

One Nation Under God, The Virtues That Made America tells true stories of how virtue contributed to America's founding and growth as a nation.

One Nation Under God: The Virtues That Made America

By Jerry M. Roper PhD

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ONE
NATION
UNDER
GOD

THE VIRTUES
THAT MADE AMERICA

JERRY M. ROPER, PH.D.

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Chapter 1.

VIRTUE... hidden and forgotten in today's America

What happened to virtue in America is entirely explained by an incident that occurred over a century ago at a world famous health spa. To tell this story, it's best to begin at the beginning. For approximately three thousand years, Bath, England has been known for the curative powers of its thermal springs. Bladud, the king of the ancient Britons is credited with discovering the springs around 860 B.C. According to legend, King Bladud developed a most unpleasant skin condition. Fearing it was leprosy, the Britons banished their king and he became a wandering pig herder. One day when passing through the Bath region, his pigs found a warm muddy hole, wallowed in it, and slept in it overnight. The next morning, Bladud, who seemingly was meticulous about his pigs, washed the mud off. To his astonishment, their hides were smooth, and their skin as pink and healthy as that of a newborn piglet. He reasoned if it worked for pigs, it could work for him. He bathed in the mud and his skin healed. Bladud returned to the Britons, his crown was restored, and word of the healing power of the hot mineral waters at Bath spread. But, the story doesn't end here.

Eight hundred years later in 60 A.D., the Romans decided to take the hot springs to a whole new level. They built an impressive temple to Sulis Minerva, a local deity that was created by merging a Celtic god, Sulis, with the Roman god, Minerva. The temple complex included a pool filled with water from the hot mineral springs. Bath now had a proper spa! By the 5th Century, the Romans were gone from Britain, and over the ensuing centuries, the City of Bath developed. In the 12th Century, a new bath was built over the site used by the Romans,

and in fact, the new bath used the old Roman walls and columns to support the new pool's foundation. A statue of King Bladud was commissioned and placed so that it overlooked the new bath, and from the statue came the name, the King's Bath.

From the 12th to the 20th Century, the King's Bath remained in use, and over the centuries the area around it developed with several significant structures being added such as commercial buildings, apartments, and shops. These buildings followed the example of the King's Bath, and used the Roman foundations to support the new construction. Over the centuries the magnificent bath, spa, and temple complex built by the Romans disappeared beneath the growing City of Bath.

In the 18th Century, the famous Grand Pump Room, which remains in use, was built adjacent to the King's Bath. In 1873, however, a problem developed. The King's Bath sprang a leak and Major Charles Davis, the City of Bath's surveyor and architect, set about to discover its origin and fix it. His search took him deep under the pool and into the old Roman foundation. There he found corridors and adjoining rooms with ornate tile floors. He continued exploring farther and farther until he was well away from the King's Bath foundation. He was now in subbasements of nearby buildings.

In the dim torch light, he could see that he was standing in a large open space, and as he felt his way around, he discovered stone columns and handsome statuary. All of it was from the Roman period, and all of it was hidden in the subbasements of buildings. Decade by decade, as buildings came and went, got larger and more complex the original Roman bath and temple complex disappeared from view and vanished from memory. Thankfully, the Roman craftsmanship was so substantial that it endured over the centuries and supported the modern City of Bath, whose citizens were unaware of the incredible beauty,

timeless significance, and ancient value that lay beneath their feet. And, so it is with the virtues.

Virtues, and in particular Christian virtues, are the foundation of Western civilization. They are ancient. Their value and significance cannot be overstated. Virtues afford incredible beauty to the lives of all who practice them, and the society that honors, respects, and teaches virtue to each generation is a society that flourishes. But, just as the stunning Roman temple and bath lay hidden and forgotten in a subbasement, so also have America's virtues. In our rush into 21st Century modernism, we are like the medieval builders. America has overlaid our foundation of sturdy virtues with an insubstantial slab made of high sounding principles, seemingly noble but empty values, and a watery feel good Christianity where Jesus is not Lord of all, but just a good buddy. Like plastic, these modern feel good notions are flimsy and unsuitable foundational material to support a thriving civilization.

