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The Hope of Localism

By James M. Decker

Last week, I kicked off a new series on some ideas that I believe are vital to the future prosperity of rural America. If you have not read that essay (“Subsidiarity, Localism, and You”), I encourage you to read it as a prerequisite to this essay. We will revisit subsidiary in the weeks to come.

A few weeks ago, Adam Smith wrote an important piece at Front Porch Republic titled “Localism without Nostalgia.” Adam is a professor of political philosophy at the University of Dubuque in Iowa. He’s not the 18th century Scottish economist, but that Adam Smith will appear in this location in a few weeks.

“Localism without Nostalgia” sounds like something I would write, but alas, I only wish I had written this one. Smith points out the perils of nostalgia, something that I have written about on many occasions. He writes that people of the past lived more locally and that we ought to think in detail about the extent to which “local lives” were “better lives.” In that, he quotes Wendell Berry’s insistence on a “full accounting” of history considering the costs as well as the benefits. It’s like I have said before, the “good old days” were not always good for everybody. Smith points out that nostalgia is an accounting trick of sorts: promoting the good things while obscuring the liabilities.

But then, Smith really rocked my world by distinguishing between “optimism” and “hope.” I have often called myself an optimist because I view myself as positive about the future’s possibilities. Smith quotes philosopher and moralist Christopher Lasch describing optimism as “a kind of cheerful fatalism, which assumes that we are carried along on an irresistible flood of innovation. It finds its clearest expression in those conventional images of the future disseminated by the advertising industry, in which everyone owns a private airplane and machines do all the work.”

Nothing describes our current moment’s obsession with “artificial intelligence” and the like better than that. But it reminds me of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” when he observes that time is neutral and nothing about the passage of time requires progress. Optimism is similar, in this respect. Merely assuming good things are going to come from innovation is an exercise in folly and a good way to get sucked in to a machine-dependent dystopian world without personal agency or independence.

Smith thusly distinguishes optimism from “hope.” Hope, quoting Lasch, “implies a deep-

seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it...[hope] rests on confidence not so much in the future as in the past. It derives from early memories—no doubt distorted, overlaid with later memories, and thus not wholly reliable as a guide to any factual reconstruction of past events—in which the experience of order and contentment was so intense that subsequent disillusionment cannot dislodge it. Such experience leaves as its residue the unshakeable conviction, not that the past was better than the present, but that trust is never completely misplaced...”

That quote is a lot to process. I am still processing it myself. But without a doubt, I think I will gladly start calling myself a “hopeful” person about rural America, rather than an optimist. There is nothing about the passage of time or the flood of innovation that will push our way into a new era of rural prosperity. But hopeful? A confidence in the good things of the past that we use to shape a better future? A memory of when people lived more locally-centered lives? A full accounting of the past but a realization that we can channel the positive things of local life without the accounting trick of nostalgia?

A belief that rural prosperity is possible in the 21st century

UPCOMINGS!

CCRTA to meet February 19

The Coke County Retired Teachers Association will meet Monday, February 19 at the First Baptist Church in Bronte at 12 noon. They would be delighted for all public school retirees and friends to come enjoy the meeting.

Daddy Daughter Date Night set for February 24

RL4Restoration Foundation will host their annual Daddy Daughter Date Night on Saturday, February 24, at the Family Life Center in Robert Lee from 5 pm until 8 pm. The event is open to girls in Pre-K through 6th grade. Advanced tickets are available at Blackburn’s Ranch and Hardware Supply in Bronte or Austin Street Coffee House in Robert Lee through February 22. Tickets will also be available at the door the night of the event.

Friends of the RLCC to meet February 26

The February meeting of the Friends of the Robert Lee Care

Center will be held on Monday, February 26, at 10 am. The meeting will be held in the West Coke County Hospital District Board Room, located by the Food Pantry. Anyone interested in helping to improve the quality of life for the RLCC residents and in learning more about this organization is encouraged to attend.

Spring Break Camp to be held March 11

A Spring Break Camp will be held on March 11 from 9 am - 2 pm for kids ages 6 - 12. There will be horse riding, horse grooming, arts, crafts, and lots of outdoor fun. Lunch and snacks will not be provided.

For more information, reach out to Horsetooth Hills Dude Ranch on Facebook.

Fundraiser meal set for April 7

The Bronte Educational Enrichment Foundation will hold a chicken spaghetti fundraiser on Sunday, April 7 at 11:30 am at the Blue Goose in downtown Bronte. The meal will include chicken spaghetti, salad, garlic bread, and a dessert.

**Editorial &
Advertising
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is 5 pm on
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preceding
publication.**

**THE OBSERVER/
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Area Churches

Invite You to Worship

Bronte

Bronte Church of Christ

PO Box 346
118 S. Jefferson • Bronte
Sun. 10 am & 6 pm, Wed. 7 pm

Central Baptist Church

324 S. Franklin • Bronte
(325) 473-4811
Dale Patterson, Pastor
Sun. 10 am Sunday School
11 am & 5 pm Worship

First Baptist Church

424 S. Washington • Bronte
(325) 473-2331
firstbronte@gmail.com

Pastor George Cooper
Sunday 9:45 am Sunday School,
10:30 am Worship

Wednesday 6 pm - 8 pm

Children and Youth

Bronte Methodist Church

Corner of Washington & Holmes
Bronte • (325) 650-4836

Pastor Keith Fletcher

Sun. 10:00 am Sunday School

11:00 am Worship

St. James Catholic Church

215 N. Washington, Bronte
(325) 365-2687

Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor

Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am

Bread of Life Church

314 Fayette • Bronte

(325) 227-0010

Michael Crane, Pastor

Sunday, 9 am

Wednesday, 6 pm

Coke County

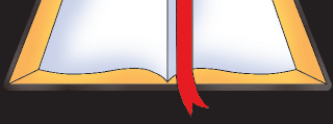
Pecan Baptist

PO Box 542 • 12 miles West of
Robert Lee on Sterling City Hwy
(325) 453-2065, Bill Hood, Pastor

www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com

Sun. 10 am, Sunday School

11 am & 7 pm, Worship



Robert Lee

Bible Baptist Church

PO Box 938 • 9th & Austin
Sunday 10 am Sunday School,
11 am and 5 pm Worship,

Wed 5 pm Bible Study

Emmanuel Pentecostal

PO Box 794 • 1004 Hillcrest
Pastor Brantly Robertson
(972) 841-2009

Sundays 10 am, Wednesdays 7 pm

First Methodist Church

PO Box 144 • 9th & Chadbourne
Pastor Gary Karschner
Robert Lee • (325) 453-2417

Sun. 11 am Worship,

Iglesia Bautista Betel

101 Houston • Robert Lee

Sun. 9:45 am • Sunday School

11 am Service • Bible Study Wed. 6 pm

Southside Church of Christ

PO Box 698 • 8th & Houston
Robert Lee (325) 453-2176

Sun. 10 am, Sunday School

11 am Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Worship

Northside Church of Christ

PO Box 508
9th & Chadbourne • Robert Lee
(325) 453-2685, (325) 763-2118

or (325) 473-1053

Services: Sun. 10 am

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

601 W. 10th, Robert Lee

(325) 365-2687

Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor

Saturday Vigil Mass 6 pm

Robert Lee Baptist Church

PO Box 493 • 22 W. 11th

(325) 453-2724

Chris Walls, Pastor

Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School

11 am Worship

Wed. 6:30 pm, Prayer Meeting

Victory Assembly of God

(325) 453-2208, PO Box 638

202 E. 6th Street, Robert Lee

Rev. Rocky Youngblood, Pastor

Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School

10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study