

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE BIRTH OF A NATION**

As I write, we are preparing to celebrate the Fourth of July. It is a very significant holiday. Some reflections come to mind. I wish to share them with you, even though you will be reading this after our nation's birthday.

The only true natives of this nation are the ones that lived here before the white man came. The rest of us are immigrants and descendants of immigrants. I am proud to be a first-generation-born American. My father came on the SS. Kaiser Wilhelm de Grosse in 1913 and frequently referred with great fondness to the Statue of Liberty, which greeted him and others. It would have been an even-more-welcoming experience for them had they been able to read the plaque at the base of the statue that immortalizes the poem by Emma Lazarus: *Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,....* We have become a nation where, all too frequently, even visitors do not feel welcome anymore. Perhaps, we have forgotten how this nation came to be.

Our nation was born of a war. Not everyone agreed that it would be for the best interest of the colonies to free themselves from the oppression of King George III. Nevertheless, the colonial leaders met and decided that it was worth fighting for the idea of freedom. It was a very difficult war, as all wars are. However, they did not fight it alone. Generals and soldiers from other countries, such as Poland and France, came to fight and die at the side of the revolutionists. They did so to fight for the concept that all people have the right to work out their own destiny. As a result of those immense hardships and sacrifices, when fighting a seemingly undefeatable foe, we enjoy the life and privileges that we do today. Every now and then, we are called upon to return the favor in other parts of the world.

God was not a stranger to those molding the new nation. While not all perceived the Creator in the same way, there was a public recognition of a Superior Being. Our foundation documents attest to that. Our money proclaims our trust in God. Our congress and legislature, to this very day, pray before each session. Our president even takes his oath of office on Sacred Scripture. Yet, our public schools are forbidden to include prayer at their commencement exercises. That does not appear consistent with the intent of our Founding Fathers, who considered their "unalienable" rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to have been given them by their Creator. The Establishment Clause of our Constitution was intended to assure the free practice of religion, not to forbid it.

The birth of our nation was the birth of a new concept, one that sought to bring people of different lands and cultures together under one, representative government. Alexis de Tocqueville journeyed to this nation when it was only a half century old and called it an "experiment." I think that it still is, - in many ways.