

MAKING NEW ATHENS OUT OF OLD TOWNS

Dr. Edward L. Henry, President
Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana
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For the past twenty years one major subject of conversation in the nation has been how to save the big cities. Until recently, not much was said about "small cities." I want to address myself to that topic this evening.

I had the pleasure of working in the public sector for fourteen years. During my second campaign for mayor, while making the rounds, I met some very interesting people. I stopped at one house, knocked on the door, and building up my courage, I simply said, "I am Ed Henry and I am running for mayor. I'd like your support." He immediately said, "You have it! I would do anything to get rid of the guy we have in there now." I went on down the line and knocked on another door. This time a housewife came to the door. I decided to rephrase my words so as to avoid embarrassment. I told her that I was the mayor and asked for her support in my re-election. When I told her that, she said, "Mayor, you are not a bad guy, but I have really already committed myself to one of your opponents." I said, "Well, that's fine. You have to get on somebody's bandwagon. Which one is it?" She paused, and somewhat embarrassed asked; "Who is it again, Mayor, that is running against you???"

So what is a small town? We have a definition from Max Lerner in his book America as a Civilization and he made this memorable observation. He said, "A small town ceases to be one when someone who has lived there all his life walks down the street and sees unfamiliar faces, but is not moved to find out who they are or how they got there." Now I don't know whether that applies to North Manchester or not. I suppose that suggests what a small town is not, but there is an old story that Max Lerner says suggests what a small town really is. "It seems there was a merchant in such a town who ordered some merchandise from a traveling salesman. When the merchandise arrived, the merchant felt he had been gypped. So he sent the goods back to the wholesaler. But the wholesaler insisted on payment for the goods and drew a draft against the merchant at the local bank. When the bank refused to honor the draft, the wholesaler wrote the postmaster of that little town asking if the merchant's financial standing was sound. Informed that it was, the wholesaler sent the account to the town's leading lawyer for collection. If the wholesaler did not know what a small town really was, the lawyer's reply should have straightened him out. The reply went something like this: 'As your lawyer I should tell you I am the merchant you tried to cheat. I am also the President of our local bank. As for the postmaster, I'm him. Now if I didn't happen to be the minister of our local church, I'd tell you where to go!'"

Actually, small cities are on their way back. Those of us who are a little older can remember the hard times small cities began experiencing after 1940. Agriculture became so efficient that a single farm family could farm larger and larger pieces of land and a good part of the populace that was important to the small towns began to disappear. And with the economic base of the small town disappearing, many small towns disappeared, too. People don't even remember where all these towns were. They were abandoned and ended up with a creamery and a general store, but not much else besides.

But I think they are on their way back because every poll shows people are getting tired of living in large complexes. After World War II, what had been central cities began experiencing a drift of population out to the suburbs. The last census showed that about 70% of our country's population live in the metropolitan area but for the first time the suburbs outnumber the central city population size. And now I think there is a move from the suburbs to the smaller cities in the hinterlands. With the food shortage, farming is on its way back. There is a good deal of decentralization of industry taking place throughout the country and people in an affluent society are beginning to think more of where they want to live than how they want to make their living. With good highways, they can live in or around the small towns. I noticed many relatively small density towns all the way around North Manchester as I came in this evening; and that is typical.

A recent study took a look at 4,300 small towns that ranged in population from 2,500 to 10,000. It established that in the last decade 28% of them lost population but 72% of them gained population. The typical town in America is not a New York, Chicago, or Philadelphia. It's a North Manchester or Wabash. There are 18,000 dotting the landscape of America. I think their potential is not being realized. Some of you may remember from history or political science courses a Frenchman who came over here in the 1830's to take a look at America. Then he went back and wrote a book about us called Democracy in America. He was Alexis DeTocqueville. It is one of the most insightful commentaries on the American political system and way of life that we have. Perhaps the only one who would come close to him would be James Bryce who wrote The American Commonwealth. He was a former British ambassador to the United States around the turn of the century.

DeTocqueville had most of his experience along the East Coast. Speaking of the New England towns, he said: "These are wonderful courts of local government. In America, power in the towns has been disseminated with admirable skill for the purpose of interesting the greatest number of people for the common good." Here he is saying we have New England towns where there is a distribution of power; where all the people are interested in their community; and they all participate. He thought this was a great thing because he was used to the bureaucracy of France and centralization.

