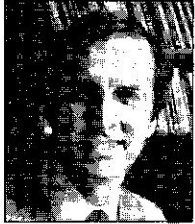


EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



"Let's take our kids downtown New York for the Statue of Liberty celebration," I said to more than one new friend here in the Northeast this past summer.

They all smiled at me (the naive Midwesterner) and replied, "You don't really want to be in the middle of that mob, do you?" Lower Manhattan, you may recall, was entirely given over to pedestrians a couple of the days.

So we stayed home and—like most of you—watched the tall ships and fireworks on TV.

As politicians and singers reveled in the symbolism of Lady Liberty, however, I remembered a long-ago comment by Bishop Fulton Sheen. He once said this country could use a second symbol on the opposite coast to balance things off: a Statue of Responsibility. Liberty and freedom are great—but they don't make a strong nation if citizens do not use their freedoms responsibly.

I got to fantasizing about a location for this second statue, something equivalent to New York Harbor. How about San Francisco Bay? Maybe they could even use Alcatraz Island. . . .

Terry Eastland, director of the Office of Public Affairs for the Attorney General in Washington, makes a fascinating speech about how this country became so keyed to things like the Statue of Liberty. Back in colonial times, he explains, there was something of a tug-of-war between what might be called "the party of virtue" and "the party of liberty" (*party* in the sense of "school of thought," not political body).

The party of virtue was led by such minds as John Adams and drew their ideas from as far back as Aristotle and the Old Testament. This group asked, "What is best for society? What will make a good and noble people?"

The party of liberty, on the other hand, was championed by Thomas Jefferson, who drew heavily upon the writings of the English philosopher John Locke (and before him, Thomas Hobbes, and before him, Machiavelli). This group's primary questions were "What are the rights of man? How can freedom and individualism best be fostered?"

Well, as we all learned in fifth grade civics, Jefferson wrote most of the Declaration of *Independence*. And by the time the Constitution was framed in 1787, it was clear that the party of liberty had won the day. What were the first 10 Amendments? We call them the Bill of *Rights*.

We Americans have been fiercely defending our "certain inalienable rights" ever since. That's what Liberty Weekend was all about. Of course we've had a reservoir of goodness and godliness to carry us along; most people have tried to exercise their freedoms with an eye toward morality as well as hard work.

But that reservoir, says Eastland, has been seeping away over the last 200 years. Meanwhile, the concern for freedom and individual rights stays strong. When a court today considers a case about homosexuality or pornography or abortion or student-led prayer in schools, the

discussion is not about whether these things would be *good* for society. The only issue on the table is "What are my *rights*, and are they being fully observed?" A concern for public virtue seems out of bounds.

Here, in my judgment, is the Achilles' heel of this Land of the Free. Our obsession with not letting anybody tell us what to do or infringe on our individualism can blind us to the need for personal sacrifice and responsibility. That spells a society in jeopardy.

Paul had it right when he advised the Galatians: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (5:13).

In this issue of *Christian Herald*, we talk about modern television—as "free" a scene as you'll find. Where is virtue? Where is responsibility to the viewer's good? The articles by Edward McNulty and Will Norton Jr. give two Christian approaches.

We also raise the touchy subject of teen sexuality and show a Christian teacher who helps her students deal with their perilous liberties.

We introduce a new standing column, "Film Facts," to help readers make responsible decisions about their entertainment.

No, we haven't started a fund to erect Sheen's statue yet. But if we raise the standard of virtue in our own lives and homes and communities, that will do an equal amount of good.

Dean Merrill