

Restoring Safety – Reclaiming Patriotism

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Reading:

Prophecy of Peace Lon Woodrum (adapted by M. Bryant)

There's a voice on the wind of the world speaking dreams from the ancient books

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks

Have you heard the voice in the darkness, up from the foggy past?

Do you hear, you winged warriors over the cyclonic blast?

If any strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also

Did you hear it, you beautiful sons

As you fell in the flash of guns

Thou shall not kill

You are still, you can hear it Earth

In the crackle of cities that burn

In the lancing cry of children

And the silence of those who'll never return

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God

There's a voice on the wind of the world:

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Sermon:

In the reading Dana led for us we were reminded of the numerous injunctions in the Judeo-Christian tradition which encourage us to peace.

The religious tradition which gives me greatest inspiration is the Tao-Te-Ching – the twenty-seven hundred year old Chinese text: I read from the translation by Stephen Mitchell:

“When a country is in harmony with the Tao, the factories make trucks and tractors. When a country goes counter to the Tao, warheads are stockpiled outside the cities. There is no greater illusion than fear, no greater wrong than preparing to defend yourself, no greater misfortune than having an enemy. Whoever can see through all fear will always be safe.” (from #46)

“Whoever relies on the Tao in governing doesn't try to force issues or defeat enemies by force of arms. For every force there is a counterforce. Violence, even well intentioned, always rebounds upon itself.” (#30)

“Weapons are the tools of violence and all decent people detest them .. they are the tools of fear and a decent person will avoid them except in the direst necessity and use them only with the utmost restraint. Peace is the highest value. One's enemies

are not demons – but human beings, like oneself. Do not rejoice in victory – for every victory is a funeral for kin.” (#31)

“Give evil nothing to oppose and it will disappear itself. “ (#60)

“There can be no wholeness is war – only in Peace is there wholeness”

These are only a few of the countless passages we could find in all of the world’s spiritual texts that warn against the kind of action our government seems dedicated to in Iraq; only some of the many that would encourage us to peace and patience, compassion and understanding.

Echoing this today, our clergy stand almost united in their opposition to a unilateral action against Iraq. In Austin all three UU ministers, Davidson Loehr, Chuck Freeman, and Kathleen Ellis, have all delivered very strong statements from the pulpit. They are joined not only by individuals, but by organizations of Catholics, Presbyterians, even Methodists. My good friend Pastor Doug Hill, of the ELCA Celebration Lutheran Church in Nashville, Tennessee, was pleased and surprised when his peers voted to make last weekend a plea for peace in Lutheran pulpits all over the mid-South and Mississippi valley. Only the most conservative clerical bodies, the Southern Baptists and Episcopalians have refrained from voicing their concerns.

However, many UUs have been somewhat suspicious of religious texts and religious leaders. I ask though – if not these - what and whom shall we trust?

Our news media seems incapable of presenting international news in an objective light. The right-wing media inappropriately presents Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda as “insane” and the left wing media uses the same “political cartoon” imagery to portray President Bush. Neither of these groups seems to have much respect for their audience. The motives of the players in these actions may be subtle, but they are not beyond our comprehension.

Even the quantity of “world news” that Americans receive through their media is very small compared to that conveyed to free citizens of other countries. From the point of view of our news – we are self-absorbed. If any of you would like to see what our international news coverage could or should be like – try looking at “the Economist” – a moderate British newsweekly – for whom a recent week’s cover story was the international anti-war movement, seemingly invisible to our press.

Without objective "eyes" overseas, we are left to trust our leaders in government and industry – leaders whom, I'm afraid, are proving themselves untrustworthy; untrustworthy, because they've been unable to separate the “national interest” from their own. And this self-interest would sacrifice the lives of the countrymen they are entrusted to protect and the lives of our fellow companions on the earth to

protect their franchise. Our foreign policy seems designed to protect the petroleum and defense industries, and we have leadership with deep ties and considerable investment in the petroleum and defense industries.

In considering current affairs, perhaps it would be constructive to take an historical view of fairly recent US military engagements.

Let's begin with the World War II. In the "Good War", the United States was the "Sleeping Giant". Like the Gary Cooper and Jimmy Stewart screen heroes of the day, the country was very slow to anger, but terrible in its wrath when it could take no more. The U.S. stood by while Germany and Japan attacked ally after ally, in "strong and silent" restraint, until it could be restrained no longer.

When America did enter the war, the country was unified in its resolve and unqualified in its success. The result was that our country, while taking fewer casualties in Europe than Canada in World War II, was given the respect and appreciation of the world for the victories. And the resulting National self-satisfaction and "glory" was just enough to serve as salve for the deep wounds that war, even popular and successful war always causes.

