



“A Great Awakening” – Sermon by Eric Liu

Civic Saturday – April 8, 2017

Town Hall – Seattle, WA

Welcome. It’s great and very fitting that we are gathering today in a space that was once a Christian Science church and is now a civic temple at the heart of our city’s life.

This is one Saturday when I am glad that our little civic analogue to church doesn’t start at too early an hour. I’ve just spent a week with Jena in the other Washington and in New York, speaking to all kinds of audiences and organizations about my new book, *You’re More Powerful Than You Think*, which is a citizen’s guide to exercising power.

The trip was fantastic, and I’ll tell you today about some of the things I learned. But I was running hard every hour of every day and I didn’t sleep much. So now my body clock is a bit off. I’ve been hovering in that space where wakefulness and sleep are commingled, where the line between a dream and a memory becomes blurred.

From that interstitial state of mind emerges the question I’d like to ponder today: *What’s the difference between a promise you’ve never kept and a lie?* At what point does a failure to deliver become not just an omission or a condition of regrettable tardiness but an act, an act of malicious deceit?

That, my friends, is the American question.

The American promise, is what Thomas Jefferson wrote and others extended, clause by clause. It is our creedal pledge of equality under law, of liberty and justice for all, of government by and of and for the people. It’s a creed we haven’t yet lived up to.

More than that, it is a dream. It is a dream in the sense of an aspiration, for economic security and material comfort. It is a dream too in the sense of Martin Luther King’s vision of racial integration and equal opportunity for all.

A dream exists both above and below “real” life – above, in that experiences of time and space are intensified and heightened by our unleashed imaginations; below, in that every dream trawls through the murky waters of animal instinct and sense-memory.

The American Dream is just like that. It's a great feat of imagination – and a stirring of our basest nature. We're not sure if it's real, yet we can't seem to shake it. Today I want to talk about three states of being in the American body politic and spirit politic: the states of sleeping, dreaming, and awakening.

SLEEPING

On our last night in New York, Jena and I went to Studio 54 in Manhattan. It's no longer the disco of hedonistic 70s lore – which is too bad, because you should see us on the dance floor (especially her) – but it's now a gorgeous, intimate Broadway theater. There we saw a celebrated and new play by Lynn Nottage called *Sweat*.

Sweat is set in Reading, Pennsylvania between 2000 and 2008. It chronicles a group of friends who've worked all their lives at the town's steel tubing plant, as they reckon with the slow-motion decimation of their factory and their community. Things get complicated when one of the friends, who's black, gets promoted off the line and into management. Things get even more complicated when upper management starts squeezing the workers and locking them out until they agree to a 60 percent pay cut. Jobs and machines go to Mexico. A Colombian American bartender crosses the picket line.

Disaster ensues – not the acts of God that Rebecca Solnit described, in our first reading, as generating surges of fellow-feeling and collective action; but rather the acts of capitalists that yield only tragic isolation.

Nottage, who wrote *Sweat* before the election, has said her subject was the human cost of "America's de-industrial revolution." Donald Trump, more bluntly, has called it "American carnage," and he vacuumed up votes from the real Reading in November.

But Lynn Nottage is no Donald Trump. She is an African American woman, she is a genius not of the self-proclaimed kind but of the MacArthur Fellowship kind, and she listens to other humans. She spent two years living in Reading, listening to the women and men, black and white and Hispanic, of every generation, who grew up believing in the certainty of their work and their sweat and their pride and their dignity – even as evidence mounted all around them that all would be outsourced and shipped away.

Out of that listening came this play. From the first moments, it gave me the kind of lump in the throat that precedes a deep and long-deferred cry. At various moments, often unexpected ones, I did cry. And in the final scene, many tears were flowing.

I'm not going to give away the plot points that pressed these tears out. But the particulars aren't important. What made me cry was the grinding inexorable tragedy of these characters who had believed in a promise that became a lie.

At each scene break, images from national news are projected onto the sets, without commentary or explicit connection to the plot – images of President Clinton and President George W. Bush, images of the stock market booming and then collapsing, Wall Street bailouts being announced. Barack Obama is never mentioned, and what made me cry was the unsaid truth that we learned between 2009 and today: that it wouldn't matter. "Hope and Change" didn't happen in the Rust Belt. W's slogan was "compassionate conservatism." Bill Clinton's slogan in '92 was "Putting People First."

