



Written by on October 12, 2010

National Law of the Harvest

There is a Christian church in America that contends, as did many of our Christian forefathers, that America “is a choice land; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and captivity, and from all other nations under heaven; if they but serve the God of this land, who is Jesus Christ.” (1) An interesting tenet.



Over the years, thousands of Christians of various denominations have expressed similar sentiments in letters to this writer. Political liberty, they believe, is not merely the product of a superior political system — but rather a gift from God, a gift contingent upon the level of faith and fidelity to a few fixed laws and to the Author of those laws. Trample on this gift and this gift will be, as they say, “history.”

On one level, this is a matter of natural law. Benjamin Franklin observed: “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt, they have more need of masters.” (2)

But it is also a matter of religious principle. As Paul put it, “be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (3)

Christians call this the Law of the Harvest. Economists know it as the free market. It is also known as “the Law of Restoration.” We read, “Do not suppose ... that [men] shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.”

That is, sooner or later, one way or another, men and women are rewarded or punished according to their works – and despite wishes or claims or appearances to the contrary, never is the reward or punishment to “a state opposite to [our] nature,” but always to a state consistent with it. As one chooses good, good returns; as one chooses evil, then evil. “[T]hat which [we] send out shall return again unto [us].” (4)

Everyone knows it. Even the kid on the street repeats the mantra, “What goes around comes around!” But we need more than kids on the streets parroting common sense; we need men and women in government and other positions of influence who will stand up and declare that what-goes-around-comes-around is valid and that this principle applies not just to individuals but also to nations.

A letter to the editor published in the Sept. 17, 1764, issue of the *Boston Gazette*, did just that when it asserted:

There is an inseparable connection between publick virtue and publick happiness: Individuals, we are assured, must render an account hereafter of every part of their moral conduct in this state; but communities, as their existence will cease with this world, can neither be rewarded or punish’d as such in the next: It therefore appears rational to conclude, that present rewards and punishments are distributed to them, according to their present moral behavior. (5)

This was common belief two centuries ago. God, in his wisdom, chooses to delay the full brunt or blessing of individual rewards and punishments to the hereafter; nations reap here and now based on collective performance.

Consistent with this assertion we read, “if the time comes that the voice of the people [the majority]



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doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come.” (6) And from Job: “If they obey and serve [God], they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in [pleasantness]. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.” (7)

Modern man generally has a hard time seeing the connection, if he sees it at all. A century and a half ago, the connection was already blurring for many — so thought President Lincoln. In a proclamation calling for a national fast day on March 30, 1863, he reflected:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

Lincoln referred to two great national sins, pride and ingratitude, two trigger points for so many others like slavery, factionalism, religious intolerance and, finally, bare-knuckled, bloodcurdling warfare between former brethren.

One may call the Civil War a political war or a moral war — but Lincoln may have put his finger on the ultimate cause of that war when he asked:

[M]ay we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People?

How can we ignore this probing question, even today? Lincoln, like Franklin, like the writer in the *Boston Gazette*, like the scriptural authorities, was willing to admit and affirm that the Law of the Harvest is real. Said Lincoln, “[W]e know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world.”

How presumptuous to think otherwise. And so, he added:

[I]t is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

He next pleaded with America, North and South, to turn to God and repent. “It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.” (8) The war raged on, however; and one can’t help but believe that there were lessons yet to be learned, as Lincoln reflected elsewhere.

Eighty-eight years earlier — nearly to the day — a young Christian Thomas Paine foresaw a day of reckoning for any nation that embraced slavery. Paine predicted: “I firmly believe the Almighty ... will curtail the power of Britain.” Why?

[E]ver since the discovery of America she has employed herself in the most horrid of all traffics, that of human flesh. ... [Y]early (without provocation and in cold blood) [she has] ravaged the



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hapless shores of Africa, robbing its unoffending inhabitants to cultivate her stolen dominions in the West.

Most shocking of all is [their] alleging the Sacred Scripture to favour this wicked practice. ... Such arguments ill become us, since the time of reformation came, under Gospel light. All distinctions of nations and privileges of one above another, are ceased; Christians are taught to account all men their neighbours; and love their neighbours as themselves; and do to all men as they would be done by; to do good to all men; and Man-stealing is ranked with enormous crimes.

Is the barbarous enslaving our inoffensive neighbours, and treating them like wild beasts subdued by force, reconcilable with the Divine precepts!