Since World War II, the US has been intoxicated with its success and power. With much more ready fists and trigger fingers, like the screen heroes portrayed by Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood, and Chuck Norris, we've been ready to enter fights around the globe. In fact, like the true bullies that we are, we've readily entered fights with weaklings, like Grenada, Panama, and Haiti just to remind our friends, and our enemies, of our power. For the bully, however, every conflict, win or lose, is unsatisfying. When one loses, there is no conviction behind the sacrifice and the loss is doubled. When one wins, there is a hollow undeserved feeling.

For those who have seen the movie "Blackhawk Down" – you've seen a glimpse of our clandestine military in action. These Rangers and Delta force units – were not authorized by the U.N., international agreement, or treaty to be in Somalia. Our troops were surprised when they found themselves at war with an entire city – a city they were supposed to be assisting – but a people resented their presumptive application of deadly force. – a people who resented our arrogance of "empire".

This will not be another "easy" victory like Desert Storm. For a generation – America has not entered a conflict which resulted (at least for us) in casualties of more than a couple of dozen soldiers. However – although we will prevail – we have superior numbers and weaponry – the Iraqis have a significant army with technology and motivation. There will be hundreds, if not thousands of body bags required for this action. Independent research studies indicated tens of thousands of Iraqis and perhaps a thousand American troops will die.

As a frequent traveler overseas - I can tell you – the reason why Arabs – and others including Jamaicans and Canadians dislike us - is because of our "interventions". With our World Bank, CIA, and active military - our meddling sows the fear and hatred that we reap - and our gluttonous consumption of resources and opulent wealth is the fertilizer. In the last several years I've had the privilege to travel around the world in my work. In my travels, particularly in Saudi Arabia, I've found people open to discussing their image of our country and the relationship we have with them. I believe you would find the foreign press will reinforce my anecdotal reports that around the world the United States is perceived as a militaristic people, a great bully who can be counted on to flex its muscle, often for peace, sometimes just to flex it.

This is confirmed by a Pew Research study released in December - researchers personally interviewed 38,000 people in 44 countries in 63 languages -

Despite an initial outpouring of public sympathy for America following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, discontent with the United States has grown around the world over the past two years. Images of the U.S. have been tarnished in all types of nations: among longtime NATO allies, in developing countries, in Eastern Europe and, most dramatically, in Muslim societies.

Since 2000, favorability ratings for the U.S. have fallen in 19 of the 27 countries where trend benchmarks are available. While criticism of America is on the rise, however, a reserve of goodwill toward the United States still remains. The Pew Global Attitudes survey finds that the U.S. and its citizens continue to be rated positively by majorities in 35 of the 42 countries in which the question was asked. True dislike, if not hatred, of America is concentrated in the Muslim nations of the Middle East and in Central Asia, today's areas of greatest conflict.

Opinions about the U.S., however, are complicated and contradictory. People around the world embrace things American and, at the same time, decry U.S. influence on their societies. Similarly, pluralities in most of the nations surveyed complain about American unilateralism. But the war on terrorism, the centerpiece of current U.S. foreign policy, continues to enjoy global support outside the Muslim world.

While attitudes toward the United States are most negative in the Middle East/Conflict Area, ironically, criticisms of U.S. policies and ideals such as American-style democracy and business practices are also highly prevalent among the publics of traditional allies. In fact, critical assessments of the U.S. in countries such as Canada, Germany and France are much more widespread than in the developing nations of Africa and Asia.

The worldwide polling conducted throughout the summer and fall finds few people, even in friendly nations, expressing a very favorable opinion of America, and sizable

minorities in Western Europe and Canada having an unfavorable view. Many people around the world, especially in Europe and the Middle East/Conflict Area, believe the U.S. does not take into account the interests of their country when making international policies. Majorities in most countries also see U.S. policies as contributing to the growing gap between rich and poor nations and believe the United States does not do the right amount to solve global problems.

This year we will spend over \$300 billion on our military. We will spend another \$200 billion on the interest on prior military spending in the deficit. This does not include veterans' benefits or retirement pay. This amounts to 41% of the federal budget (not including social security). Our military budget is more than four times the combined military budgets of China, North Korea, Cuba, Iraq, and Libya combined, and what is even more amazing, it is just larger than the next ten largest military budgets in the world combined. Do any of these next ten military budgets represent our enemies? Even China in this number has "most favored nation" status.

