

Of Government

THE DANGER OF POLITICS

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The secret of unity is to find an external foe.

“The Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:447

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The world polarizes around over-rated individuals. . . . As the two poles conceive an ever greater antipathy to each other they become more and more *alike*. Everyone knows that it is like poles that repel each other. As each recognizes itself in the other, it resents the incriminating resemblance.

“The Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:443, 447

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Such a cleanly polarized world gives us supremely simple solutions and supremely confident leaders, whose decisions are as quick and spontaneous as a knee-jerk and as irrevocable as the Ten Commandments—men like Hitler, Stalin, Arafat, Khadafi, Khomeini, Somoza, et al. [and others], who reduce all troubles to one cause and all problems to just one enemy.

What could be more unhealthy than to have all one’s thoughts and actions dictated and conditioned by the policy of another, waiting for him to act so that we can react, noting what he does so that we can do the same, watching his career to know how to plan and direct our own?

Well is Satan called the Adversary, the Destroyer, the Accuser, the Contender. All of his titles describe one who must wait for another to act before he can move.

Nothing is more crippling to creative thinking than obsession with an enemy. The person who can think of only one solution to a given problem is mentally bankrupt. The person who can think of only one solution to *every* problem is doomed.

“The Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:454-55

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It is not the voice of God from Sinai that lays down the rules but our own interest and convenience, as we choose to interpret them. Thus, thou shalt not lie—to your friends, that is. After all, the dictionary definition of strategy is “deception,” in particular with the intention of “killing others, practiced on an enemy,” an enemy being anyone who stands in your way, and whether in business or war, strategy is the name of the game. Thou shalt not kill—people on your side only, of course; for killing others you get medals. Thou shalt not steal—from your friends, naturally. I

seem to recall that the Lord said that if you love only your friends you have no reward, because sinners and publicans do that much (Matthew 5:46-47).

“The Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:454

“All the religious world is boasting of righteousness,” [said Brigham Young.] “It is the doctrine of the devil to retard the human mind, and hinder our progress, by filling us with self-righteousness. . . . We are full of selfishness; the devil flatters us that we are very righteous, when we are feeding on the faults of others.” Here surely is the greatest threat of communism. It puts us to sleep and paralyzes our minds in the comforting assurance that we are the Good People and it is They and not We who need to repent.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 2:7

Even in the great classic treatises on the state, its image is never without a sinister side. The combination of unlimited power and limited wisdom can never be a reassuring one, but it is the actual behavior of sovereign states and princes that is most disturbing. The key to understanding the behavior of delinquents, we are often told, is an insight into early background and environment. . . . The state spent the most impressionable years of its childhood living as an orphan of the storm in tents of vagabonds where it acquired many of the habits and attitudes that still condition its activities.

“Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” *CWHN* 10:33

WAR AND PEACE

Recently I received from a Brigham Young University professor a list of scriptural passages in which God seemed to favor war. Matching it on the other side of the page was another list of passages in which conflict was forbidden. This seems like a deadlock, a basic contradiction.

But the contradiction is only apparent, for if one examines the passages on both sides throughout the scriptures, they fall clearly into two categories: general principles and special instances. The verses forbidding conflict are of a general and universal nature, while those which countenance it all refer to exceptional cases.

“If There Must Needs Be Offense,” 54

[I remember] certain dashing, wonderful men who, during World War II, used to brief the various units of the 101st Airborne Division which they were leading into battle. (The classic Leader’s Oration before the Battle

enjoyed a revival in airborne operations where the army, a short hour before the battle, could sit quietly on the grass one hundred miles from the enemy and listen to speeches).

It was the high point of their careers, the thing they had been working and hoping and looking forward to all their lives—to lead a crack regiment or division into battle, and they made the most of it. The feeling of euphoria was almost overpowering. They were smart, sharp, vigorous, compelling, eager, tense, exuding optimism and even humor, but above all excitement. Invariably General Maxwell Taylor would end his oration with: “Good hunting!” It was wonderful, thrilling; you were ready to follow that man anywhere.

But before the operation was a day old, every man in the division was heartily wishing that he was anywhere else, doing anything else but that. Everyone knew in his mind and heart that he was not sent to earth to engage in this nasty and immoral business. The heroism and sacrifice were real. The situation was utterly satanic and shameful. The POWs we rounded up to interrogate were men just as good as we were, the victims of a terrible circumstance that the devil’s game of power and gain had woven around them.

