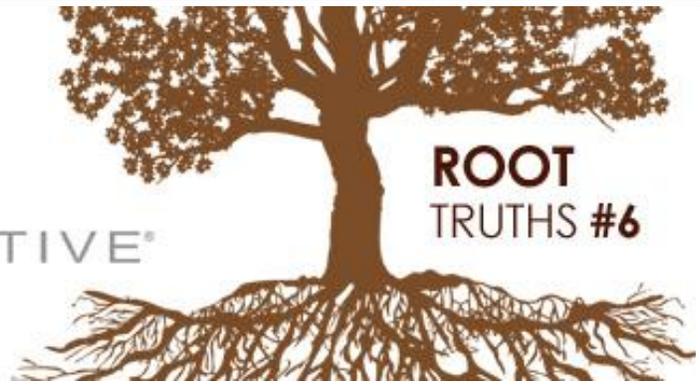




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August 7, 2013

Restoration of America: A Doctrine of Property

By Karla Perry

Jefferson penned the famous line encapsulating American freedom as the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Time has eroded the meaning Jefferson sought to employ with the words “*pursuit of happiness*.” History professes that Jefferson almost certainly borrowed the idea embodied in this phrase from George Mason’s *Virginia Declaration of Rights*, May 1776:

That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural Rights... among which are the Enjoyment of Life and Liberty, with the Means of acquiring and possessing Property, and pursuing and obtaining Happiness and Safety.



Moreover, Mason’s conceptualization of the right to property and pursuit of happiness is traced directly to John Locke’s philosophy.¹

Locke argued that the land of the earth was given in common to man through Adam. He reasoned that in order to occupy such land it would need to be cultivated by the labor of individual people. The fruit of such labor would then belong to the laborer for he will have added his own work to nature and could then claim the result as his own. Thus, the land he worked would be his to work. The produce he harvested would be his to harvest, keep, trade, give, or sell. His ownership would be directly related to that which he occupied by his labor. The role of government, then, is to protect those borders of a person’s property. A person’s pursuit of happiness is ensconced in his ability to be free to labor and steward the fruits of his labor.²

1 *George Mason Bio*. <http://www.gunstonhall.org/georgemason/>

2 Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Barnes and Noble: New York, 1690 and 2004, Chapter 5.

Locke argues: “*But because no political society can be, nor subsist, without having in itself the power to preserve the property....*”³ Here he is explaining that a political society must be able to protect the property of its members. This idea of property requires the institution of moral and physical boundaries to a person's property. To have a right to have property indelibly means that your land or personal items are yours and yours alone, and not also another person's.

The Ten Commandments were given in such a context of community where stealing could not be permitted. For something to be able to be stolen it has to belong to one person and not another. In the same way, for something to be given it has to belong to the giver to be received as a blessing by the receiver. If the labor of individuals belongs to everyone in common, no one is ever stealing and no one is ever giving, nor is anyone practicing stewardship. Labor must become forced, or the workers must work for more than themselves for society to continue.

In keeping with the 8th and 10th Commandments forbidding the stealing and coveting of property, Locke implores that:

Man being born, as has been proved, with a title to perfect freedom, and an uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of nature, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, hath by nature a power, not only to preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men; but to judge of, and punish the breaches of that law in others, as he is persuaded the offence deserve.

Here is where we have the institution of government to protect the liberty of a people joined together as a nation. A nation's government then has a moral duty to uphold the right of the people to their own property. People are then entitled to the property they own rather than the property owned by others.

One of the earliest American colonies learned the hard way that working a jointly owned land and subsequent harvest would not produce enough food for the community. The fallen nature of man created those who simply refused to do their fair share of work, and the remaining workers could not do enough to cover their slack. The harvest was insufficient to feed the community and many starved during the winter months including women and children. Everyone wanted to eat of the food produced by a few so the few suffered along with the many. Captain John Smith decided this could not continue and declared, “*the labors of thirty or forty honest and industrious men shall not be consumed to maintain an hundred and fifty idle loiterers.*” Therefore, he made the ruling declaration that if you do not work, you will not eat. He then gave each family their own plot of land to steward, solving the problem of their starvation. Now they would be responsible to labor for their own sustenance.⁴