I think we began to experience an erosion of that admirable condition as the 19th century wore on and we became caught up in this whole mad race for material possessions. I think this was quite natural because we were a pioneer nation, we were opening the West, and acquisition became one of the major pursuits of men. We began to lose some of those humanistic qualities of communal life that existed in those New England towns of DeTocqueville's time.

We in this country have tended to couple "progress" with "growth", and "quality of life" with material enrichment. Now that is one definition of quality of life, and that is the one America has seized upon for the greater part of our existence. It is also causing our problems today because pre-occupation with affluence has obscured our social ideals of how can we live a good life in humanistic terms. I can well remember an Austrian economist whom I don't think is living anymore named Goetz Briefs. I remember him discussing the nature of labor unions in the United States, and their failure to become something more than a business corporation with bread and butter

ideals rather than broadly social ones such as better housing and concern with good government. In analyzing the history of the labor movement he said that the socialism of American labor went aground on rocks of roast beef and apple pie. What he meant was that American labor unions became materialistic and gave up their more idealistic goals. I think the same thing may be true for many Americans and for many communities because we have become preoccupied with the Gross National Product. It has become an obsession with us. It has only been in the last four or five years that social scientists have begun to point out that a continuously growing Gross National Product is not an unmixed blessing. As John Gardner said, "We are getting richer and richer and filthier and filthier until we are approaching a point of affluent misery."

The advent of a rising Gross National Product to the fabulous height of a trillion dollars brings a point to mind. When I began teaching twenty-five years ago, one of my colleagues, a recently arrived Spaniard, and I got into an argument because he said there was no such thing as a trillion. Economists tell us that two years ago, we reached the trillion dollar level in terms of the Gross National Product. But the GNP as we have looked at it up to this point really tells us very little of the quality of the GNP nor how GNP reflects our moral responsibility nor our fulfillment as human beings. And it says very little about the difference between fulfilling our superficial wants generated by slick advertising, and satisfying genuine needs springing out of the human condition. Nor does the GNP tell us how successfully we are taking care of the community needs or needs that accompany private production such as air and water pollution.

In the final analysis, I think a truly great society, if that is what we are concerned with, will provide more than a high Gross National Product, important as that may be. If we want to quote the late President Johnson in defining the great society, he said that "the great society is the place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands for commerce, but also the desires for beauty and the hunger for community." I think quite often there is something wrong in our private and public hierarchy of values when we become accustomed to accepting private frills and ignoring public necessities. We are used to satisfying our personal wants and overlooking community needs. I think this is a cultural fixation not peculiar to America perhaps, but certainly peculiar to most of the industrialized nations. There have been societies such as those of the ancient Greeks who in their cities put a very high value on civic needs and community action.

So, in a sense, we have depended on continuous growth to overcome most problems, but it's not an answer to all problems. In fact, it is beginning to appear that continuous growth is not a viable option for us. Maybe we have come to the end of undisciplined growth; and it has been undisciplined because while we total up in dollar terms all of our output in goods and services every year (called GNP), we do not subtract from that the cost of producing that GNP; and one of those costs we are finding today is a very serious one---pollution. It goes hand in hand with rising production. And, of course, only in the past twelve months has 99.9% of our public become aware that our production has been outgrowing our energy sources. And that of course forms the basis for this very interesting project you have going here in North Manchester this year.

In the Bible, Genesis 1:26, we read that God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, and over the cattle and over

all the earth. Most of you recognize that passage, for if you haven't read it, you have heard it. I think failure to handle that dominion which has been handed over to man, failure to exercise it with wisdom and foresight, could ultimately bring us face to face with the specter of an environment inimical to health, happiness, and even the survival of man. The dominion which God gave to man is not the sole property of those who are living today. It is necessary for those who follow in the generations to come also to have the same opportunity to wisely operate that dominion. And this dominion is going to require a self-discipline and new social mechanisms to assure that cooperation and not oppression accomplishes this goal. In this connection, there is a prime need to create citizens that are responsible; communities which create citizens that are responsible; communities which have shaken off the obsolescence that ultimately can make your city a social institution that does not renew itself periodically. *The way to protect the environment is not to remember just but to strengthen it*

Those of you who are familiar with some of the Greek literature such as the classic work of Plato for instance, know that the whole theme of The Republic is "how can we so shape society so as to bring out the best that is in man?" Right there we are talking about a moral goal---how to improve human beings. That is what Plato was interested in.

