandist, and statesman lay ahead of him.

His democracy was simply a demand for equality and opportunity, for (vide Franklin himself) wisdom, virtue, and ability spring up among the poor as well as the rich. Without belaboring the point here, it may be suggested that our social, economic, and political history has shown a strange interplay between Franklin’s optimism and the Puritans’ pessimism. On one side, we assert confidently that all problems have a solution and that God is on the side of America. On the other, everything will turn out wrong because human nature is depraved and the masses will be too strong for the enlightened few and eventually will bear them down in a vast doomsday. This may help to explain our violent political oscillations and our intense emotionalism. It is fortunate that through it all the balance wheel of Franklin’s cool, pragmatic approach has been able to forefend the final disaster.

The public’s persistent worship of Poor Richard as a bourgeois saint has until recently obscured one of Franklin’s most firmly held tenets about property. In this connection he asserted that:

> All the Property that is necessary to a Man . . . is his Natural Right . . . . But all Property superfluous to such purpose is the Property of the Publick, who, by their Laws, have created it, and who may therefore by other Laws dispose of it . . . . He that does not like Civil Society on these Terms, let him retire and live among Savages.

Now the interesting thing is that this is essentially what Richard Hooker meant when he upheld the rights of the community, as superior to those of the individual — though without violating reason and tradition. And, according to some recent interpreters, Locke did not mean to champion the right of property to override all other rights. When Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence of the human right to life, liberty, and property it seems to have been Franklin who amended it to the form we know — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This picture of Franklin as the prophet of the welfare state is no more out of keeping with the traditional view than his role in foreign
relations. During most of his life Franklin was an active champion of imperial union and during the ten years previous to the Revolution he strove desperately to prevent the suicide of the British Empire. This stress on cooperation did not weaken his Americanism, for he was convinced that the center of empire must presently come to rest in North America. The Revolution altered the form but not the substance of his dream.

Franklin knew that he had to deal with human nature as it was and that he had to yield to popular imperfections. His guiding rule as a politician was that he should be influenced by public expediency but under no circumstances by his own private interest. Reality had to come ahead of theory (even sometimes ahead of morals) and time after time he was forced to accept compromises, in politics, in diplomacy, in constitution making. This meant that the public penchant for moralism must be catered to — that the power necessary to national security must be concealed by a moral cloak. Franklin denied that power could create right or that power alone could solve human problems. Just as evident was his belief that morality, standing alone, was helpless. Power and morality might be antagonists, yet they also were necessary allies in the building of justice and human happiness. Inherent throughout Franklin's writings and actions was the realization that might gives to right the power to survive and right gives to might the moral reason to fight for survival. And this pragmatic view has been the basic guide for American action despite those shocking and all too frequent aberrations which have enabled foreigners to berate us as hypocrites.

Franklin was a man who not only could reconcile clashing points of view but could weld them into something new and constructive. This, also, has been the genius of America, but perhaps what we need as a nation is more of Franklin's serene ability to equilibrate uncertainties. It does not seem that he suffered much from a guilty conscience. He marked down his errata not to fret about them but to help himself mend them. When high living gave him the gout he took his punishment like a man and did not blame it on foreign subversive elements. We must, said he, "reflect how many of our duties Providence has ordained to be naturally pleasures; and it has had the goodness, besides, to give the name of sin to several of them so that we might enjoy them the more." And then he added a great truth: "We only live once, and if we choose security and propriety — even to shield those we love — we lose something of what might have been."

Edwards and Franklin were men with differing tastes and out-
looks, but I have tried to show that they were not simple exemplars respectively of idealism and materialism. Each man was a bundle of complexities — as who is not? They differed in theology, but they had pretty much the same view of the qualifications of a ruler and of the people's right to promote their own welfare. Above all they agreed that the errand into the wilderness was to construct a better way of life, a more perfect society. And this, I maintain, has been the key to the American psyche, the touchstone by which we have tested every plan and policy. Together these two great contemporaries helped to mold the spirit which fought the war for independence and which has deepened and broadened during the two centuries which we are now celebrating. Certainly they played a part in assuring that the Revolution would not be fought in support of Winthrop's aristocratic and theocratic ideas.