The truth was that no matter who was president, these people were getting screwed. Global capital was gutting local labor. There was no compassion to it. What made me cry that night was feeling the sheer distance – the awful silent chasm – between the elites who've rigged the game during my lifetime and the people who've paid the price.

And what haunted me was how long I'd been *asleep* while this was happening in America – the complicity in my slumber.

Let me back up a step. Two weeks ago, we at Citizen University held our annual national conference. The theme was "Reckoning and Repair" in a polarized and severely unequal America, and we had speakers and teachers from many domains there to share ideas and lessons from history and politics.

But I was struck by how much the learning and teaching at the conference was either above or below politics. Above, in that it was on a spiritual plane, about values and moral aspiration; below, in that it was about the forgotten fundamentals of respect and human presence – how to see each other and feel each other and recognize each other, deeply – fundamentals that we've neglected in American civic life. Speaker after speaker returned to this theme of *re-presenting* ourselves face-to-face.

I recently learned about a theater company called 600 Highwaymen, who stage beautifully immersive performances in which lines between audience and performer are smudged by invitations to touch, to sense, to feel the faces and see the eyes and bear the weight and the spirit of the people all around you. That's what we all need now.

So when I was watching *Sweat*, I was highly attuned to those moments onstage, heartbreaking endowed moments, when characters would hold or touch or see one another. To provide small mercies and fleeting comforts that would still not be enough to compensate for the stripping away of dignity, of place and purpose. There's a refrain throughout the play, many variations of "They don't even see you."

And later, "I'm gonna make 'em see me."

This is why people have been flocking to see *Sweat* the same way they're flocking to read J.D. Vance's Appalachian memoir *Hillbilly Elegy*: to figure out how it happened. To empathize with the folks whose suffering and bottled-up rage and shame begat Trump.

Empathizing with the pain of another is good, of course. But empathy can be dangerous if it masks the underlying imbalances of power that create the pain in the first place. The prime task in the United States today is not for the privileged to witness the suffering of others. The prime task is to ask how this suffering came to be – to understand how power was monopolized by a few to betray and diminish so many people into invisibility. And then for all of us, together, to change the story. Even if it costs us something.

The whole time I was watching *Sweat*, because I am a teacher of civic power, I was asking myself what else these Reading steelworkers could have done. How else could they have organized against the financiers and the company owners? Could they have mobilized allies from other states, to expand the arena? Could they have pressed the media to publicize NAFTA's effects earlier? Why didn't they band together in the face of economic disaster to revive civic clubs and associations and generate power? Could they have put out a call for people who seemingly had nothing to do with their sector and their lives, to come to Reading and stand with them? People, for instance, like me?

Then I had to ask: What else could *I* have done while the American Dream was evaporating for so many Americans? Why did it take me so long to wake up and see my fellow citizens?

DREAMING

Maybe it's because I was dreaming too hard.

Often people look at my life and early career – son of Chinese immigrants, product of public schools in tiny Wappingers Falls, New York, goes off to Yale and becomes a White House speechwriter – as an embodiment of the American Dream. I tell the story that way myself sometimes.

But today I think that when I was a young man, lost in my dreams, I was rather blind.

Let me tell you about the first set of speeches I wrote for President Clinton. It was 1993, and we were planning a trip to Moscow. This would be the first time an American president had visited Russia since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the implosion of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War.

A few weeks before the trip, a fellow speechwriter and I sat down in the Oval Office with the president, to take notes as he riffed on the kinds of themes and topics he would want to address on this historic trip. I figured he would go to policy issues. I was wrong. He spent the whole time musing aloud about psychology and national character.

Russia, he said, was a great nation. More, it was a great civilization. And though we in the U.S. might celebrate the end of communism and the beginning of democracy there, and though we might frame this as a narrative of progress, we had to be careful. We had to be careful, he said, to attend to the wounded pride of the Russian people, who, after all, were now in a shaky economic situation and at the mercy of their former enemies. Though the average Russian might be relieved to be rid of a militaristic totalitarian government, much of that relief was canceled out by the anxiety and even shame of having lost superpower status.