Over the decades, America's new faux and virtueless foundation has held up more or less well. However, we are now realizing that high sounding principles, empty values, and a watered down Christianity are nothing more than vapid platitudes. Lacking virtue and God, we have nothing to restrain evil and promote good. In this continuing state of moral decline, our iniquities have been piling higher and higher to the point that we are running out of sins to commit. Therefore, we have set our depraved minds to dreaming up new ways to sin, and our flimsy virtueless foundation can no longer bear the weight of such immorality. The faux foundation of our society is cracking. We have sprung a multitude of leaks, and more are on the way.

Our way out of this dilemma is to be like Major Charles Davis. We must go deep into America's subbasement. Just as Major Davis discovered the enduring beauty of the Roman temple and bath, we will discover the splendor and beauty of

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ancient and timeless virtues that have been buried and hidden beneath our feet. The virtues have not gone away. They're all still there waiting for us. Each of the following chapters highlights a virtue and tells the story of how that virtue made America. When all the virtues are explained and all the stories are told, we will be like Major Davis on that day in 1873. We will be astonished by the ancient and enduring quality and beauty of America's real foundation, and we will be equally incredulous that something of such importance could have ever been hidden, forgotten, and lost. Now, let's get going! Light your torches! We are going deep into our nation's true foundation, where we will discover the virtues that made America.

Chapter 2. HUMILITY... the soil in which virtue blooms

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”
(Matthew 5:5)

Do we, 21st Century Americans, believe this statement? Jesus said it. It’s the third “Blessed” statement in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which even non-Christians recognize as the most profound of all moral teachings. Therefore, it must be true, but do we believe it? Meek, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is synonymous with humble, modest, and timid. Related descriptive words are mousy, unassertive, and cowering. American parents never raise their children to have any of these characteristics. In fact, we train our children to grow into adults who are outgoing, assertive, and bossy, because that’s how you get ahead in this world. “Lead, follow, or get out of the way!” That’s the American way. Meekness and humility have been all but driven out of the American culture, and to what effect? What kind of earth – the land, the nation, the society – will our children inherit? Previous generations of Americans inherited this land of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln; a land with a national holiday devoted to humbly giving thanks to God; a land with “In God We Trust” stamped on its currency; a land of freedom and hope; a land that President Reagan said is “a shining city upon a hill.” This too is derived from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.* (Matthew 5:14 KJV)

Could it be that our children’s inheritance depends upon humility, and that the meek – not the proud, arrogant, and bossy – will inherit the land just as Jesus said? To answer this question, we’re going to board a ship docked in the harbor on the Isle of

Wight. The name of the ship is the *Arabella*, and the year is 1630. The *Arabella* has a timeless story to tell, because at its core is a story of humility, whose Latin root is *humus* (earth). From the men and women on this voyage, we will learn that the substance – the *humus* – of our souls is what shapes the society in which we live and bequeath to our children. But, we need to make haste. The *Arabella* is departing and we must be on it.

* * *

Aboard the *Arabella*, Isle of Wight, April 1630.

The air is crisp and clear, and on our cheeks we feel a gentle south breeze. The north winds of March are in retreat, and once the sails are hoisted, the captain says we'll quickly be on our way to America. This voyage has been organized by the Massachusetts Bay Company under the leadership of a landed gentleman and lawyer, John Winthrop. It appears well organized. The docks are crowded. As many as a thousand people – men, women (several who are noticeably with child), and children of all ages – are making this journey to the New World. There are so many of us that the *Arabella* is only one of four ships in our little fleet. Excitement is in the air, as well as fear – trans-Atlantic crossings are long and dangerous. And, there is regret and nostalgia. We're leaving our homes, farms, businesses, friends, sisters and brothers, and everything that is familiar and dear. We love our home in England, but since King Charles I took the throne five years ago our lives have grown increasingly hard. Our future here looks bleak for us Puritans.

Since the death of Charles' father, James I, in 1625, it all seems a whirlwind. James ruled with a light hand – some would say hesitant and uneasy hand. We tolerated him and he us. We desire a true reform in the Church of England and a purer church, hence the name given us, Puritans. It's been almost a century since King Henry VIII broke from Rome, and according to our

reading of the Holy Scriptures, there are far too many vestiges of Roman Catholicism lingering in the English church. We, along with our brethren Presbyterians in Scotland, believe that our souls are saved only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith in his resurrection, Christ, by His grace, forgives all of our sins. We have no need to confess our sins to a priest. We confess only to God and see ourselves as a “priesthood of all believers.” We also believe that the Sovereign Lord God Almighty has elected or predestined some men and women for salvation. We don’t know who these people are; only God knows them until their salvation is revealed. Therefore, we work for a just, merciful, and righteous society in strict accordance with the Bible’s teachings so that as the Apostle Paul said to the Athenians on Mars Hill, everyone *would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.* (Acts 17:27) These beliefs puts us at odds with “high church” clergy in the Church of England and in opposition to Catholic doctrine.