3 Ibid., Chapter 7.

4 Montgomery, Denise. *Captain John Smith*. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
<http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/smith.cfm>



Americans take for granted this concept of property. We have created a modernized meaning to “the pursuit of happiness.” What we pursue is the benefits of another person’s labor, rather than enjoying the freedom to produce our own property. We demand happiness, rather than create it. This has become a national problem because it is first a family problem. Many parents give their children everything without any boundaries or responsibilities. They don’t want to see them suffer to work hard for something, nor do they want them to suffer with the results of not working. In an attempt to protect them from hardship, they remove the boundaries of their labor allowing it to be sucked dry by the desires of their children. They sacrifice for their children, where their children will not sacrifice for themselves.

When the reservoirs are depleted, the children look for the next well to tap into: the government. The right to pursue happiness has now trampled on the right to property because the seekers of happiness trample on the owners of property. Property is no longer sacred; it is plundered and redistributed to create happiness for those who cannot maintain it.

Many Americans have bought into entitlement—the idea that they are due a portion of the labor of others. This is not a new way of thinking. However, the strange phenomena are those who no longer see their property as their own. The boundaries as to what belongs to them and what belongs to another do not exist. Their property is neither stolen nor given, it is simply no longer personally owned, but communally consumed. There is no violation because there is no ownership. In a sense, the laborer is a slave to the consumer, and the consumer is responsible to no one. We cannot practice loving our neighbor, because there is no distinction between me and my neighbor.



Jesus said to those who have, more shall be given, but to those who do not have, even the little they have shall be taken.⁵ This is because there are those who are able to have because they understand the creation and stewardship of property. But there are those who have no such understanding. These unfortunate people cannot keep anything, for it all slips through their fingers as they consume it. Some have trouble even consuming that which they are given, for without boundaries it is lost to them before it reaches their needs.

Without a philosophy of the right to property, a society cannot maintain the economic structure necessary for a free people. Soon those who have will rule those who have not, because the difference in culture will be too staggering to reverse. A government of freedom will have to give way to a government of control to manage the people who cannot manage themselves. If a man without self-control is like a city without walls,⁶ consider what a community of people without self-control will be like. We cannot remove boundaries of property to help people. We have to help within the construct of their being responsible for themselves. As soon as we remove the boundaries, we increase the problem. Their problem becomes our problem, and instead of getting closer

5 Matthew 13:12

6 Proverbs 25:28

to solving it, we become part of their problem. The right of property is, therefore, indispensable to a free people.



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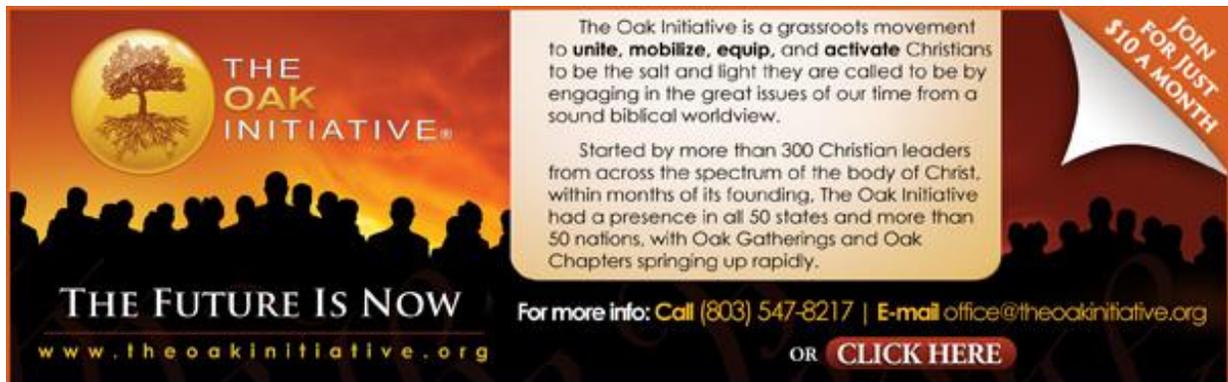
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