So the key, the president told us, was to help the Russian people channel their yearning for greatness and pride in a healthy and constructive direction. To tell them that meeting the challenges of creating a free-market liberal democracy would be a new chance to prove in a new way the enduring greatness and resilience of this nation.

I thought this was so astute at the time. It was certainly vintage Clinton, applying X-ray insight into the human psyche, and at the international scale rather than only the interpersonal. I followed the president's direction closely, layering his speeches with soulful references to the poetry and literature and music and spirit of Mother Russia. He made people feel good on that trip. He felt their pain.

Of course, we know how things turned out. Clinton's counterpart, Boris Yeltsin, had been courageous in the days of liberation but turned out to be an undisciplined leader whose cronies strip-mined the state for personal enrichment and fueled corruption, chaos, and kleptocracy everywhere. Out of that disorder, and out of the nostalgia for Soviet-era certainty, emerged the canny KGB operative who rules Russia today – who took personal control of the kleptocracy – and who later would help elect an *American* president who exploited *American* fears of lost greatness.

As that president might say: Sad.

But it truly is sad, because while President Clinton seemed psychologically astute and the rhetoric I wrote for him sounded the right notes, we – and I mean now the United States – did not in fact show the Russian people *respect*. Puffing them up about their greatness and then ignoring them was not the same as actual respect. Telling them that they could now have a junior version of the American Dream of free markets and free elections was not the same as respect. (Especially when it didn't happen). A century after the Russian Revolution, that sickly nation is great mainly in its capacity to do harm.

And what's doubly sad is that we – President Clinton and his team – did not apply the same sensitivity to lost greatness and wounded pride to the swaths of our own country that were being de-industrialized by his Wall Street-friendly policies.

So: what could I have done? I had no hand in NAFTA or the Glass-Steagall repeal or the deregulation of commodities markets – policies that forcefully tilted our economy

away from labor and toward capital. It wasn't my job. It was above my pay grade. And anyway, the economy was booming by the late 90s, the dot-com bubble was rising. While I didn't quite buy the notion that textile and steel workers who'd lost their jobs to Vietnam and Mexico could suddenly thrive selling stuff on eBay, it seemed at the time that things would work out for everyone.

But I was dreaming. Even after I left the White House, I didn't question the orthodoxies of unchecked free trade. I didn't *defend* the orthodoxies either. I just didn't pay attention. When the costs of free trade became clearer, I didn't think of it as my problem.

It was. When I think about what's happened in this country economically over my lifetime I think *I* was part of the problem, mainly because I was not a part of the solution. I could have been, had I been as awake as I am today. I should have been. It *was* my job, whatever my professional title. Because I was a citizen of the United States who had the social capital and the *connections* to speak and to be heard.

You can call me a product of the American Dream but in fact I am a product of the American meritocracy, which is not the same thing and in fact is often its enemy. The meritocracy of test-taking and selective colleges that made talented outsiders like Bill Clinton from Hope, Arkansas a Rhodes Scholar and a U.S. president, is about "merit" only in a narrow SAT sense and even then only at the front end, just to get in the door.

A friend of mine named Rocky told me once about his dad, who grew up in Appalachia but got out, got educated, and became a college professor – but never lost the aggrieved and mistrustful mindset of his Appalachian roots. As Rocky, the son of a professor, inherited the advantages that propelled him to a very selective Eastern college which then opened doors for a successful career, his dad always gave off an unspoken vibe that, as Rocky puts it, "connections are cheating."

If getting into the American meritocracy is mainly about a numerical score on a test, the preparation for which is itself influenced by inherited advantages, staying in is much more about who you know. This is the dirty little secret of the so-called meritocracy. And once you're in, you are of course motivated to believe that you get access to awesome opportunities because you *deserve* it.

The corollary to that, of course, is that anyone who doesn't have access to awesome opportunities *doesn't* deserve it. "Mistakes were made but not by me."

This self-justifying myth of a deserving elite and an undeserving everyone else has fed inequality in the United States and helped people at the top rationalize why they should ignore it. It isn't necessarily surprising that the powerful have a strong instinct for self-justification. They need to defend their privilege, which is bound up with their identity, and they do so in ways both conscious and unconscious.