The American Revolution had run its course less than a year when it gave birth to a new version of the errand. This appeared in Tom Paine's *Appeal to Reason*, the pamphlet which electrolyzed the will to independence in the American mind. "Freedom hath been hunted round the globe," cried Paine. "O! receive the fugitive and prepare in time an asylum for mankind." From this it soon proved to be an easy step to the historic definition of the American mission — that in the democratic process Americans had found a universally applicable way of life and that their function was to perfect it and serve as an example which could eventually be followed by the rest of the world. It was the rebirth in a political form of the Puritans' religious errand into the wilderness.

John Adams declared that he considered "the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scheme and design in Providence for the illumination and emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth." Virginian deists like Washington and Jefferson agreed with New Englanders that the United States had a divine mission. Washington in his first inaugural suggested that "the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment intrusted to the hands of the American people."

Nevertheless the Constitution of 1787 gave minimal attention to developing democracy; rather it was based on John Locke, Montesquieu, Adam Smith, and William Blackstone. It remained for Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson to fill the chinks in the
Constitution and to give meaning and direction to the American mission — to the quest for the City of God.

When Jefferson retired from the presidency, he placed his own bust and that of Hamilton facing each other in the great hall of his home at Monticello, and there they still stand, opposite each other in death as in life. Their position is fitting, for they personify the two great forces of democratic evolution. As Jefferson himself said, "The terms Whig and Tory belong to natural as well as to civil history. They denote the temper and constitution of mind of different individuals." This division of parties, he added, was necessary to induce each to keep watch on the other. Gilbert and Sullivan said much the same thing a century later when they sang:

... every boy and every gal,
    That's born into this world alive,
Is either a little Liberal,
Or else a little Conservative.

The first twenty years of the republic was the period in which the nation set the direction of its development (capitalism) and the method of its development (the democratic process) — that is, the direction and development of the American quest for the City of God. Hamilton stood for a strong central government, the dominance of commerce and manufactures, and rule by the rich, the well-born, and the able; Jefferson stood for a weak central government, the dominance of agriculture, and rule by the people as a whole. During the first twenty years of the republic we find either the two leaders or their followers deliberately contradicting in word or deed every item of their trilogy of tenets, and there is a lesson in that fact. No one can be quite so pure and moral about principles as a party out of power; no one sees so readily as a group of men in power that facts must be dealt with on their own terms. But the original cast of mind remains, and each will deal with a situation as nearly as possible in conformity with its basic beliefs and hopes.

The basic principles of Hamilton and Jefferson — as distinguished from the above tenets — lie much deeper. They can perhaps be best expressed in the two concepts "order" and "liberty." Hamilton did not reject liberty, of course; he simply believed that it must give precedence to good order, in the sense of stability. Jefferson did not reject order; he simply believed that order without liberty is of no value.

Both believed that where a man's treasure is, there will his heart
be also. Hamilton looked on order and property as treasures that are responsibly guarded only if they are entrusted to the select few. Property, as the rock of good order, must be preserved from direct injury or from limitations that prevent it from multiplying itself freely. Obviously, the Jeffersonians did not reject the holding of property; they simply believed that property should not become an instrument that could be used for limiting the rights, snatching the livelihood, or besmirching the dignity of the individual.

In the emerging political system neither order nor liberty could be permitted to hold complete sway. Rigid order is the bulwark erected by conservatives — including those who have "made their pile" — to protect their status or property, and inevitably it will vitiate liberty because it gives them the power to oppress their fellows. Complete liberty (individualism) enables those with luck, initiative, or shrewdness to gain an undue share of economic power — and with it will come inequality, because they will have the power to oppress their fellows. Note that in both cases there is a destructive bent toward what I have called the malaise of democracy — the all too human tendency to demand one's rights and ignore one's duties. It is necessary therefore to establish and maintain a tension between rights and duties, between liberty and order, and this has been the fundamental problem throughout American history.