And we have troops all over the world. Like the great warrior empire of the Romans, and the great Navy of the colonial conquering British, the sun truly never sets on the American military. We have airbases and battleships and carriers in every theater, every ocean, near every continent. The creation of a "homeland security" cabinet level department – seems to deny the other cabinet level department should keep the title "defense department". Honestly, we should name it the "War Department" as it was called when we were a more peaceful nation. In fact, we, the people in this room, have contributed to building the greatest warrior empire the world has ever known.

Our "pseudo-governmental" economic powers also spend tens of billions on World Bank loans that manipulate foreign governments by gaining economic control over them. And our CIA is involved in not just research, but active manipulation of governments in many regions. Manipulations which may have included assassination and coup. Manipulations which on several occasions have trained and armed those who would later threaten us – and who cause instability and fear in their regions.

Frankly – we are bullies – who force others to accept our version of what is "right for them" or "right for us" and enforce this with our might and money.

Who are our enemies? What do we fear? After the cold war, the greatest threat to America perhaps is terrorism, and our stealth bombers and aircraft carriers don't protect us from this. In fact our image as the great bully makes us more vulnerable to terrorism. In a sense, with our inappropriate level of military power and

aggressive foreign policy, for small countries and political entities *we* are terrorists and terrorism is an appropriate response.

Remembering our missile attacks in 1998 on Afghanistan and Somalia, without declaration of war, attempt at extradition, or warning, may remind us of a terrorist action. More recently, in December – as covered in the international media – we used a drone aircraft missile – piloted from Virginia to strike a car on the road in Yemen and kill six suspected Al Qaeda leaders – including one American. Six people who, however heinous, had no due process, in country whose sovereignty we showed no respect for.

How are other countries to respond to this? Now more than ever, the only thing we have to fear, is fear itself. Fear which is has become our national policy. A national policy of internal and external fear-mongering that is holding back and holding down our own economy.

Those of you who have as I have watched Michael Moore's recent film "Bowling for Columbine" in the past few months have witnessed a portrait of America which has been led – by the selfish motives of the media and government to become much more fearful than is implied by our circumstance. Moore believes this unreasonable – and self-fulfilling fear is the reason why Americans who own few more guns per citizen than Canadians and have no more diverse a population – kill each other 200 times more often with handguns. Moore believes it is why – even though crime has been consistently on the decline in America – more of us carry firearms – own firearms – and treat each other suspiciously or worse – with hostility and deadly force.

Moore believes we are given this message of fear because it sells television news programs and newspapers and justifies our government's interventions overseas. The film also suggests that the violent behavior of our government encourages violence in our citizenry and youth.

We are told that this upcoming war is to prevent Iraq from gaining or using nuclear weapons of mass destruction – which they are likely to use against us. For a moment put yourself in the position of an Iraqi:

- which country invented nuclear weapon technology?
- which is the only country in the world to destroy whole cities in a conflict with these weapons?
- which country for years has not been honoring its commitment to Russia to destroy nuclear weapons – even though the Russians (until last fall) had been?
- which country has been bombing Iraq and attacking Iraq for years to defend its imposed "no fly zone" and punishing the Iraqi citizenry with its economic sanctions?

- which country – having these nuclear weapons – is rattling its sabers loudly at Iraq – and has been for more than a decade – since they last went to war against Iraq (albeit the Iraqis – with their own territorial greed – deserved it)?
- which country has adopted a policy of “First Strike” against terrorism in the last few months – and has used this policy to attack Arabs in the Middle East in the last several months without declaration of war or significant diplomacy?

From this perspective – it could appear that Iraq feels they need nuclear weapons – not to attack us – but to defend against us. It is not an unreasonable concern. We provide them little assurance of anything else. The Oxford group, an independent research organization, reveals that a unilateral attack by the United States on Iraq will strengthen Al-Quaeda’s influence with moderate Arabs and actually increase our chances of being attacked.

Instead of reassurance, we exhibit arrogance and hypocrisy. Our elections are far from perfect – moneyed interests have too much influence. Our current President did not get a majority of the popular vote. We have serious social problems which indicate that in our quest for freedom we may have lost some of our spiritual and moral center and structure. Our economic system has for decades widened the gap between rich and poor. Even so, we are often gluttons – consuming too much food – too much energy – too much of our planet – often just for pleasure – and seeming to flaunt our blessings in the face of those with less –much less. We have recently rejected international treaties to ban land mines, protect children from being used in combat, and further reduce nuclear weapons.

Now I don’t want to be an apologist for Saddam Hussein or Al-qaeda or North Korea – all have committed atrocities. None have governments in form or practice of which we can admire over our own. However Hussein operates one of the more liberal totalitarian Arab countries (more liberal than our friends the Saudis for example or the Kuwaitis whose sovereignty we fought to protect) and neither North Korea or Hussein does not claim to be a world leader who has the moral authority to keep other countries in line.

