

The Noble Nation

“A noble man makes noble plans, and by noble plans he stands.” (Isaiah 32:8 NASB)

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed,
And on the pedestal these words appear:
*"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"*
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

*(Ozymandias*¹ - Percy Bysshe Shelley 1792-1822)

The world stands on tip-toe to see what the USA will become. Inside ourselves we ask: “Will the USA become a Noble Nation – a true civilization that is remembered with respect and with affection and which lights the way for others to follow? Or shall the USA become another great but doomed empire like that of Ozymandias - arrogant and ultimately desolate?”

There is a vast difference between being merely a “great and mighty empire” based on military or economic power (like that of the Mongols - as we shall see later) and the spiritual far-sightedness and corporate conscience of a great and noble civilization based on a sincere attempt to enact truth and justice, like that of China, Greece or Rome. The USA needs to consciously decide on the better course.

WHAT IS A NOBLE NATION?

A Noble Nation has a profound sense of justice founded on a deep faith in God (such as the rule of David and Solomon) or a worthy guiding philosophy such as that of Confucius. A Noble Nation knows when to use power – and when not to, and has a sense of the “good of mankind”, as a whole. Isaiah 32:8 in the New American Standard Version says: “A noble man makes noble plans, and by noble plans he stands.” Similarly the Noble Nation has a noble vision of the future, which it stands by.

The truly noble ruler never abandons the rule of law. Process is protected and the law and the constitution are revered. At the heart of nobility is impartiality. Noble people act without fear or favor and treat both rich and poor with equal justice. If the government

¹ Ozymandias was the Greek name of Ramses II (1279-1212 BC) who may have been the “Pharaoh” of the Exodus narrative. The statue in the poem is outside his burial tomb (see <http://www.savagenet.com/oz/Oz/real.htm>) .

panders to the rich and abandons the poor or gives contracts to friends, without proper processes being followed, then the government has taken a tawdry turn. In the Law of Moses even strangers, enemies and the poor deserve due process and proper consideration.

Exodus 23:1-9 (NKJV) *"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. 2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. 3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.*

4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

6 "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. 7 Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. 8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.

9 "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Noble Nation even lifts the burdens of its enemies and does not even leave an animal in a state of helplessness (verse 4&5 above). Verse 2 is important in a democracy "You shall not turn after a crowd to do evil". Even if the pollsters seem to advocate a morally dubious course of action the government is not obliged to follow it. A noble government sticks with unpopular – but righteous policies. A noble government maintains due legal process even under pressure from the masses and does not "*turn aside after many to pervert justice*".

The Noble Nation does not sell its soul. "*And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.*" Such "bribery" can be the overt taking of actual bribes or giving undue influence to lobbyists and large political donors.

Being noble also means to act with respect of all persons, recognizing they are made in the image of God, and that we are all descended from "one blood" (Noah) (Acts 17:26) – and thus to give the poor fair and equal access to power. It is not noble to be elitist or racist, or to be contemptuously dismissive of others. In the godly courts of David and Solomon even prostitutes could plead their case before the King! (1 Kings 3:16-28)

Lastly being noble also means possessing a spiritual far-sightedness that transcends the grubby immediacy of trade and conquest. It involves the development of policies that have a deep intuitive sense of long-term justice, constitutional effects and social implications. A Noble Nation aims to build a just and joyous society not merely a prosperous economy or a military hegemony.

This spiritual far-sightedness understands the value of truth held dearly as the core of the nation around which all else revolves. The Noble Nation eschews propaganda or the systematic deception and manipulation of the people. The noble government understands that lies defile the heart of the nation. People will not be lied to for long. Once the government abandons the truth the people soon abandon the government.

The Noble Nation takes seriously the power of example and of precedent. It understands that the people follow the ruler – only more so. If the government is slightly dishonest,

then the people will take this as a lead to be even more dishonest and if the government is corrupt the people will be without restraint. On the other hand if the government sets high principles many will adopt them and over time the national character will be improved.

In the twenty-first century America is the nation that sets a global example and so logically it must set global standards that are excellent. The emerging democracies of Asia, Africa and the Middle East are not helped when the USA abandons due process, awards lucrative contracts to election campaign contributors, or imprisons people without trial. The corrupt leaders of some nations can point to such US actions as justification for some of their worst excesses.

Yet there is clearly a risk when a great nation chooses to become a Noble Nation. There is a psychological risk in transparency and justice and equality – especially for those in power. There is a risk involved in listening to God, heeding conscience and obeying the law. And there is a risk in respecting the voice of the international community.