Jefferson saw what many still fail to grasp: that to preserve this tension there must be an educated and enlightened electorate and a considerable degree of relative (not absolute) economic equality. If we examine Jefferson's policies in that light we will see that he devoted his life to promoting public education, to asserting the liberty of the press, and to shoring up small property interests as an offset to the moneyed aristocracy. He thought of the small farmers as the bulwark of democracy because in their independence and relative economic equality lay his hope of preserving the tension between order and liberty. (Equality also tends to promote mediocrity and hamper the initiative essential to progress, but that is a later story.)

It is not quite accurate to call Hamilton conservative — that is, conserving the old — for he was certainly progressive in economics, and in those days the word "liberal" carried much the same meaning as "progressive." Nor was Jefferson altogether a liberal even in the modern meaning of the word — that is receptive of new ideas — for he had the desire to keep power in the hands of the agrarians, who were certainly conservative.
With the above said, we can add that liberalism as a historical term in the United States (not necessarily in Europe) has been the political movement which expresses the needs of more or less disadvantaged groups, and so is a form of protest against established interests. In America one group has been markedly influential from the beginning: private business. Therefore, while American liberalism has had many objectives, the one which is most common, which seems to exist in any time and place, is this: to cut back or control the power of private business so that, in the view of the liberals of the day, it is helpful rather than harmful to society at large.

American liberalism, therefore, has been Jeffersonian in its goals. These goals are more a spirit than a precise set of objectives. But they are best understood as those set down in Jefferson’s great statements, most notably the Declaration of Independence: equality, freedom from oppression, a concern for the ordinary man, an intense determination to safeguard freedom of thought and expression. We cannot say that the liberal always emphasizes the unity of the group and collective action. In earlier times, it happened that liberals fought against precisely these things on the ground that, under current conditions, they would increase oppression, give big business more power, heighten rather than reduce inequality, and hamper freedom of expression. The means, then, will vary from one generation to another, but the goals sought remain the same.

Though American democracy is permeated by the Jeffersonian spirit, yet one must realize that the nation was the creation of both Hamilton and Jefferson. Hamilton sought to implant and maintain the political ascendance of an aristocracy; it was Jefferson who forced on him the pattern of democratic evolution through political conflict. Hamilton’s legacy was intensely practical, mundane, and a little selfish; he lighted the furnaces of America’s iron mills, unfurled the sails of its trading ships, and posted the ledgers in banks and counting houses; his inspiration played a part in the rise of the genius for organization which was a vital factor in laying the foundations of the American standard of living.

Jefferson’s legacy was that of faith in humanity; he touched the moral consciousness of men with the spark of inspiration and sounded the trumpet call to battle for human rights. Hamilton was the head, Jefferson the heart. Hamilton was materialistic, Jefferson was idealistic; and though they may clash, neither can live long without the other. Hamilton was might, Jefferson was right. Might gives right the power
to survive, and right gives might the moral reason to fight for survival. Thus in eternal conflict, eternal compromise, and eternal interdependence, Hamilton and Jefferson have lived since there were men on this earth and will live as long as men remain.

We have examined the transplantation of the errand into the wilderness from the realm of theology to the realm of politics. It is now time to examine its transfer from politics to technology and economics, for the vision of the City of God had now become that of a society in which the common man lived in peace and plenty. Yet we can touch only a few high points. American independence released a surge of creative activity not only in political and constitutional affairs but in technology. Within a generation after the Revolution Americans began to pour out a spate of inventions: the cotton gin, efficient steam engines, the steamboat, and machine tools; and to these were presently added new printing processes, agricultural implements, the sewing machine, the electric telegraph, and numerous railway improvements.

The invention fundamental to this amazing technological spurt, however, was the interchangeable part, which can be attributed primarily to Eli Whitney and Simeon North. It was this invention along with the invention of machine tools that made it possible to use semiskilled labor in the manufacture of useful goods at prices that could be afforded by the common man. The tools for building the American City of God were now available. Could the realization lie far behind? It could and did.

America entered a period of groping (not yet ended) in which writers, artists, religious leaders, and intellectual leaders in general, sought to clarify the American mission. Transcendentalists professed to find guidance in the still, small voice within, which informed them of eternal truth. Reformers and religionists of a hundred varieties sought to remake society in some more perfect image by panaceas from vegetarianism to abolition of slavery.

