

Editorial

The year of the Constitution

On September 17, 1987, two hundred years will have been completed since 39 individuals, assembled at a convention in Philadelphia, affixed their signatures on the text of a document which in the following year became the Constitution of the United States of America.

Since then, this covenant of law has justly been called the "grandfather" of every other constitution, adopted by other nations of the world striving to live under the rule of liberty and law. In many ways, the adoption of the Constitution of the United States of America, has justly been seen as the crowning moment of the republican struggle which began with Solon of Athens in 599 B.C. and spread, over the centuries, to all the lands and nations which eventually shaped what we today call Western Civilization.

With all the superlatives and other expressions of admiration that this Constitution has enjoyed, it was, at the moment of its birth, and remains to this day, a very fragile achievement. The majority of the persons that signed the original document, did so with apprehension and misgivings. Most of them were compelled to take responsibility for it as a result of Gen. George Washington's most commander-like action, his opening statement to the Convention. In it, he demanded that they deliberate to discover not what would be acceptable to their fellow citizens, but to discover what is necessary for the survival of their nation.

When those delegates completed their work, they dispersed to their various states, with the task of winning over to their Constitution, both the popular masses, the local political elites, and the various special interest groups.

James Madison and Alexander Hamilton devised a campaign strategy which today, in the form of *The Federalist Papers*, constitutes the basis of constitutional law. Madison's and Hamilton's strategy echoed George Washington's original injunction: Don't tell them what they like to hear, tell them what they need to know, the Truth.

The American Constitution was presented to the 13 states at a time of general disintegration of society. Within each state, there were popular rebellions against the local governments. Among the states, there was rivalry and disintegration, as 13 local oligarchies were warring both against their own people and against each other.

Before ratifying the Constitution, each state had to weigh a choice between chaos and disintegration and "a more perfect union." It was "Necessity informed by Reason," as Plato would have put it, which compelled each of the states, one by one and with varying degrees of reluctance, to vote in favor of the text produced by the Philadelphia Convention.

Many things have been said about this text, and many theories have been spun out, most missing the point. Its genius is neither in the so called "separation of powers," nor in the Machiavellian way in which it created a nation out of playing popular power against the power of individual states' "establishments," and the power of elected representatives against that of various electorates. Its genius is that it imposed the yoke of Reason against the political passions of the moment. In this sense, the Constitution of the United States is the instrument which forces society and its various segments to succumb to Reason. A Tyranny of Reason, so to speak, using the ancient name for Liberty.

So, this Constitution is the same thing as the process which created it. It is as fragile today, as at the moment it was signed. Its continuing success depends on one ingredient: A society bound to live under it, must produce individuals who make it their life's commitment to discover this Reason, and shout it from the rooftops. So long as individuals exist, who discover Reason and Truth, and who pledge their "life, property, and sacred honor" to Truth's cause, against the vagaries of "popular opinion," then this Constitution guarantees the successful survival of society. If our society fails to survive, if the Constitution ever falls, it will only be for lack of such individuals.