What *is* surprising is how often the powerless join them in defending it.

Psychologists call it “system justification theory,” and it posits that people without power tend to blame themselves for their weak situation; worse, they often actively defend the system that renders them powerless. Why? Because it sometimes can be more bearable to make excuses for the system and its inequities than to admit the possibility that you are truly without agency. The latter is a greater threat to your dignity.

Underlying all these dynamics is the presence of cognitive dissonance—the tension between the image we want to have of ourselves and our actual circumstances. Humans always resolve cognitive dissonance in ways that reduce pain. That means explaining away—rationalizing—the embarrassment of being at the bottom. It means buying into legitimizing myths, the cultural narratives and ideologies that explain why the haves have and the have-nots have not.

In the words of one study, by Rob Willer of Stanford University and several other scholars, “The more participants reported feeling powerless, the more they believed that economic inequality was fair and legitimate.”

Until now. What has made a moment like ours so tumultuous and exciting and dangerous is that meritocratic trickle-down legitimizing myths have lost their grip. People without power—or who feel in relative terms that they’ve lost power—have decided to reject elite rationalizations of the status quo. Trump supporters and Sanders supporters may not have shared a political style or a moral palette, but they did share in spades this readiness to “burn it all down.”

People will tell themselves a self-blaming story as long as they possibly can if it helps keep cognitive dissonance at bay. And in America that is a very long time, because our hyper-individualistic culture blinds us to forces beyond the control of, well, an individual. But when enough evidence accumulates that the game is truly crony-rigged, and that merit and effort have little to do with ascent, that justice is not blind but instead winks at the powerful, there comes a forceful snap-back to reality. Literally, a dis-illusionment.

The pain of such disillusionment can be converted to action and reform—as during the American Revolution or the civil rights movement—or it can lead to an utterly paralyzing cynicism. We are in a world of such pain today. The key variable now is whether citizens will wake up and remember how to claim power.

AWAKENING

What does it mean to be awakened?

Some activists I know have come to resent the way white Establishment liberals are bending over backwards these days to empathize with white Trump voters. When

whites face a drug epidemic, they note, there are calls for compassion and treatment instead of mass incarceration and military-grade policing. When angry white voters elect a man who gives courage and cover to bigotry and hate, we are asked to understand the pain and fear that motivated *them* instead of the pain and fear they are now generating among nonwhite *others*.

It's a valid point. In fact, it's hard to deny. Yet I cannot shut down the impulse to understand. And I do not think that awakening or empathy need to be zero-sum. Because when I see a piece of art like *Sweat* – or when I read a similar work like my friend Robert Schenkkan's *The Kentucky Cycle*, a Pulitzer-winning set of ten short plays that take place between the 1770s and the 1970s on the same piece of ground in coal country – what I see is not white people getting too much coddling for having too many feelings of unrequited entitlement.

What I see is an opportunity to deliver on an unmet promise. What I see is a bright thick thread of a movement for renewal and reform. The desire to be seen, to be recognized, to not be overlooked or discarded or treated as a tool or an inert object or an obstacle – this desire is what connects Reading to Ferguson, rural opioid addicts to young urban gangsters, fast-food workers to coal miners, migrant farmworkers to Muslim refugees.

This desire is the stuff of an awakening. It is the stuff of a broad and diverse coalition of people united by their yearning to be *somebody*, to live the American promise of opportunity and reward for striving. Who can activate this desire in a way that elevates rather than scapegoats? Who can connect these isolated stories of disenfranchisement into an epic of empowerment?

We can.

Throughout American history, and especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, this land was set afire by religious revivalism. These Great Awakenings, as they were called, initially fire-and-brimstone and later more ecstatically evangelical, always tracked deep shifts in our society: the violent theft of Native lands; the consolidation of slavery; the urbanization and then the industrialization of the economy; the rise of speculative finance and the financial panics – mini-Depressions – that broke out every few decades.

All these tectonic shifts generated volcanic bursts of collective spiritual searching among white citizens. And all that religious seeking yielded massive social reforms every generation or two, from abolition to Prohibition to women's suffrage to the Progressive Era's curbing of monopolistic capitalism to the Civil Rights movement.