This turbulence and uncertainty was due at least in part to the early phases of a dilemma which was not to become clear until our own century; this was the conflict between the European cultivated tradition and the American vernacular, or native workmanship. It was basically a struggle between an aristocratic elite and the democratic engineer.

Europe's art and technology were rooted in its traditional civilization that had developed with more or less symmetry from classical times to the Industrial Revolution. To quote John Kouwenhoven, the
American vernacular — that is, native workmanship — is the folk art “of the first people in history who, disinherited of a great cultural tradition, found themselves living under democratic institutions in an expanding machine economy.” American democracy, for the first time in history, sought a civilization built on material service to, as well as appreciation by, the people; and in pursuance of this dream many artists, engineers, and craftsmen were trying to find the way to use the material resources of America in new forms useful to the masses.

Although the political institutions of the United States were based on democracy, many of its inherited social institutions reflected distrust of the people. The inexorable pressure of democracy was shaping a machine culture to develop the nation's resources in the service of the masses, but the pressure of the American inferiority complex was calling for the absorption \textit{in toto} of the European cultivated tradition. The conflict that grew out of these clashing pressures not only pained artists but confused the public. Nevertheless, generations of simple American mechanics refused to feel inferior but asserted that function should govern form. Devoid as they were of any training in taste, they deplored Europe’s so-called art and beauty as mere artificial prettiness, though they failed to realize that they themselves had found the nub of art and beauty in their native workmanship. That they had done so is evident to anyone who examines the simple architecture of the antebellum period, such as the Shaker barn or the Cape Cod cottage, or the common artifacts, such as furniture and tools — for example, the ax, a light, utilitarian, and graceful descendant of the European’s unwieldy broadax.

American intellectuals were torn between the supposed security of status and the democratic demand for change. The struggle between native and alien forms afflicted not only art, literature, and mechanics, but politics, and, in one sense, the Civil War was an aspect of this conflict.

Horatio Greenough, the sculptor, was one of the first to recognize the nature and significance of the clash and he became the prophet of the new order. Americans, he said, founded their institutions on hope, Europeans on the past. “We hoist the sail and are seasick; they anchor and dance.” Greenough also anticipated the modern role of function. “The mechanics of the United States,” said he, “have already outstripped the artists and have, by their bold and unflinching adaptation, entered the true track and held up the light for all who operate for American wants, be they what they will. By beauty I mean the
promise of function; by action I mean the presence of function; by character I mean the record of function.” In another place he went on to say “this American people is the advance guard of humanity because it is one vast interrogation. Never affirming but when there is need for action . . . . it gives peace and good will in proportion to the universality of the wants to which it ministers.”

The American vernacular influence sprang from the masses, and persisted despite the determined effort of the upper class to put Corinthian pillars on steam engines and coruscate their framework with pomegranates and arabesques. The difference in approach was fundamental. Europeans feared the machine and wished to hide and prettify it; they wished to preserve the old, which itself had once been functional but was now outmoded by new techniques, because the old represented the set of values on which the age-old European elite based its ascendance — values which were now obsolete but for which no sure substitute had been found. The American instinctively realized that if the machine was to serve all the people it must not be hampered by the old artistic forms, but must strip away unnecessary bulk, weight, and ornamentation in order to simplify, cut cost, and increase efficiency. Just as the explorer had boldly set out to find new lands, some Americans boldly set out to find new social values — and to express them in all of life.

The American had short-cut European evolution and was entering the era of mass production. Progress in the new techniques was much easier than in Europe, for the European was more firmly rooted in the past. Thus by about 1870, Americans were using a cast-steel plow that weighed only 40 pounds, while the British clung to a wrought-iron plow (intended to do the same work) that weighed 250 pounds. Though much American machinery was somewhat affected by the ornamental lines and coruscations of the European tradition, the most impressive treat at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 was the enormous, starkly functional Corliss steam engine. Even Europeans recognized its artistic quality. The London Times, little inclined to praise things American, noted that “the American mechanizes as an old Greek sculptured, as the Venetian painted.”