“Beyond Politics,” 300

Real warfare, resorting to overt violence directed against others, defeats the whole purpose of our earthly existence. Heaven is “the peaceable kingdom” from which Satan was thrust “in a twinkling” the moment he resorted to violence. War, utterly wasteful as it is, has the vast appeal of shifting one’s own guilt, of all of which we relieve ourselves as soon as the shooting begins.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 2:2

How then do we deal with the enemy? Brigham Young, who knew as much about as large a variety of enemies as any man who ever lived, has laid it on the line: If we show our Heavenly Father that we trust him to the point of putting aside all our feelings of malice and revenge towards our fellow men, no matter who they may be or how they feel toward us, he will see to it that “the wicked shall destroy the wicked.” That is a promise that has never failed of fulfillment. The alternative to this is the other game, the most dangerous, futile, and foolish game in the world, the age-old Asiatic game of world conquest, the madmen’s chessmatch as old as history.

It is a game of power and the rules only exist as tricks to trap one’s opponent, and words and courtesies serve only to obfuscate and deceive. The game is endemic to the steppes of Asia, and the Asiatics are better at it than we can ever hope to be: for us to play the game and play it their way is simply suicide.

But this vision of world power, of massive armies and machines engulfing the surface of the earth as they grind all opposition to powder, is an intoxicating one, the ultimate dream that I have many times heard generals talking about among themselves and to their staff. After all, say these realists, it is power that wins in this world. God is on the side of the big battalions.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 2:11

There's such a thing as good force, and there's an attractive force as well as a compulsive force. . . . If we are obeying the law because we regard it as a holy thing, because we love it, we're still being forced, but we're being attracted rather than compelled in that case. . . .

Can there be some great attractive force that would bring about some sort of world peace without the compulsive force? This is the old Jerusalem formula. It's very ancient, very well-established, and has been given lots of trials and it's still being tried today. . . . It's the doctrine that peace will only come when the law goes forth out of Jerusalem, when all men are drawn toward it, when the law is given to the world as a holy thing. And it can't even be secular. It has to be given as a revealed thing.

"Jerusalem's Formula for Peace," 1-2

Faith is the source of strength, the very power by which the worlds were created. To say it is helpless without military backing recalls an ancient saw: "I trust God but I feel better with money in the bank." In the spirit of the times we preach that to expect security without a four-man bodyguard is futile, when security is *not* to need a bodyguard; that charity without a guaranteed profit is futile, when charity means asking *no* profit; that free agency without strict supervision is futile.

"The Prophetic Book of Mormon," *CWHN* 8:452-53

Peace will only come when the law goes forth out of Jerusalem; when all men are drawn toward it; when the law is given to the world as a holy thing. And it can't even be secular; it has to be given as a revealed thing.

"Jerusalem's Formula for Peace," 2

THE VIRTUE OF POLITICS

There is . . . virtue in politics even at the human level. The energy, the dedication, courage, loyalty, selflessness, zeal, and industry, the intelligence that have gone into the political actions of men are immense, and the excitement, color, dash, and humor bring out some of the best in human nature. But . . . there are various levels at which the political dialogue takes place—all the way from the *Federalist Papers* to the local crackpot's letters to the editor—and many arenas and different forms of the game, differing as widely as a chess match from a slugging contest.

Let us by all means retain the drive and dedication of politics, but do we still need the placards and the bands, the serpentine parades, funny hats, confetti, squabbling committees, canned speeches, shopworn clichés, patriotic exhibitionism, Madison Avenue slogans, to say nothing of the bitter invective, the poisonous rhetoric, the dirty tricks and shady deals, payoffs, betrayals, the blighted loyalties, the scheming young men on the make, the Gadianton loyalty, the manipulated ovations, and contrived confusion of the Last Hurrah?

The furiously mounting infusion of green stuff into the political carnival in our day is enough to show that the spontaneity is not there; and even if some of it may remain, those running the show know very well from tried and tested statistics that all that sort of thing is to be got with money—lots and lots of money—and with nothing else.

“Beyond Politics,” 286-87

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Whether the Greek pursued philosophy, art, religion, pleasure, science, or money, he was willing to give the search everything he had—sacrificing every convenience and amenity. The ideal of the Greeks was the *sophos* [life of the mind]—completely selfless, oblivious to his own comfort, health, appearance, and appetites as his mind came to grips with the problem of achieving one particular objective. That is why the Greeks were anciently way out in front of others in almost every field of human endeavor—and still remain unsurpassed and even unequalled in many of them.

The Greek citizen not only spent the day in the agora [marketplace], but in the evenings at home he carried on the dialogue in discussion and study groups, for the Greek citizen knew that the only work worthy of the name, a work a hundred times harder than the repetitious routines and seemingly virtuous bootlicking that we call work, was the terribly demanding and exhausting task of cutting new grooves and channels with the sharp edge of the mind.

He felt that if politics was all that important, it was worth [his] best hours.