I think there are two dimensions to this problem of creating a better community in North Manchester. I am sure it is something that students of Manchester College will be interested in no matter where they go. Anybody studying liberal arts today has got to be interested in the question of "how do we produce better human beings?"

There are more dimensions, but very briefly I want to talk about the "quality" dimension and the "spatial" dimension in creating better communities. The very word "city" for those of you who have had a little Latin, is a derivation from "civis" from which also "civilization" is a derivative. I think civilization is "the will to live in common before all else." A man is uncivilized and barbarian in a situation where he does not take another into account. The whole purpose and meaning of morality is how to take others into account. Man who does that is truly a civilized man and not a barbarian. Barbarians ignore others.

A city: look at its nature; why is it here? Why are we living in it? Why was a city created as a social form by man? Aristotle studies about 127 cities around the Mediterranean Ocean about 300 years before Christ, and was one of the all time great urbanologists. He would take his students as an interdisciplinary team and go into the cities to do a complete interdisciplinary study including sociological, economical, historical, and constitutional. They would then go back to the gymnasium of the school in Athens and talk about the empirical observations that the team had made. We have only one of those studies of the 120 left, The Constitution of Athens. It is very interesting to see how the urbanologists looked at cities 300 years before Christ.

In answering the question, "Why do we have cities?", Aristotle concluded from his studies that "Men came together in cities in order to survive, but they stayed on in cities to lead the good life." In other words, cities do something for man---something more than enabling them to survive to continue existing as a special kind of animal. That's where we got the word "city"--

people's civilization. And cities are more than a glorified ant hill. Cities are designed by nature to humanize and socialize. "No man is an island," says Thomas Menton, and the Greeks and a lot of social scientists since they are saying the same thing when they say man is a social animal. He really cannot develop his whole potential as a Robinson Crusoe. It is the immediate environment of man that helps socialize and humanize him. The Greeks realized this when they coined the word "koinonia". The word means basically "friendship". The Greeks operated under the philosophy that you could not run a good community unless you knew many of the people in it so you could recognize the good traits of people and chose your leaders. And they coined that phrase as a kind of community fraternity that enables man to exchange ideas, socialize and help one another. In talking about the ideal size of the city, some of the early Greek writers like Aristotle said a city really should not have more people in it than can be addressed by an orator in the town square. So that set the premise. If you could reach them out there, your city was not too large; but when it got too big for you to communicate directly with them, it was. You could not then develop a sense of "koinonia" and the city would start losing something.

The Athenians were very much aware of the inter-relationship between society and community and the development of individuals because they used to brag that other cities might turn out better products than they do, but Athens turns out better men and that is the important thing. Plato, in The Republic, said that cities grow not from stone to stone (the physical dimension) but from the character of the men who predominate. Now if what the Greeks observed is true, or has a grain of truth to it, that is, that you must have a knowledge of the people in your community in order to create the proper environment for human growth; then small cities like North Manchester do have this potential. I rather imagine that you could almost pile all 5,000 citizens of your community into someplace in this town and address them, and could be heard. Furthermore, Manchester is blessed with a fine college, one of your great assets, to feed the cultural component. It has also a reservoir of skilled manpower and cultivated individuals who can contribute to the city as well as receive from the city. The greatest concentration of skilled manpower which you can find in the world is sitting on the college campuses. You have a whole campus of specialists in almost any subject you could talk about. One of the main problems is how to plug that great reservoir of skilled manpower in to solve the community's problems. That is something that Manchester College is trying to do here with this project, and the college has tried to do here before.

If we start thinking of our cities in something more than purely commercial terms, then maybe some of the things that cities like North Manchester ought to be doing, given its nature in the role of developing human beings, will look more feasible and more desirable. Maybe that means passing a motion to have a civic auditorium or something of that nature.

Let me get to the second dimension of a better community---that of the spatial one. Almost every government in the United States today is obsolete. That sounds like a rather radical statement to begin with, but those of you who have worked in government, taught government, or studied government probably would recognize a lot of truth in it. Why do I say it? A city is a