While James was on the throne, we more or less got along. James commissioned the scholars at Westminster to translate the Bible that now bears his name as the King James Bible. But, this new king is not his father! Charles, less than a year into his reign, married a French princess, Henrietta Maria of the Royal House of Bourbon. They were married – he by proxy not even bothering to show up for his own wedding! – in front of the church doors at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. When we heard this news, our hearts sank. Would this new king and his Catholic queen drag us back under the dominion of the Roman pope? When we saw how heavy-handed Charles was with Parliament, shutting it down and ordering new taxes without Parliament’s consent, we knew things would only get worse for us. John Winthrop, our leader, who was a king’s commissioner of revenue in London lost his position. Why? Because he is a Puritan. After

five years of this, the New World – New England to be specific – looks to be the Promised Land.

Plymouth Planation is now ten years old, and we will add to their numbers in order to build a godly society, where righteousness under the Lord God's law flourishes. That's why we're here on the docks boarding these ships. The captain has ordered everyone aboard and the sailors are preparing to hoist sails. As surely as God led the Children of Israel across the desert, God is leading us across the sea to America. But still our hearts are heavy. We know that we will never again see our beloved England, and only in the rare letter will we receive news from our families who remain here, but the time for lamenting these things is now passed. Behind us is England; in front of us is a new American horizon. All is in God's hands.

* * *

Around the time of the voyage, John Winthrop preached a sermon entitled "A Model of Christian Charity," which began with these words: "GOD ALMIGHTY in his most holy and wise providence, hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission."

The question that Winthrop raised is why? Why did God ordain such disparity among people's lives? It seems so unfair, capricious, and arbitrary. Winthrop gave three reasons why. First, it is the way that God ordered creation "for the preservation and good of the whole." In nature, the healthy forest has a variety of trees, and even within the same species of trees there is variety with some growing strong and tall and others languishing and small. The same is true of an ecosystem such as the ocean, and among land animals, herds such as bison and deer have individuals that are young and old, strong and weak, healthy and sick, aggressive and gentle.

Winthrop sees the same pattern in human society as well, believing it is the way God ordained all of nature. Is it fair or just? It is neither; it is simply the way things are. Second, when it comes to people, these differences are there to “manifest the work of his Spirit.” God’s Spirit is manifested when the poor are fed, law-breakers are justly punished, goodness prevails, and society is decent, moral, and orderly. These things and additional benevolences are the work of the Spirit in God’s people, who show His love by building a more perfect and righteous society. The third and final reason that Winthrop gave for the disparity among people is the most profound. It is so “that every man might have need of others, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the Bonds of brotherly affection.” In our dependence upon one another we have the opportunity to live by Christ’s command to *love one another*. (John 13:34) Winthrop saw that everyone needs to be loved and everyone needs to love.

Love one another even when some are mean and unlovable, and others good, gentle and easy to love. Love one another including the poor and weak, and not just the rich and powerful, who might advance you in some way. It is an impossibly high standard! To have any hope of achieving or even being near this standard, Winthrop believed that society must be both just and merciful. He said in his sermon that there must be a balance between justice and mercy. “There are two rules whereby we are to walk one towards another: Justice and Mercy.” To treat one another justly and mercifully, God gave us “the law of nature and the law of grace, or the moral law or the law of the gospel,” and the wisdom of Holy Scripture would be the Puritan’s guide for just and merciful living.

To Winthrop justice and mercy were not lofty theological concepts that make for a high-sounding sermon. To him, justice and mercy were concrete, practical virtues that were to be demonstrated daily in how the Puritan’s treated others in the

community, and he knew that among neighbors giving, lending, and forgiving can be particularly hard. Therefore, he gave examples of justice and mercy during times of abundance and plenty, and in times of need. If a brother is in need, he said, “If thou lovest God thou must help him.” Set within this context of giving and lending, Winthrop said that the first duty is to look after and provide for your own family, because it is within the family that dependency upon one another is first experienced and where children learn of love, duty, and personal responsibility to God and others. With their character so trained, then they will have the wisdom to know when and how to give and lend in order to best help someone. Regarding forgiveness, it should be readily offered, because Christ readily forgives us. Winthrop saw doing all these things as a “duty of mercy [being] exercised” and necessary for living into the requirements of the Golden Rule.