One of the most remarkable developments was the balloon-frame house, so called in contempt of its lightness. Hitherto houses had been framed of heavy timbers as much as a foot square, joined by mortise-and-tenon and held firm by wooden pegs. The balloon-frame house used the plentiful nails provided by new machines to fasten together
frames composed of light two-by-four studs. This was the answer to the need for cheap housing for the masses, and was an example of the way in which the vernacular overpowered the cultivated tradition.

The America of the Gilded Age — the period after the Civil War — was a welter of conflicting interests and ideologies which we have no space to examine or even mention. The deists had bequeathed a belief in a divine plan, or design, as revealed in nature, and this was now transformed into Naturalism — the belief that in a dynamic and evolutionary universe the moral and social orders were subordinate parts of the natural order. This soon tallied with Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism, often called the Gospel of Wealth, which brutalized natural law by presenting the survival of the fittest as nature's way of weeding out the weaker members of society. Prosperity was the tangible evidence of fitness and the proof of righteousness, and education, literature, art, politics, and the church played soft accompaniments as the great entrepreneurs — known widely as the robber barons — sang their hymns of praise to the Bitch Goddess Success. The thesis was that democracy had failed to build the City of God so now the businessmen had taken over the task. They must be given every needful assistance — tariffs, cheap raw materials, favorable banking and currency laws, and plentiful, cheap, and docile labor. This creed, it will be recognized, was merely a flowering of one of the basic tenets of Calvinism: that wealth has a responsibility for guiding society and promoting its welfare in accordance with the divine light known only to the "visible saints." The "river gods" of Jonathan Edwards had returned in a new guise.

The new Jonathan Edwards was William James, Harvard psychologist, and his disciple was John Dewey, Columbia University philosopher of education. William James, unlike his brother, the mandarin novelist Henry James, delighted in the turmoil and clamor of America. He saw its tough-mindedness — that is, acceptance of the fact that change is a constant of life — as the hope of the future, and he sought ways to use its fighting instincts in building a better society. James, like most other Americans, was an optimist, a believer in progress; yet he could not accept progress as inevitable. Society could advance or deteriorate: accident, community decisions, and the acts of individual leaders would all enter into the equation and determine the outcome. James accepted science as a tool, but not as a master. Ideas were meant to be put into action. Truth must be tested by experience, and if there was any absolute — that is, final, perfect, divine truth — it was unknowable. This was all to the good, for it gave humanity scope
to strive to better itself.

The work of James and his many colleagues gave philosophical form and renewed impetus to the traditional American ideology of practical democracy. The name given to it was pragmatism. Save for a few intellectuals, Americans had always been pragmatic — that is, practical — because their problems were practical, and they had given little thought to philosophy. A wit remarked that this most recent version of pragmatism was merely a means of doing without a philosophy.

The transcendentalists had assumed that good and bad were not only distinct from each other but clearly identifiable, and this sort of thinking had for a while overridden the traditional American method of experiment and compromise and helped bring on civil war. The pragmatists took the view that it is often hard to know, just by thinking about it, whether a course of action is right or wrong.

In large part, this new formulation of America's traditional way of thinking grew out of evolutionary scientific concepts, which suggested that all ideas, morals, and laws are constantly changing, evolving from generation to generation as the product of social conditions and needs. The implication — which would have scandalized St. Augustine — was that truth is not an absolute, unchanging thing, but is relative.

The pragmatists said simply this: man's wits are not powerful enough for him to find out immutable truth by reasoning alone. The consequence is that absolutist philosophers who believe that disciplined thought can open the door to truth by following the rules of logic simply do not understand how coarse and inexact a tool man's reason is. While we must always develop ideas by the most careful use of the scientific method available to us, there is only one ultimate test of whether or not the idea is a true one: how it works in practice.

The pragmatist's only guide is firm faith in human dignity and freedom, and he examines all crises and programs with that faith in mind. Said William James, "The practical consequence [of pragmatism] is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality — is, at any rate, the outward tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant."

