

The Invincible Liberal Mind

By JUDE DOUGHERTY

Pat Buchanan, whose syndicated column appears weekly in *The Wanderer*, is known to have said more than once: "This is not the country into which I was born." Anyone who reached maturity in the 1950s is likely to concur. The nation has changed radically since the first half of the 20th century, so much so that what the future portends is unpleasant to contemplate.

Clearly the nation is divided ideologically, perhaps irrevocably. One is forced to say "irrevocably" because the prospect of honest engagement between left and right is remote.

The liberal mind, although always a contender in the nation's political life since the country's founding, achieved ascendancy in the mid decades of the last century.

Once in control, the liberal mind has not and is not likely to voluntarily yield power or make concessions in the interest of the common good. In the public forum it resists a level playing field, where differing conceptions of the good may be debated forthrightly. Its ascendancy and supremacy depend on control of the educational system and on a one-sided, complicit press.

The liberal mind whereof we speak is characterized by its crass materialism, by its repudiation of inherited norms, by its quest for control through centralized government, by its promotion of the welfare state, by its secularity if not animosity to religion and religious education. It is the mind of the dominant anti-Christian intellectual and political elite.

We are talking about the modern liberal, not the classical liberal of times

past. Political discussion is necessarily about disparate comprehensive visions of the human good. What is thought to be good is based on one's understanding of human nature. From a materialist point of view, man is a product of an evolutionary process; nature's order is deemed a chance occurrence or the product of imagination. The result is that the recognition of a God-given natural order, piety toward the sources of our being, and the hope of eternal life are without foundation, and of course not acknowledged in the classroom.

Materialism makes a difference in the cultural order as well as in the political, in the feasts we observe, the artistic work we cultivate, the books we read, the leisure we enjoy. A materialist culture did not create the Parthenon or the great cathedrals of Europe, or give birth to a Michelangelo or a Johann Sebastian Bach.

In the historical examination of Europe's past, the Cambridge-trained.

Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm tells a different story from that of Christopher Dawson. Experience shows that liberalism produces a surrealism in the arts and revisionism in history, and fosters a kind of Hobbesian bellicosity. In the moral order it can lead, if not inexorably, to a kind of hedonism. Need we be told again, "If God is dead, everything is permitted?"

Also to be noticed, when Europeans have come into conflict with Islam, the anti-Christian elite has supported the Muslim, throughout history and in the

present. Its totalitarian propensity is lightly hidden.

From its inception, Christianity has recognized two interrelated orders, Church and State, and that man is by nature a "citizen of two cities," to use the words of St. Augustine.

Both Plato and Aristotle tell us it is impossible to advance the common good in a fragmented society. Certain goods such as security and justice can be achieved in a state only where virtue prevails in the citizenry. Since the advent of Christianity, Western morality has found its support in the wisdom of Socrates and the natural law philosophy of Aristotle and the Stoics, an outlook if not identical with biblical morality, certainly supportive of the Mosaic code and the teaching of the Gospels.

The West, symbolically at least, continues in many ways to reflect its Christian heritage. Public expressions of God's existence remain in spite of attempts to remove the Ten Commandments from the classroom and public places, and in spite of obstacles to the teaching of religion even in the private sphere. What the future portends remains to be seen.

A random thought: Plato and Aristotle flourished in the fourth century B.C. Approximately 1,800 years later they are celebrated in Raphael's painting, *The School of Athens*. Five centuries after, people still flock to Italy to view the fruit of the Italian Renaissance. Giotto's marvelous paintings in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua, and the paintings of Raphael and his contemporaries, Fra Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Bellini, Mantegna, and Ghirlandaio, though many examples of their best work are to be found in London's National Gallery of Art, if not in Washington.

Is it conceivable that in a few centuries to come some will think that the work of our celebrated avant-garde contemporaries, darlings of the left, such as Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, or Willem de Kooning, will even be noticed?