

## **THE AMERICAN “EXPERIMENT”**

There was no question when my brother and I were growing up that we were Slovaks. We spoke Slovak and we ate Slovak. Our parents acted quite Slovak. At the same time, we were very aware of the fact that we were Americans. Our parents requested and became naturalized citizens of the United States. Ed and I were born in this country, one in Ohio and the other in Michigan. It seemed natural that we were both American and Slovak. There did not appear to be any contradiction. Was not everyone both American and something else?

Some have attempted to call our nation a “melting pot.” However, Michael Novak of our Diocese challenged that notion in a book that he once wrote. *Ethnics in the United States* have not melted together. It is more of an integration than a melting. It is a bringing of oneself into a new entity without losing individual identity. The same holds true for individual states.

Such a society does not appear to have much success anywhere else in the world. I do not believe that a United Europe will ever be a reality. One of the more challenging feats for me has been an attempt at explaining to an European how 50 states with their own rights, police, schools, and governments form a federated nation.

That has been somewhat unique to America (both the United States and Canada). Alexis de Tocqueville called it America’s experiment. He and a traveling companion came to study the prison system in the United States in 1831. They ended up traveling around for 10 months observing democracy, and then tried to explain it to the French.

As I write this, we are in the Fourth of July weekend. The so-called “American Experiment” has been around for 229 years now. My intuition tells me that for however long this nation will endure, it will continue to be solely an American experience. It goes beyond what one might call a double allegiance. Rather, it comprises a citizenry that is aware of one’s own being and individuality while being committed to the greater good of the whole. Respecting the worth of the parts that come together to make a new entity is what gives worth to the whole and has made the American experiment a success for the past 229 years.

What de Tocqueville called an experiment is not an experiment at all. Our Founding Fathers considered it a sure thing. In the Declaration of Independence, they cite the authority of “Nature and of Nature’s God” for their action. They recognize as self-evident that all men are equal and that it is their Creator who has endowed them with such rights as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

God has been an integral part of the American experience. He has been from the very beginning. While there are forces striving to relegate spirituality and morality to some closet whose door is to be opened only on the weekend (for an hour or so), we ought not to forget that this nation was founded on the belief in a Higher Power and in the worth of each individual. That is what has motivated the Slovaks, the Italians, the Irish, and others to become Americans.