The pragmatist operates inductively, using his reason by testing each step as he feels his way by successive compromises and constant references to experience, to the existing social context, and to the ideal of human welfare toward which he strives. He believes that we must preserve and federate the rival sovereignties and moral values of the
individual, on the one hand, and of society, on the other, as positive aids toward a higher moral order. He espouses what he sees as a process rather than as an absolute — but if the continuance of that process is jeopardized, he will fight as fiercely as any convinced believer in the absolute.

Pragmatism does not ask how the idea fits in with hallowed and revered practices and concepts. Rather it asks three practical questions: (1) Will it work? (2) Will it be good for the individual and/or society? (3) If the effect is not completely desirable, what compromise can be drawn in order to keep as much as possible of the practical program and the ideal good?

This is a hard doctrine for those who demand certainty. Even the pragmatist is puzzled over precisely what constitutes good, and he has some real tussles with his fellows over what should be done. He always ends, however, by attacking confusion piecemeal rather than by sweeping generalizations, because our reasoning process is so limited that generalizations are almost always wrong. He settles each case on its own merits and according to its own necessities and peculiarities. This is exactly what democracy does, and when we come to examine pragmatism and democracy side by side, we find that they have the same attitudes and methods. Indeed, democracy is only the political expression of the age-old method that was now called pragmatism. They operate through compromise between extremes — through the experimental search for a practical solution. The rise of pragmatism in the 1890s marked the reassertion of the democratic spirit that had been blighted by the crisis of secession and the power of business.

The revival of pragmatic democracy quickly gave impetus to new ideas in nearly every field of American endeavor. Economics, sociology, anthropology, education, and the law were revolutionized. The Social Gospel rose to give battle to the Gospel of Wealth, and Protestants and Catholics took a new and much more effective interest in labor problems and sought to help the underprivileged to help themselves. A group of magazine writers called muckrakers showed that social and economic abuses and political corruption were almost invariably connected. Politicians and businessmen were not solely responsible for this disgraceful condition — everyone was to blame. This was a democracy, Americans were professedly a moral people, and ultimate control lay in their hands; hence if they did not have a clean society, it was because they shamefully looked the other way.

The immediate result was the political progressive movement
which did much to cleanse the temple of the money changers — though not permanently. Even the great entrepreneurs warned each other that amassing wealth without visible purpose must be stopped, or the public would stop it. The result was an outpouring of gifts to education, foundations, medical centers, libraries, and research institutions. Regardless of the motives, these gifts wrought enormous public benefit in a day when custom did not permit government to take much interest in scientific and social advancement.

The robber barons had their faults, and they loom large when viewed by a more socially conscious generation. Nevertheless, they paved the way for mass production by building a great industrial plant and a magnificent system of transportation. The finance capitalists contributed the capital, centralized organization, and the relative economic stability that would provide the continuing markets essential to the success of mass production. Mass production entered a new day with Frederick W. Taylor's introduction of scientific management. Taylor and his colleagues saw the industrial problem not only in terms of machines and efficiency but also in terms of human relations. Unfortunately, management has often refused to adopt Taylor's well-rounded recommendations but has accepted only the aspects which cut costs and raise production. This failure is in some part the measure of our failure to solve social problems.

It is not necessary to describe in detail how mass production revolutionized practically every industry and in so doing also revolutionized American life. But it may be useful to say a word about pragmatism and the corporation. No doubt the corporation was inevitable, and no doubt it was inherently oppressive in the context of the times. But it was not realized that certain tendencies within the corporation and within the mass production process were to be sparked by the restoration of democracy in the early 1900s, and were in time to create a new atmosphere for capital and labor, for producer and consumer.

A thoughtful view of mass production will show that there is far more to it than careful blueprinting and management. It is even more basically a social effort, and in a pragmatic society it must use pragmatic means and serve pragmatic ends. Now the success of a social effort depends on the cooperation of the participating individuals. It is perhaps true that machines and many aspects of scientific management could have been developed without the inspiration of democracy. Nevertheless, the ultimate secret of the American know-how lies not in machines or scientific management or even financial and corporation
organization. Basically it depends on the fostering of the spirit of freedom, cooperation, and \textit{esprit de corps} on the part of workers, engineers, management, and capital.