social institution and social institutions are a creation of man designed to meet a time-place problem. The pioneers that originally settled around North Manchester ventured into certain kinds of services, and they figured that putting them together in the same spot made sense. Mutual commercial interaction that would be supportive of each other was their purpose. They had to develop some sort of structure which would keep order, so city hall was developed. There you had North Manchester---a social creation. But all social institutions are time-place conditioned. They are set up to meet a particular problem. Even cities were built physically to meet certain kinds of problems and many of them have not recognized new kinds of problems and haven't reconstructed themselves in terms of the nature of new problems. A social institution then is the solution to a problem. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, the nature of the problem changes, but we don't always change the solution. The social institution remains frozen or static. That is true of everything including governmental forms. You could make a very good case that Federalism, when it was founded in 1787, was a very viable form. It was a compromise. The colonies needed some kind of common bond, but yet they didn't want to give up their independence. Federalism was a way to do just that. It was a way of concentrating certain powers within a central government, while allowing some power to remain within the individual states. A lot of the reasons for that form have disappeared; and there are those authorities, even some politicians, who maintain that the Federal system has become outmoded, and today instead of solving problems as it once did, has become an impediment to solving problems. For instance, just think of the problem of pollution control. A big plant on the boundry of one state spewing pollution over the state line, but the state being affected not having the power to do anything about it because it has no jurisdiction. There are many other examples that could be mentioned.

So today, we are talking increasingly of groups of states like the Upper Great Lakes Region which includes parts of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin which can take a joint approach to problems that no one can solve individually. There is an obsolescence that has occurred in cities, too. The traditional boundry lines, for instance, that applied in 1940 pretty well defined the "community" of North Manchester, but do not define the community anymore because it has spilled over the city lines. You have all this suburban sprawl lying around the perimeter of North Manchester. And the community can no longer be termed North Manchester, the "community" of North Manchester which includes the city of North Manchester. That is the real community. Yet when the city legislates, it can legislate only for that part of the community that lies within that artificial boundry-line that somebody set up a hundred or more years ago, and did at that time define the total community. We now have to think in broader terms and maybe define the North Manchester community as those who live, work, and play together. That would be a better way to define the people that belong to this community, and would include some of the farm folk who live around the city. What I am trying to say here is that among other changes that cities have to make to create good places to live is a redefinition of the word "community", so that we don't think anymore of the farmer versus the city slicker or the suburbanite versus the inter-city person but all of us together working for the common cause.

Let us say that when you do have a good city, it is not just because it happens, but represents a matter of will. Somebody wanted to make it good! The good communities make good people as Plato tried to point out in his Republic. It appears that North Manchester is trying to shape society to

bring out the best in man through its school system, its churches, and its cultural activities of various kinds on the college campus. That's making good people. It's humanizing people. It's widening the gap between man and the rest of the animal kingdom, and that ought to be a goal for all human beings. Put as much distance between you and the animal world because the animal part of you is not what makes you distinctive.

Good communities make good people and good people make good communities. I want to repeat what I quoted from Plato some minutes ago. Namely that "cities are not built from stone to stone, but from the character of the men who predominate in that community." What kind of a regime do you have? Who are the leaders and what are their ideals? Are they carrying social responsibilities? What are their visions? They help shape communities. By looking at the ruling power structure, if you want to do an empirical study, and analyzing a couple dozen people in the community, you might pretty well draw a conclusion without looking at the city what kind of city you are going to have. Because the regime shapes the community; they are the leadership and their ideals shape the community in which they live.

What connection is there between the ideal city I have tried to build for you tonight and energy and pollution which is the concrete problem you are wrestling with over a six week period? First of all, this study might solve the practical problem of how you are going to distribute a scarce commodity. This project, at the very least, represents a chance to get the people of North Manchester dialoguing together and working together. It is an opportunity to develop "koinonia", which Aristotle says you have to have if you are going to have a good community: I think it is an opportunity to inspire people towards new goals, and it is an incentive to plan your community. Talking about who's going to get energy is a plan, and that plan could well convince people that we ought to be planning in other areas. I think it is an occasion to practice selflessness and cooperation. Many things can happen! A community is not wasting its time trying to build new camelots. We always have to do that. If communities improve it is because some men let themselves dream and exercise vision. This project is a start toward unleashing some of that vision. I would hope that North Manchester and most of the small cities of the country (which I think have the best chance of all cities to produce a good community simply because their problems are still manageable in contrast to the problem cities like New York and Milwaukee) will exercise control and communicate with the citizenry to raise their vision to the better things in life. I would hope that most of the citizens here sometime would feel spiritually inclined to repeat in spirit what was the oath of every public office holder in Athens. "I will strive unceasingly to quicken the sense of public duty and hand down this City, North Manchester, greater, better and more beautiful than it was given to me." Idealistic perhaps, but I think it is the idealists and the dreamers who will produce the better communities in this country.