But, what about times of peril to the community as a whole? Should the Puritans live just and merciful lives when they are in mortal danger? Winthrop knew that danger and peril would surely come as they carved out farms and homes in the wilderness, and he also knew that disease and famine were likely, as everyone in England was familiar with the starving times in the Jamestown Colony, and the deadly attacks by Native Americans. Therefore, how were the Puritans to conduct themselves under such duress? Winthrop said, “The same as before, but with more enlargement towards others and less respect towards ourselves and own right.” In other words, forget yourselves and what you consider are your rights and your privileges. For the good of the community, you are to be more loving, more just, and more merciful than before the hard times came. He said the Puritans in New England were to live as they did in the early church, and he cited the faith of saints throughout the ages. Continuing with the church as a model for their community, Winthrop said, “Ye are the body of Christ and

members of the part. All the parts of this body being thus united... If one member suffers, all suffer with it. If one be in honor, all rejoice with it.” And, knitting this body of Christ together is love. Winthrop said, “This love among Christians is a real thing, not imaginary. This love is a divine, spiritual, nature; free, active, strong, courageous, permanent, undervaluing all things beneath its proper object and of all the graces, this make us nearer to resemble the virtues of our Heavenly Father.”

Winthrop concluded his lengthy sermon, urging them to live together in New England “in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality.” If they did these things then, “The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as in one people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways. So that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when he shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘the Lord make it like that of New England.’ For we must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill.”

It’s uncertain if Winthrop preached “A Model of Christian Charity” sermon aboard the *Arabella* during the Atlantic crossing or the evening before the Puritans boarded the ship for New England. What is known is that they arrived in Boston Harbor in June 1630. Fearing if they settled in one main community that an attack by Native Americans might wipe-out the entire colony, they spread out and established smaller communities around the harbor and along the Charles River. These settlements would become Boston, Roxbury, Cambridge, Charlestown, Medford, and others. Approximately, two hundred of the roughly one thousand died that first year succumbing primarily to disease. John Winthrop served several terms as governor of the colony,

and in the years between 1630 to 1640, thousands more Puritans would make the journey to New England.

Today, Americans are four centuries removed from Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" sermon. What are we 21st Century Americans to make of Winthrop's words? The phrase "a city upon a hill" is well known and quoted in important speeches. Before departing Boston to take the Oath of Office as President of the United States, John F. Kennedy gave a speech to Massachusetts lawmakers in the State House on January 9, 1961. As president-elect, he, like John Winthrop four hundred years earlier, was on the threshold of governing. Winthrop in his sermon articulated the principles by which the Puritans should live and be governed. What of Kennedy? By what principles should 20th Century Americans live and be governed?

In his speech, the president-elect said, "Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us – and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill – constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities." Then, like Winthrop, Kennedy quoted the Bible saying that "for those to whom much is given, much is required." (Luke 12:48) And, for those men, who are given much and govern, Kennedy asked by what criteria will history judge them, including himself? He answered saying, "Firstly, were we truly men of courage... Secondly, were we truly men of judgment... Thirdly, were we truly men of integrity... Finally, were we truly men of dedication... Courage – judgment – integrity – dedication... these are the qualities which, with God's help, this son of Massachusetts hopes will characterize our government's conduct in the four stormy years that lie ahead." The storm that lay, not just ahead, but was already upon America was the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In Kennedy's speech, we hear echoes of Puritan values. Almost thirty years later, on his way out of office, President Reagan harkened back to the Puritans

and Winthrop's sermon. Reagan referred to America as a "shining city upon a hill." Soon, after he left office, the Cold War was finally over, and the 21st Century was only a decade away.