Not only is the corporation a social institution and its mass production a social effort, but together they offer a solution to the rivalry between producer and consumer. Now we live in an economy of mass production, in which the supply is prospectively unlimited, but demand is limited only by effective purchasing power. For the first time \textit{maximum profit can be obtained by maximum production at minimum cost} — exactly what both producer and society have always wanted.

Nevertheless, there is no indication that the economy can be self-regulating. Though the broad outline of the future seems clear, the details are not. For example, the key to successful operation has long been regarded less as the redistribution of what goods exist than as the manufacture and distribution of additional goods. But lately we have become aware that unchecked production will result in depletion of irreplaceable resources and pollution of the environment. Mass production's prophecy of an economy of plenty, of the attainment of the utopian dream, is not self-fulfilling. The City of God is in sight, but it lies across a seemingly impassable gulf.

Of course the vision of the City of God is not an American monopoly, for nearly every nation has its own version of this goal. Moreover, almost all of them have evolved from a religious view of God's unfolding purpose to some form of secularity. For example, the Russian historic idea of "world mission" was thoroughly religious and Messianic; it should, perhaps, be a warning to us as we observe how the communists not only secularized it but emptied it of its spiritual contents and filled it with materialism.

It will be noticed that we have confined ourselves pretty much to the internal history of the quest for the City of God. The fact is that nearly every phase we have examined had its extension in foreign policy. Tom Paine's concept of a refuge for freedom was an excuse for the annexation of adjacent territories in order to enlarge the "asylum for mankind." It was long supposed that even as Winthrop expected his city set on a hill to be a holy pattern for England, the mere example of the United States would automatically sow discontent among the common people of the nations. As Bancroft put it, it would "allure the world to freedom by the beauty of its example." The same idea was expressed more crudely by a yokel when he told a British
traveler, "We air a great people, and bound to be tol'able troublesome to them kings."

With the Spanish-American War we passed to the method of crusade, ostensibly to free certain oppressed peoples, and a few years later the crusade took the form of an attempt to make the world safe for democracy. All the ventures were in a sense — or at least were thought to be — manifestations of the American mission. The idea found its clearest expression in President Kennedy's inaugural address when he issued the ringing caveat:

Let the word go forth to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans ... unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of these human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world .... Let every nation know ... that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

That was in 1961, and today it sounds like a sonar echo from another world — which it is. After ten years of war in the rice paddies and forests of Indochina the United States withdrew under color of an arrangement called "peace with honor," which everyone knew was nothing more than a thinly disguised acceptance of defeat. Most Americans regarded this as something unprecedented in our history, and the result was a wave of cynicism and isolationism which may still succeed in shaping American policy. Certainly the method of crusade is now in abeyance, if not actually discarded, and the American mission has become one merely of manning the ramparts of freedom. This may be a wise policy, perhaps the only one possible, but out of the past there comes the warning voice of William Pitt: "A defensive war can only end in inevitable defeat."

Ho Chi Minh had already assessed Kennedy's ringing declaration as mere bombast; American democracy, Ho asserted, did not possess the stability or the determination to endure the long haul. Perhaps he was right — or perhaps the American retreat was only realistic. Regardless of which it was, it behooves us to reexamine ourselves prayerfully rather than to engage in vain boasts of perfection which paper over the serious evils in our history.

I would like to suggest that we are at bottom suffering from the dual malaise of democracy — the tendency to assert rights and ignore duties, and the corollary rising from this: the inability to preserve the political and social tensions between order and liberty. Throughout history advanced societies have usually lived under authoritarian regimes, and we have been smugly accustomed to view the emergence
of democracy and its support of freedom as a vast and irrevocable step forward. Democracy, as I have attempted to show, bases itself on pragmatic relativism — a readiness to accept change because truth is held to be relative to the needs of the times.

