ADDRESS

— BY —

Reverend Alfred Ray Atwood, D. D.

— AT THE —

Union Memorial Sunday Service

— OF THE —

East Dennis and Dennis Churches

— HELD IN THE —

Dennis Union Church, Dennis, Mass.

May 29, 1949

Printed in response to popular request.
"Why America Is A Great Nation"

Text: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach The Gospel of Peace."

Rom. 10:15

This text refers not only to industrial and social peace but especially to spiritual peace: the peace of soul. It is the text used here, 222 years ago at the Organization of the Church for the East Precinct of Yarmouth and at the Ordination of Josiah Dennis, M. A. as its Pastor.

It has been our custom at these Union Memorial Sunday services to hear an address on some phase of the Greatness of America. The question arises, "How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?"

This problem faced our Dennis community 222 years ago, when it was "the East Precinct of the Town of Yarmouth." The distance from here to the Yarmouth Meeting House was too great and the methods of travel (on foot or by oxen) were too slow to satisfy the people of this vicinity, and Mr. Josiah Dennis, M. A. from whom this Town received its name, was assigned to preach here. His parishioners, ancestors of some of you, wanted him to be ordained that, beside preaching, he might administer the two Protestant Sacraments: Baptism and Communion. So Rev. Samuel Wigglesworth, M. A. of Ipswich came here, probably by packet, and "Preached at the East Precinct in Yarmouth, June 22, 1727, at the Ordination of the Reverend Josiah Dennis, M. A.," who ministered here for 37 consecutive years.

This service was 222 years ago and the Ordination Sermon was printed in Boston by a hand press. I have a copy from the Congregational Library, 14 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

This Ordination Sermon shows one reason why America has become a great Nation. It is, on the one hand, because of God's Messengers and God's Message, and on the other hand, because of the loyalty and support of the Laity: the People of the Pews.
I. THE MINISTERS

This Ordination Sermon said in part: "Ministers of Christ are Messengers of the Lord. They are to be looked upon as in God's stead, and the words they speak are to be considered as the words of God. They are men of knowledge (usually the best educated in the community) and they are to turn men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God and to persuade them to accept Christ."

"Ministers of Christ are to preach the Gospel of Peace (especially spiritual peace: peace of soul). If it be inquired, What is this Gospel of Peace? I answer Peace with God through Jesus Christ; who has made room for the pardoning of sinners. This is the great subject to be insisted on by ministers. The tenor of the Gospel is: Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out; Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and no condemnation shall belong to you. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Be ye reconciled unto God."

To the people in this vicinity, the preacher of Josiah Dennis' Ordination Sermon said: "Afford your minister a liberal maintenance. It will be vile and dishonorable, for Christian Congregations to practice parsimonious allowances. This will cause both their libraries and their heads to be but mealy furnished; their discourses will grow lean; their lamps will burn dim for lack of oil; they will not be able to give themselves to their work nor to be given to hospitality."

Thus the people of Dennis were told of the minister's duty and of their own responsibility. This bit of local, religious history fits in with our inquiry of today: Why is America a Great Nation? It is because of our ministers and the liberality and loyalty of our people. These constitute the foundation upon which our great American nation has been built. There are other reasons why America is a Great Nation, but foremost I place the spiritual influence of Ministers and the loyalty of the Laity.

II. THE COMPACT

Why is America a Great Nation? It is because in Provincetown Harbor before the Pilgrims began to plan their houses, they drew up a Compact, and it was signed in the cabin of the Mayflower. That Compact was the first written
constitution the World ever knew and is called the "First Gospel of Americanism." Edward Everett Hale, DD. declared that "the Compact drawn up at Provincetown is as important as the Declaration of Independence, and was its forerunner."

The exact words of this Compact are:

"In the Name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign, Lord King James, by grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc., having undertaken for the glory of God, and the advancement of the Christian faith and the honor of our King and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern part of Virginia, do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for the better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof do enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord King James of England, France and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland, the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini 1620."

Forty-one men affixed their signatures to that Compact, once described as "the first state paper in America."

That Compact, one of the great documents in American history, began: "In the Name of God." In addition to the spiritual influences of its Ministers and the loyalty of its Laity, America is a Great Nation because she was born "In the Name of God."

Early settlers of South America went there to find gold. Early settlers of North America came here to worship God, according to the dictates of their own consciences. The South American adventure failed; the North American adventure succeeded. And from the signing of the Compact in the Mayflower at Provincetown, America has enjoyed prosperity because as a Nation, she was born "In the Name of God" and was dedicated to God.

III. THE CONSTITUTION

Why is America a Great Nation? It is because in Philadelphla in 1787 at the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin
Franklin, addressing the chairman, George Washington, said:

"We indeed seem to feel our own want of political wisdom, since we have been running all about in search of it. With the situation of this Assembly as it were in the dark, how has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understanding? We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings that 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it.' I firmly believe this. I therefore beg leave to move that hereafter prayer imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessing on our deliberations be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business."

Franklin's motion was carried. From that hour definite progress was made in framing the immortal document which is the keystone of our liberty. The Constitution of America was guided by God's Word and cradled by Prayer.

America is a Great Nation, not only because of the spiritual influence of her Ministers and the loyalty of her Laity; not only because she was born "In the Name of God" and dedicated to God; but also because her Constitution was guided by the Word of God and she was cradled by Prayer.

That is why the late President Wilson could say: "America is a great spiritual conception."

That is why William A. Viscounte, Chaplain of New Bedford Post 1 American Legion recently said: "America is a Divine Blessing" and "may our people ask God's blessing on our American Way of Life."

That is why the late Rabbi Stephen S. Wise defined America as, "an Atmosphere;" "a Religion;" and added: "God make us worthy of America, willing to serve her loyalty; and God make America worthier to serve the World."

That is why Henry Van Dyke, returning to America from a European tour could write:

"So it's home again, and home again, America for me! My heart is turning home again, and there I long to be, In the land of youth and freedom beyond the ocean bars, Where the air is full of sunlight and the flag is full of stars."

That is why with Isaac Watts we can pray:

"O God our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come; Be Thou our guide while life shall last, And our eternal home." Amen.
[1949-05-29; 6-page brochure, “Address by Reverend Alfred Ray Atwood, D.D. at the Union Memorial Sunday Service of the East Dennis and Dennis Churches held in the Dennis Union Church, Dennis, Mass., May 29, 1949”; the topic was “Why America Is A Great Nation.”]