In both the Kennedy and Reagan speeches, we see that modern politicians like the lofty idea of America as "a city upon a hill," a model for all the world, which indeed America is or perhaps sadly was. But, "a city upon a hill" was only the punch line of Winthrop's sermon. In choosing this phrase from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Winthrop was encouraging the Puritans to strive for a godly, virtuous, moral, decent, just, and merciful society. To achieve this goal, he implored the Puritans, as they established their colony in New England, to lead humble and meek lives in obedience to God's laws. If they did, God would bless them and they would inherit the land. Yet, the words humility and meekness appear infrequently in the sermon. Instead, Winthrop preached on justice, mercy, love, and forgiveness, and in his speech, President Kennedy spoke of courage, judgment, integrity, and dedication. All these are virtues, and virtues are like robust and beautiful flowers, growing in rich and verdant garden soil. The soil – in fact the only soil – in which virtue blooms is humility. All virtues are rooted in humility.

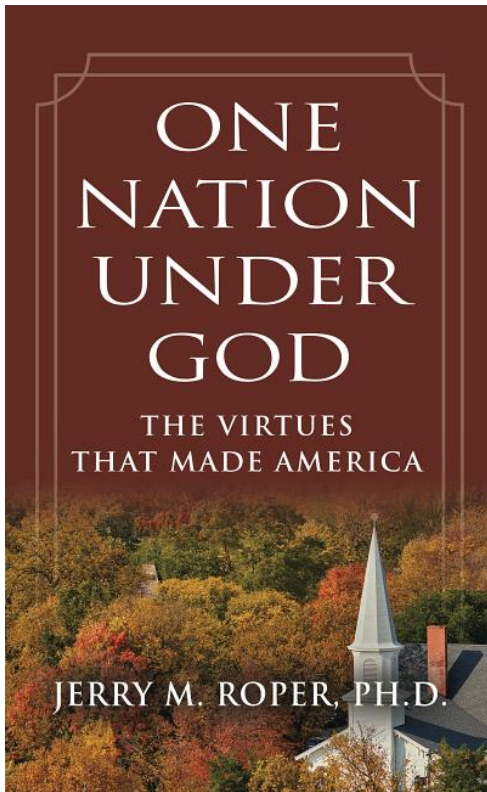
The 19th Century theologian, writer, and pastor, Andrew Murray, wrote: "The life God bestows is imparted not once for all, but each moment continuously, by the unceasing operation of his mighty power. Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil." ("Humility & Absolute Surrender," p. 6) Therefore, humility is indeed the spiritual soil, the *humus*, from which all virtue – faith, hope, love, justice, mercy, courage, perseverance,

gratitude, and more – grows. Conversely, pride is the soul’s spiritual substance from which all vice comes.

No farm crop – be it wheat or corn, soybean or cotton, lettuce or asparagus – grows in the soil unless it is the will of the farmer. So it is with either virtue or vice growing in our souls. Our will determines the crop that grows, and human will is determined by the simplest of decisions. Do we accept our dependency upon God or not? Both Winthrop in his 1630 sermon and Murray 300 years later in his book told us that dependency upon God is the starting point for humility and pride is rejection of that dependency. Inherent in Winthrop’s understanding of creation is a dependency upon God that is incumbent upon every man and woman. Flowing from this dependency upon God is a dependency upon one another, which was of vital importance for establishing cities in a wilderness. Winthrop said it was necessary “that every man might have need of others.” Andrew Murray also knew the truth about dependency upon God. In his quote above, he said, “Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is... the first duty... of the creature.” From dependency upon God comes humility from humility comes all the virtues from the virtues comes a society that is “a city upon a hill.”

Certainly today America’s cities are decaying, and slowly Americans are beginning to realize that the condition of our cities is a reflection of what is in our souls. Generation after generation of Americans have been taught to reject dependency upon God, and with God eliminated, only self remains. In our arrogance, Americans, like Adam and Eve, believe that we can be gods and gods don’t need anyone or anything. In our prideful arrogance, we have rejected the very things that made the Puritans, and by extension Americans, so remarkably successful. We have rejected God, brotherly love, and the mutual dependency that binds a nation together. Pride, not humility, is in the American soul, and without humility, none of the other virtues grow.

Meanwhile, vice flourishes. Crime, drug addiction, violence – sadly these vices and many others define America’s largest cities. For decades we have attempted to solve these problems with government programs based on the latest results from university studies. Yet, the problems not only persist, but increase. No new government program or results from the latest university research will solve any of America’s urban problems. When new things don’t work, it’s time to return to old things that did. It’s time for America to believe again Winthrop’s vision for a new society built on humility. When Americans believe that the meek are blessed and *will inherit the earth*, then, once again America “shall be a city upon a hill.”



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