In the twenty-first century we are a less church-ed nation. But all of us gathered here this morning are evidence that the human impulse for rebirth and renewal and great awakening is timeless, and it is secular as well as religious. Or, to use the language of Civic Saturdays, it is *civic religious*.

When I speak of American civic religion I mean not only the kinds of civic scripture we

heard read earlier. What animates the text is the spirit. And what the spirit of Jefferson and Lincoln and King tell me today is that it's time to wake up. We are either going to die a slow national death, lost in the loops of our segregated self-justifying dreams, or we are going to set in motion a rejuvenation *together*.

Simply by showing up today you are saying you choose rebirth. You are part of a vanguard that will do the work of stitching movements and communities together into a bigger story. The greatness of America arises not when the people scrape for scraps beneath the indifferent gaze of a moneyed and merit-badged elite. The greatness of America arises when the people unite to push back to share in power and opportunity.

How do we convert this awakening into something coherent? Let me tell you what I've learned in the first week of travels on my book tour.

First, we've got to make a bigger story of us. Among my progressive friends, "intersectionality" is the buzzword these days: connecting self-identified causes like feminism and racial justice. But *deep* intersectionality expands that in-group to include white and black workers in the South who voted Trump but are literally getting chewed in the auto parts factories that moved from Mexico back to Mississippi and Alabama when corporations realized they could exploit Southern labor like Mexican labor.

I call this "Confederate capitalism," and there was a cover story in a recent issue of *Bloomberg Businessweek* that exposed its ravages: the pressure from foreign auto and auto parts companies, in complicity with union-busting state governments, to force low-wage workers to work extra shifts with no safety protections or recourse or remedy. When I read that, I thought *that's just wrong*. This is America. Then I thought: they should be allies with the people of Standing Rock and \$15 Now and Black Lives Matter and others who are getting screwed by systems of concentrated power.

There's a big affirmative story of *us* that they – we – can all fit into. It's a story bigger than resistance. It's a story bigger than party or region. It's about work that means something and that makes you feel *you* mean something. It's about a sense of place. A sense of purpose that can carry you through hard times.

This story can have an obstacle – a self-serving elite – but it need not have an enemy. As the psychologist Gordon Allport observed in his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*, the desire for security within a group can be achieved without hostility toward an out-group. We just have to make it safe inside.

Which brings me to my second lesson: We've got to show each other how to say what we are scared of and what we are ashamed of. To name our pain. This, and not scapegoating, is how we can build bonds that will truly liberate us. This point hit me last week when I was speaking at Civic Hall in New York. During the Q & A, a young African American woman asked for counsel on how to speak about politics to her relatives in Georgia who supported Trump and who were repelled by her liberal views.

My suggestion was not to speak about politics, at least politics as we know it, but rather to speak about her fears. To explain to her kin why she is afraid of persecution or condescension, to reveal in what ways she is insecure and where she is trying to shield a weakness or a wound, to own up to her own failings. This is to lead by example. To invite others to drop their guard. We all have been imprisoned by our histories, and we so often disrespect others to remedy the deficit of respect we have experienced.

The night I was at Civic Hall, I had to miss another event going on uptown at historic Riverside Church – a commemoration of the speech Martin Luther King Jr. had delivered there fifty years earlier, in which he spoke out for the first time against the Vietnam War, and tied the civil rights struggle to the antiwar struggle.

That speech made him immensely unpopular in many quarters – LBJ disinvented him from the White House – and that is part of why it is important. It laid the groundwork for the Poor People’s Campaign that King set in motion the next year, in which civil rights and economic justice and peace would merge into a single revolutionary movement for *respect*. But then he was assassinated – a year to the day after his Riverside speech.

After his death, Americans came to sanctify a safer King, one who spoke of dreams in hopeful language and who could be used as a messenger of reconciliation and even colorblindness. The more radical, more fully awakened King that emerged late in life is less remembered but more necessary now. This King was unafraid to speak truth – both to power, and to his own allies in the fight against concentrated power.