What kind of example do we set for other countries? Is this any kind of “world leadership” that we can be proud of? It is my opinion that the United States no longer represents any kind of “city on the hill” and has lost the “moral authority” to unilaterally settle disputes.

What about patriotism? Has my cynicism about our world role destroyed my loyalty to America? No.

I hold in high regard the ideals of our nation – ideals of a people

- who were established holding that all are created equal
- who had the courage to cross oceans and climb mountains to settle uncharted territories
- who believed in self-determination and representative government and economic freedom
- who believed in community and were ruled by town meetings and helped their neighbors

A people who have fought and died and sacrificed money and advantage for freedom – freedom which has brought us cultural wealth and yes, economic wealth beyond our wildest dreams. A people who have become the most diverse and free culture in the history of the planet – a celebration of human life.

But have we transformed ourselves from the courageous nation that claimed a continent, re-forged the great institution of democracy, explored the grand vistas of capitalism and opportunity, rescued the world from Fascism and walked on the moon into an isolationist, paranoid people who watch their neighbors on tv and “hold the world down” in cowering fear that they might rise up and take our stuff from us?

What in these actions against Iraq is loyal to our American ideals? What is inconsistent with them? What is patriotism in this context?

Across a small bit of the Hudson bay from the horrifying, destroyed ruins of the World Trade Center stands the Statue of Liberty. In the nineteenth century, the statue was gift to the United States from France – recognizing our world leadership – leadership authored, in part by our Unitarian predecessors Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Ralph Waldo Emerson among many others. Leadership which inspired others to struggle for their own freedom.

Today our world leadership includes entertainment like “gangsta rap”, “Baywatch”, and “Buffy the Vampire Slayer”, economic manipulation and intrigue, unethical corporations, weapons systems, standing armies and fear. What kind of monument will other countries build for us today?

Former President, and recent Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter reminds us: “It is important for us to remember that the United States did not invent human rights – rather human rights invented the United States”. Perhaps it is time for us to return to and struggle to deserve this heritage.

President George H. Bush, the elder, has called the challenge presented by the “conspiracy” of globally organized terror “the greatest challenge any American President has faced since Lincoln”. I propose to face such a challenge, we will need true patriotism, the kind of patriotism that is derived from a people whose

government truly represents the diverse and moral people that they are. The patriotism of a people proud of our communal life and our relations with others. It is important that we reclaim a foreign policy not driven by self interest or even national interest – but a foreign policy that represents the highest values and cultural diversity of our great people.

Alexander Solzenitzen wrote “ it would be easy if some were simply good and others were simply evil, we could eliminate the evil ones and destroy evil – but the line between good and evil runs through each person’s heart – and no one is willing to part with a piece of their own heart.”

In the face of this crisis, it seems to me some choices are simple:

We can call these people – who seem so different from us - with different clothing and language and religion - “crazy” and “evil” – and this course of action will NEVER make us more safe or secure

-or-

we can attempt to understand why our fellow human beings - who are similarly interested in the safety and future of their families and communities - are willing to die to attack us

if we can understand this – perhaps we can become more safe... A safety – a peace – that is not just the absence of war due to our vigilance and overwhelming force – but that is due to our harmonious relationships with those around us.

To do this, we must be patriotic in the traditional sense – we must be willing to assert our democratic right, nay our responsibility, of dissent. Because this will require no less than our “taking back” our foreign policy and demanding that it reflect our values.

It will require us to re-evaluate the costs to our society and psyche of our role as a great warrior nation and global bully.

It will require us to realize that freedom and self-determination mean that we have the patience to refrain from manipulating other countries to our ends with our money and intrigues so that they can govern themselves and participate as working peers, friends in our global community.

It will require us to insist on the kind of restraint that we have shown in the past when it comes to defining our “national interests” and it will require us to insist on ethical behavior from our leaders.

It will require us as a community to take control of our military – and even more difficult – our CIA and World Bank

It will require us to speak our minds at the dinner table, water cooler, and here in the pulpit.

It will require us to read Don’s e-mails

It will require us to march in the streets and vote at the ballot box.

It will require us to, as we did in the middle part of the last century in the face of economic crises and World War to eschew fear and make examples of ourselves in the world – translating our character as a people into true world leadership

It will require us to reach out to other nations with trust, trade, and peace and not manipulation and fear.

It will require us to have the patriotism to take responsibility for the actions of our nation and develop a foreign policy we can be proud of.

It will require us to see our enemies, not as such – but rather as human beings.

It will require us to live the Peace we sing about.

Shalom