A Noble Nation loses its braggadocio. It humbles itself before the truth and before the demands of justice. It endures criticism and often “turns the other cheek” to lesser threats while still dealing strongly with evil. This path of humility and conscience is a risk to ego that most powerful elites have refused to take - and this is part of the reason why their statues lie crumbling in the sands of time.

Nobility also often involves a risk to short-term material gain; for instance from unjust trade or from military might that is deployed inappropriately. And not only does a Noble Nation refuse certain sources of income, it also racks up certain expenses – such as welfare, education and international aid. Thus there must be a solid core commitment to a certain national philosophy combined with a steadfast belief that if noble courses of action are followed then a greater ultimate prosperity will be achieved. Just one simple example - it easy to spend money on arms that should be spent of educating the poor (as happens in Africa) but when the uneducated poor commit crimes, the cost of the crimes, and the post potential and productivity, far outweigh the gain from the extra military power. If the long-term view is taken, the Noble Nation will attain a stability and productivity and sense of dignity that far outstrips the fast profits and ego boosts that flow from the systematic abuse of power.

The Noble Nation works diligently to construct a productive, functional, just and enduring civilization rather than having a few years of great glory based on conquest, consumption, pillage, and injustice. In the thirteenth century the Mongols² conquered the largest contiguous land empire ever created, extending from the border of Austria all the way to Korea – and left utter desolation and disorder in their wake. They conquered both Russia and China and united them into nations. Despite this greatness, despite the lasting impact on geo-politics, and their strict and punishing laws known as the Yassa they are regarded as barbarians, who contributed nothing and destroyed everything. By direct contrast the Chinese, who the Mongols conquered for more than a century, are seen today as a great and principled civilization. History does not reward raw power and pragmatism.

² For a concise history of the Mongol Empire:
<http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/intro.html>

With these twin guidelines of history and Scripture we need to look at US trade policy, US foreign policy and US domestic policy to find out what is needed if a truly noble America is to emerge and light the path of history.

TRADE

Trading empires such as the Phoenician Empire (biblical Tyre and Sidon) and the Dutch East India Company have come and gone throughout history, and they generally leave very little mark on the landscape. Trade empires tend to evaporate, unless like the British Empire, they become a political empire with a clear sense of values. Trade empires become wealthy and their wealth creates envy and brings conquerors, such as Alexander the Great who conquered Tyre. (Someone once said that unprotected wealth is the cause of all war.) Trade can lead quickly to corruption and massive injustice.³

It would take a great leap of imagination to even characterize US trade policy as fair trade - let alone as noble policy. Despite various WTO rulings the USA is a dominant and very self-interested player in world economic affairs. There is considerable evidence that US trade policy is severely detrimental to many developing nations.⁴ There is little constraint applied to the more ruthless multi-nationals and in some areas such as arms, oil, agriculture and pharmaceuticals there are deep ethical concerns about US policy.⁵ The current administration seems to be actively encouraging exploitative trade policy while ignoring the concerns of a growing chorus of “fair trade” advocates. This has resulted in widespread international resentment. In fact the intelligence services have been co-opted in support of US economic objectives and in 1993 the CIA and the National Security Agency were tasked with gathering economic intelligence - ostensibly to spy on European attempts at bribery, however there is some evidence that it has taken on a much wider role.⁶

What then is required of a “Noble Nation”? The Scriptures give us seven clear and wise guidelines for fair trade:

1. Honest balances – including fair exchange rates and just pricing mechanisms. (Leviticus 19:36, Deuteronomy 25:13, Proverbs 16:11, 20:10,23 Micah 6:11)
2. Consideration of the effect of our actions upon other people. (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31)
3. Payment of fair wages. (Malachi 3:5, James 5:1-4)
4. No bribery, extortion, profiteering or usury. (Leviticus 25:36-37, Deuteronomy 23:19,20 Proverbs 28:8, Ezekiel 22:12, Deuteronomy 23:8. Psalm 15:5, 2 Chronicles 19:7)
5. Compassionate lending to the poor. (Exodus 22:25, Deuteronomy 15:1-11)
6. Forgiveness of debts after a set period of time – every seventh year at the Festival of Booths. (Deuteronomy 15:1,2; 31:10)
7. Regular correction of accumulated gross economic imbalances, especially in the distribution of land, every fifty years in the year of Jubilee. (Leviticus 25:5-55)

These biblical principles have a deep resonance with both justice and common sense. No-one can argue with the need for fair means of exchange or with the payment of just