“Beyond Politics,” 304-5, n. 42

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Our storm-driven ancestors met the challenge of their predicament with two solutions: the one sought to make the earth a permanent home and possess it wholly; the other to move on to some happier home, whatever and wherever that might be. The one philosophy is based on the firm belief that this is our only world, the other on the equally convincing and far more easily demonstrable proposition that we are transients who “here have no abiding kingdom.” The paying of tolls and taxes has made it possible for the two ideologies to coexist in the world; it is an arrangement by which each side humors the other: the payer of taxes concedes to the recipient the right to imagine himself as the owner of the earth, while the other in return for this recognition allows his client the luxury of imagining himself the citizen of another world. The one while ceaselessly ranging abroad in the earth thinks of himself as lord of an immovable possession, while the other, tied to his patch of glebe or dingy workshop, thinks of himself as a courser through the endless expanses of heaven. The common symbol of both, the sign both of possession and of wandering, is the tent.

Living in an atmosphere of emergency and uncertainty, the state has always been obligated to tax to preserve its identity. Taxes are viewed by those who are asked to pay the most as a personal insult and an affront to the sacredness of property. That is exactly what they are, and what they were originally meant to be. An ancient tax-notice, an imperious tap on the shield, was nothing less than an invitation to a sojourner in a land to justify his presence there either by satisfying the claims of the owner to recognition or by meeting him in open combat for possession. We may deplore taxes, but we may not resent them.

“Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” *CWHN* 10:69-70

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Conformity can be had by bribery, flattery, or force, but one can no more legislate loyalty than one can legislate love, of which it is a part. . . . Since the essence of loyalty is *disinterested* devotion, there is something distressing in the attempts of the fourth (or any) century to conjure it up by appeals to interest, fear or expediency. . . .

Loyalty is one of the few words in existence about whose meaning dispute is virtually impossible. Everyone knows what loyalty is, and what a desirable, nay, indispensable thing it is to the survival of any community. Like honor and chastity, it is strongest when least talked about, and thrives only in a climate of uncritical acceptance. A virtuous investigation of loyalty is like a noisy oration in praise of silence, and the appearance of loyalty orders and loyalty legislation . . . [are] a sign of lost confidence, a desperate groping in empty air for something which groping fingers only push farther out of reach.

“Unsolved Loyalty Problem,” *CWHN* 10:224

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To “use” patriotism, treating it as a tool rather than a precious jewel, is to abuse it. Yet like other goods of primary intent, it has a special function. The business of patriotism is to open doors; the *abuse* of patriotism shuts them.

“Uses and Abuses of Patriotism,” 188

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Some have felt that the attempt of the state to implement the ideas of liberty and equality by passing and enforcing laws repugnant to a majority or minority, i.e., laws restraining persecution, discrimination, slavery, and all violence whatever, is an infringement of free agency. But plainly the Nephites did not think so. As we have seen, they believed that no one was ever without his free agency. One can sin or do unrighteously under any form of government whatever. Indeed, the *worse* the government the better the test: after all, we are all being tried and tested on this earth “under the rule of Belial” himself, “the prince of this world”; but since no one can ever make us sin or do right, our free agency is never in the slightest danger.

But free institutions and civil liberties are, as history shows, in constant danger. They are even attacked by those who would justify their actions as a defense of free agency and insist that artificial barriers erected by law to protect the rights of unpopular and weak minorities are an attempt to limit that agency.

How far can men go in “counselling” their fellowmen? God can give life and he can take it, he can judge and he can punish, he can smite the blasphemer and the unbeliever, he can heal and bless at will, he can forgive or condemn whom he will, he can curse and he can segregate, and he can put a mark on whom he pleases, and be avenged on his enemies—all of which we learn from the Book of Mormon.

But *men* may *not* do these things. God has reserved judgment and punishment for himself and pronounced terrible penalties on any man who shall presume to exercise those high offices. In punishing Cain he pronounced seven-fold vengeance upon any mortal who should presume to contribute to that punishment.

“Good People and Bad People,” *CWHN* 7:352-53

THE CONSTITUTION

It is more than Fourth of July rhetoric when the Latter-day Saints declare that the Constitution is an inspired document. It actually is the restoration to the earth of that ancient law of liberty which has been preached by the prophets in every age, allowing every man to act in doctrine and principle according to the moral agency which God has given him, to be accountable for his own sins on the day of judgment.

“The Ancient Law of Liberty,” *CWHN* 3:190

The genius of the Constitution is not that it guarantees every man a chance to “succeed,” as we are often told (has there ever been a government under which clever, determined, and unscrupulous men could not get to the top?), but that it gives the same inviolable rights and immunities to rich and poor alike, the only qualification for their enjoyment being their humanity. They are *human* rights pure and simple.

“Uses and Abuses of Patriotism,” 194

It was the glorious principles of the Bill of Rights that opened the door to the gospel in this dispensation. That was the indispensable implementation of the gospel, without, however, being part or parcel of that plan which transcends all earthly disciplines.

“How Firm a Foundation!” *CWHN* 9:151