Many years ago Horace Kallen pointed out that men invented philosophy because they wanted security and certainty. The enemies of pragmatic relativism attacked it because it destroys what the masses allegedly need: assurance of a body of dependable axioms, a theology, or a moral code. Ho Chi Minh unerringly laid his finger on this human desire for an absolute and used it to strengthen his people in the thirty-year fight against France and the United States. Communists from Lenin onward have rattled their sabers or nuclear rockets to frighten the democracies, but behind all the threats they have relied basically on Ho Chi Minh's secret weapon — not so secret after all, because they have openly proclaimed that they expect us to collapse because of our inner contradictions.

Thinkers of the progressive era were quite aware of these contradictions rising from the antagonism between pragmatic relativism and the human desire for certainty, for an absolute. The trap in pragmatism is that its relativism may deteriorate into brutal expedience — not but what a moral order based on an absolute such as communism will do the same. Certainly relativism is often misused to define truth according to one's desire, thus seeming to justify expediency or selfishness. The ideal of the good of society may be subtly rationalized into the good of one's self or one's class. There is danger that not only does the end justify the means, but that the means becomes the end. We have recently seen this demonstrated in high places.

Before long, conservatives and liberals alike were entrenching themselves as champions of their latest respective absolutes, and accusing their enemies of being cynical relativists. As J. Allen Smith, the political scientist, admitted later, "The real trouble with us reformers is that we have made reform a crusade against standards. Well, we smashed them all and now neither we nor anybody else have anything left."

The result has been confusion, rising at least in large part, from relativism's emphasis on the influence of environment. Analyze the environment and you explain the boy and then the man he becomes. "Eat, drink, and be antisocial," jeered Eric Goldman, the historian, "for tomorrow the environment explains us" — presumably in a police court or in the court of heaven. Certain it is that the new generations as they
arose have been confused by the clash between old and new standards, the changes brought in perhaps by relativistic ideas, perhaps by the mere rapidity of technical changes and their effects, perhaps by both. At any rate, these were called upon to explain loose sexual standards, juvenile delinquency, cheating in examinations, and deceitful and slippery business methods. The assumption was, of course, that the past had been both staunchly based on a moral code and purer in its behavior.

This struggle between absolutes and relativism has broadened down through the twentieth century despite the astounding effects of the pragmatic movement in nearly every aspect of American life. It is notable particularly in the churches, in clashing theories of education, in interpretations of economics, in diplomatic theory and practice, and finally in the great struggle between democracy and totalitarianism.

All in all, it has become increasingly difficult to preserve the tensions without which democracy cannot survive. Today we face contradictions, complexities, and ironies perhaps more awesome than any of those which in the past confronted American searchers for the City of God. Can it be that democracy because of its very nature cannot endure a long haul because the selfish or the faint-hearted can veto a reasonable public policy — as, for example, a sound energy policy? We have come to regard the sought-after City of God too much in material and selfish terms — a realm of peace and plenty wherein men are more concerned with their rights than with their duties. Corporations, labor unions, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and civil servants do not hesitate to enforce their will by threatening to wound the society to the point of breakdown.

Our City of God has been secularized and exists, I sometimes think, without hope of heaven or fear of hell. Certainly it is subject to temporal forces, unlike St. Augustine's City of God, which was expressed in spiritual terms and could not be overthrown by worldly means. For a little while our quest for the City of God has been like a wheel rolling downhill, gathering speed and seeming to have a life of its own. But the wheel must keep its speed to maintain its balance; so when it reaches the bottom it must collapse.

It is high time for a reinterpretation of the meaning of our quest. If we go over to authoritarianism we not only abandon the search in any meaningful sense but become like our absolutist archenemies, the communists and fascists. To find that city not only of peace and plenty but of ordered freedom it is essential that we rethink our political and
social processes.

This is the task that faces the bicentennial generation. We must evolve new techniques and inculcate a new devotion to duty and to public service, and these must be confirmed in our souls and our national habits. Only thus can we learn to preserve the tensions and equilibrate the uncertainties essential to our democracy. Our method of experimental pragmatism means that politicians and people must have iron endurance, steady nerves, and a superb sense of balance as we walk the tightrope over the gulf which separates us from the City of God.