And this is the third lesson I wish to share. Let’s be brutally honest about the challenges we face so that we can be brutally honest in our demands. In recent weeks I’ve noticed big visually arresting signs being pasted onto buildings and street structures in the Central District saying “WE DESERVE RENT CONTROL.” Perhaps so. But the blunt truth is, to quote a line used both in the Clint Eastwood Western *Unforgiven* and in the HBO Baltimore crime series *The Wire*: “Deserve ain’t got nothin’ to do with it.”

If you want change, don’t make an appeal to just deserts. Make a map of who decides – whether it’s about rent control or homelessness or taxes or health care. Make a plan to locate and pressure those deciders, or to replace them or become one of them. Then make an alliance with others to mobilize the crowds, the money, the media attention, the social norms pressure, and the state actors needed to execute that plan.

I met last week with Dale Ho, who directs voting rights litigation for the national ACLU. He has a degree from Yale. And he’s using it to serve not himself but his Constitution. His small but mighty team files lawsuits in every state where right-wing white insiders are trying to rig the rules to keep young and nonwhite outsiders from voting. It’s a daunting task but Dale is a calm dude. He has a plan to re-rig the game, state by state. Power concedes nothing without a demand, Frederick Douglass told us. Let me add that a demand means nothing without a plan.

RISK AND REWARD

At the start of the morning I asked *What's the difference between a promise you've never kept and a lie?* I hope you've been pondering that as I've described this arc from dead sleep to willful dreaminess to full wakefulness.

I want to close now with another question: *What will **you** do to deliver on the American promise?*

All around us today Americans, young and old, are getting activated for the first time or the first time in a long time. We don't always know what we're doing. But the important thing is that we're doing. We can teach each other how to do it – how to practice power – with more skill and wisdom. We can read books of strategy like mine and many others. We can learn by trial and error with joy and fellowship.

One thing each of must do first, though, is to be clear about what we're willing to lose. The risks of showing up and participating in times of upheaval are real: the risk of disappointment, of failure, of financial penalty or reputational damage or bodily harm.

But here's the reward: living as if you were wide awake, fully human, and not alone. For the sake of our country and the ideas for which it stands, let's take that chance.

Readings to Precede the Sermon
Civic Saturday
April 8, 2017

Rebecca Solnit

Author, born 1961

From A Paradise Born in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster

You can read recent history as a history of privatization not just of the economy but also of society, as marketing and media shove imagination more and more toward private life and private satisfaction, as citizens are redefined as consumers, as public participation falters and with it any sense of collective or individual political power, as even the language for public emotions and satisfactions withers. There is no money in what is aptly called free association: we are instead encouraged by media and advertising to fear each other and regard public life as a danger and a nuisance, to live in secured spaces, communicate by electronic means, and acquire our information from media rather than each other. But in disaster people come together, and though some fear this gathering as a mob, many cherish it as an experience of a civil society that is close enough to paradise.

Carol Tavis

Psychologist, born 1944

Co-author of *Mistakes Were Made but Not by Me*

Depression is not “anger turned inward”; if anything, anger is depression turned outward. Follow the trail of anger inward, and there you will find the small, still voice of pain....

In the horrifying calculus of self-deception, the greater the pain we inflict on others, the greater the need to justify it to maintain our feelings of decency and self-worth....

Rebels and dissidents challenge the complacent belief in a just world, and, as the theory would predict, they are usually denigrated for their efforts. While they are alive, they may be called “cantankerous,” “crazy,” “hysterical,” “uppity,” or “duped.” Dead, some of them become saints and heroes, the sterling characters of history. It’s a matter of proportion. One angry rebel is crazy, three is a conspiracy, fifty is a movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
“Beyond Vietnam”
Riverside Church, New York
April 4, 1967

I come to this great magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice. I join you in this meeting because I am in deepest agreement with the aims and work of the organization that brought us together, Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. The recent statements of your executive committee are the sentiments of my own heart, and I found myself in full accord when I read its opening lines: “A time comes when silence is betrayal.” That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam.

The truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government’s policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one’s own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexing as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty. But we must move on.

Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. And we must rejoice as well, for surely this is the first time in our nation’s history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history.

Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us. If it is, let us trace its movement, and pray that our inner being may be sensitive to its guidance. For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.