³ “The Market, The Kingdom and the Terrorists” <http://www.aibi.ph/ebooks>

⁴ <http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/ffd/2002/1126kaunda.htm> and <http://www.globalissues.org>

⁵ The Market The Kingdom and The Terrorists chapter 7
http://www.aibi.ph/tmk/tmk7_the_heart_of_darkness.htm

⁶ <http://www.heise.de/tp/english/inhalt/co/6662/1.html> and
<http://www.heise.de/tp/english/inhalt/te/6929/1.html>

wages or the non-payment of bribes. The lending principles can still guide us even though may need some modern updating. The clear promise of Scripture is that the nation that follows such policies will know incredible blessing (Deuteronomy 15). Certainly such a nation would be a blessing on a global scale. Trade could and would still go on in such a nation but it would not be “trade as usual”, unrestrained and assertive. Rather it would be fair trade, that is prosperity tempered by justice and humanity. This would lead to genuine prosperity – a civilization, a place where human dignity could find its true worth.

FOREIGN POLICY

A Noble Nation has a discerning, principled, wise and considerate foreign policy based on a deep understanding of the issues and a sense of what “the right thing to do” in each situation is. The twin evils of ruthless pragmatism and over-benevolence (which creates dependency) are avoided. Foreign policy needs to be sufficiently “thick-skinned” to receive the criticisms of friends and allies and to hear the voice of the international community without taking undue offence. While the USA must remain a sovereign and independent nation that makes its own policy decisions - it must make those decisions with a sense of deep connection to the rest of the globe. As someone who has lived the bulk of my life in Asia and the Pacific I can say that the cry is for a more understanding America that has a much deeper grasp of the region and is much more sensitive to the “on the ground issues”. To smaller developing nations the USA is like an elephant among grasshoppers and the grasshoppers want the elephant to be careful where it treads!

All human beings are made in the image of God and are of great value. The U.S. Declaration of Independence says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Logically this “all men” also applies to the other nations of the world and a noble foreign policy would assist these nations in their pursuit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – and not detract from their inalienable rights. The past support of brutal dictatorships and puppet governments against the wishes, interest and self-determination of the people of those nations - needs to be reviewed.

DOMESTIC POLICY

A noble domestic policy develops an internal culture and civilization which helps every person to achieve the best that can they can reasonably achieve in life, ensures they live in safety and enables them to receive the justice that is their due. It also allows new discoveries to be made and implemented and new truths to be propagated so the nation develops in wisdom and does not fossilize or decline.

A Noble Nation avoids the development of an elite that is “above the law” – or which can receive major concessions from it. In history, the development of such over-privileged elites often immediately precedes the decline of the nation or empire. The most fundamental characteristic of government in Scripture is absolute impartiality (Exodus 23:1-9, Leviticus 19:15, Malachi 2:8,9) . Therefore favoritism, nepotism, and “special interest groups” that have an undue access to power are a clear violation of God’s standards of justice. Democracy is undermined when power is taken from the people and given to the friends of those in power.

The Noble Nation also avoids discriminatory policies based on race, gender or religious faith. The US has made major advances in these areas. However there is room for improvement in health care, basic education in urban areas and in equal justice for the aged, the poor, and for the mentally ill. There are thirty-five million Americans living in poverty and a great section of the nation is rapidly becoming a seething underclass without hope of economic prosperity or fair legal redress in the courts.

Finally in a Noble Nation the primary role of the government is the betterment of the people, not the rash pursuit of glory. When projects, wars, conquests and space exploration are pursued at the expense of the national good then they become questionable. The glory of a nation will become evident in other things such as its culture, technological prowess, education and scholarship and its contribution to mankind and above all, in its righteous living by the laws of God. Wars only achieve a soon fading glory - at high expense. Rulers can sometimes become "addicted" to the glory, adrenalin and pomp of military victory (1 Kings 20:1) and thus deplete the nation in battle after battle. Yet we don't remember Greece for her conquests but for her culture. Our national esteem must come from who we are in ourselves, not on the basis of who we can beat on the battlefield.

Nobility goes far beyond mere piety or religiosity to involve deep issues of justice and ethics. To have leaders who are faithful church-going Christians is a good start. Yet spiritual far-sightedness and noble action requires more than mere conversion. It involves genuine spiritual maturity and moral courage - that is diligently and intelligently applied to actual real world issues.

The USA has great power and it faces a choice on how it will be used. This is not an easy choice but it is a choice which time has come. The USA is poised to decide her character and thus decide her destiny - and the world waits on tiptoes for the outcome.

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