Paine understood one could only strike against the order of God so far and for so long before God would intervene. And “man trade” was that sort of extreme sin — “an unnatural commodity!” he called it — the kind of which makes open war on Nature and the plan of God for man, and in its wake encourages so many other extremes and unnatural acts. Paine numbered them:

... selling husbands away from wives, children from parents, and from each other, in violation of sacred and natural ties; and opening the way for adulteries, incests, and many shocking consequences, [including, the shedding of innocent blood, and the robbing of dominions].

Reason and conscience were crushed. One of the greatest sins of all, Paine believed, was this:

The past treatment of Africans must naturally fill them with abhorrence of Christians; make them think our religion would make them more inhuman savages, if they embraced it; thus the gain of that trade has been pursued in opposition to the Redeemer’s Cause, and the happiness of men. [F]or all of which the guilty Masters [he called them “pretended Christians” and “devils”] must answer to the final Judge. ...

And answer they would.

[I]n compassion to mankind, God would act. Britain’s power would be curtailed; the commencement of that curtailment would occur in America. When I reflect on these, I hesitate not for a moment to believe that the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain. Call it independence if you will, if it is the cause of God and humanity it will go on.

Perhaps prophetically, he continued:

And when the Almighty shall have blessed us, and made us a people dependent upon him, then may our first gratitude be shown by an act of continental legislation, which shall put an end to the importation of negroes for sale, soften the hard fate of those already here, and in time procure their freedom. (9)

These things all occurred, as Paine predicted. Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution began the legislative process in the United States Paine was calling for from Britain, as it demanded the prohibition of the importation of slaves starting in 1808. But America dragged her feet in finishing the job, our nation split over the issue, and in time it was settled in a most unpleasant manner. Not surprisingly, America’s system of government, especially the principle of local and state government has suffered ever since for the rank hypocrisy, ingratitude and pride of a large number of her citizens and states.

Is there, then, a national Law of the Harvest? Does a nation pay for its collective sins? In answer, some will say sin has always been with us, and so what of it? And the retort is, well of course; but do we not



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cross the line in our time, as we did with slavery, when we place laws on the books which promote, encourage, legitimize and even glorify sin, and others which simultaneously discourage, deligitimize, and even scorn virtue? Ought not such policies be firmly rejected by all men and women of faith and reason as extreme and dangerous? Is there not any sense that a nation that promotes sin and suppresses faith has entered upon a path similar to those which raise hammer and sickle against “the Redeemer’s Cause, and the happiness of men”? Does a day of reckoning await America?

President John Adams once observed, quoting Proverbs, “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” (10)

Perhaps we can learn from such men – before it is too late. For the day of harvest, like the rising and setting of the sun, is sure to come.

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Footnotes

1. Ether 2:12, Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1989.
2. Smyth, Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 9:569.
3. Galatians 6:7, King James Version, “The Holy Bible.”
4. Alma 41:10-15, Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.
5. Hyneman, Charles S. and Lutz, Donald S. “American Political Writing during the Founding Era, 1760-1805, Volume I,” Indianapolis, Liberty Press 1983, p. 38.
6. Mosiah 29:27, Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.
7. Job 36:11-12, King James Version, “The Holy Bible.”
8. Abraham Lincoln. “The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln,” ed. Roy P. Basler.
9. Van der Weyde, William M (editor). “The Life and Works of Thomas Paine,” Volume II, New Rochelle, New York, Thomas Paine National Historical Association, 1925, pgs. 1-10. The essays are “A Serious Thought,” October 18, 1775; and “African Slavery in America,” March 8, 1775, as they appeared in the Pennsylvania Journal. Paine, who many falsely assume was never a Christian (because they’ve only read or heard about his big mistake, “The Age of Reason,” which he wrote in France, and neglect his best work and writing while in America), saw the need to eventually preach what he called, “the Divine Religion,” of Christianity, as did the “Primitive Christians,” ... “not only to the slaves here, but the Africans in their own countries,” as part of our national duty and penance to these “injured people!” Miraculously African Americans embraced Christianity despite the poor example of so many Christians.
10. John Adams, “Works of John Adams,” Vol. IX, p. 172. “Messages and Papers of the Presidents, John Adams,” vol. 1, p. 274-276. “A Proclamation by President John Adams,” March 6, 1799.



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