



The Real State of the Union By Dennis Peacocke

This is not another critique of President Obama nor an endorsement of conservative or liberal political perspectives. It is far more important than that. It is an attempt to deal with three of the root issues most afflicting us as a nation and, to some degree, the greater part of western culture. It is seldom discussed per se and attempts to illustrate why that until our national conversation changes, it makes a relatively small difference which parties are in office. Until we can truly communicate as a people, the merry-go-round goes on and on with little lasting core changes.

Many of our core problems are not being resolved; instead they are being re-described, recycled, and re-log-jammed as liberals and conservatives take turns capturing the anger and dissatisfaction of both the people at large and the special interest groups on each side. We are self-perpetuating victims of our own conceptual neuroses. The fundamentals of our economy, educational systems, and the deep ruts of our public dialogue prohibit conversations that would allow us to define what must change in order to affect real change.

Back to Square One:

Three Critically Missing Elements of Our Nation's Mind-Set

You can't change what you can't see. You can't see what you don't want to see. And you won't see what you don't want to see until a severe enough interruption forces you to see the real state of the union. How severe must our national interruption be in order for us to re-calibrate our national and global conversations? While a number of likely opinions exist on specifically what it will take to jolt us into reality, let us pass by that and go straight to where we must go as quietly as God would grant us to get there.

1. We must recognize that all personal decisions take place in the context of community!

Personal opportunities and rights, either directly or indirectly, affect the whole of the community. The right and left cannot and will not begin to constructively communicate until both sides truly understand that their respective opinions champion only their half of this mutual equation. Freedom, as Jesus said, is identifying your ultimate truths and then living them out in the context of loving your neighbor.

Advantages for the gifted or well-positioned, unless they are related to some clear benefit for others, undercut our union and become roadblocks to our faith in the system. The lazy and indolent, the true criminals, penalize us all in the reality of our social teeter-totter just as much as the insider super-rich eviscerate our will to honestly work for fair returns on our labor and investments. As a union we cannot whole-heartedly applaud those whose freedoms gave them success, nor can we clearly know when to replace compassion with rebuke regarding those who want something for nothing. There must be true consequences for both a socially rigged system and the offenders on both sides of this social balancing act.

This being the case, we can't keep the conversation "real." All we do is talk to ourselves and constantly stay in the spinning squirrel cage of recycled temporary social and legislative "victories" until the other side of our union capitalizes on the disequilibrium and regains the upper-hand. Until now, this game has only been boring to those who have seen it. Though I fear it is becoming

The Bottom Line

Kingdom Notes on
Discipling Nations

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truly dangerous. What is good for one of us must find some way to be good for all of us. In a self-interested, fallen world this is not completely possible, but our national union may only hold together if it makes this concept both a goal and a practiced mantra of our social conversation.

2. We must begin to make principle-based decisions rather than simply expedient or pressure-driven decisions.

For many of us who are educated or trained in the disciplines of history and social thought, the “normal” political dialogue is a constant vexation. Our most common reaction to the dialogues or personal rhetorics is, “Where did you get that ideal? Where in history has it proven itself beneficial? And why don’t you explain to us the principled reasoning behind this idea?” Even when some are able to do this, it frequently fails the test of balance we just discussed. What are the personal and social ramifications of this idea, both now in this context, and anywhere else it has been deployed? For me, the test of truth is this: What does this idea or principle actually produce when applied to every generation, ethnic group, and personal and social organization? Ideas do indeed have consequences.

We have largely degenerated our national dialogue into an exercise in accusations, undefined terms, and emotionally-charged phrases designed to trigger socially-conditioned responses and appeals to self interest that once again negate the reality that principle-based decisions must render their due to individuals and the larger community. Our economic dialogue, our educational system, our social media and entertainment are filled with destructive, divisive, self-centered and prejudicial half-truths or no-truths designed to once again say, “I am right and you are wrong because you oppose my opinions or life-style.” The state of the union is self-centered and not principle-centered. We are so far away from our founding documents, so unaware of what the social functions of transcendent truths are as the “glue of our union,” that without a principle-based response to whatever calamities interrupt our increasing divisions, we have no reasonable hope for future social peace.

Some may say this whole line of reasoning is too idealistic. To you I would say that the foundations of this nation rest upon principle-based idealism and spirituality-based truth. If we got here riding that train, I believe that if we get off it we will step not down upon solid ground but thin air.

3. We must recognize that ideas and principles must prove their merits in the reality of their results.

I worked as a research economist and speed writer for the labor unions some years ago. As such, I commonly referred to and used statistical information. Mark Twain, the American humorist, is quoted as saying, “There are lies, damn lies, and statistics.” I can only say “Amen.” Prejudicially constructed numbers can say very strange things. However, gravity exists and in a defined context the laws of reality are highly probable, or “science” itself is a colossal con game. Ideas have consequences.

Over the last decades, a number of social scientists and commentators have observed what is commonly called “the end of ideology.” It means the mind-rigidity and trapped thinking of being a “communist” or a “socialist” or a “capitalist” is passing away amongst the enlightened thinkers of our day. While this may contain a measure of truth, both left and right antagonists continue to publicly argue over ideas or results that either are unproven, dishonestly presented, or carelessly disconnected from results-based reality. It has become a common notion that if someone’s idea is sincerely held, it need not be connected to results-based reality, and to assert that it should be is prejudiced and intolerant. There is much I could say about this phenomenon of being trapped in our minds rather than living in the reality of a results-based environment. I need say here only this: Reality is not a hope or a conviction; when lived out, it creates results.

If our state of union is to survive, let alone thrive, we need to carefully consider these three very fundamental necessities for a real dialogue with the potential to deliver us from our current, “stuck” conversational impasse. We need statesmen and stateswomen to rise above being on the “right side” and all be on one side. Indeed, while varied points of view are essential, union is dissolved when those varied points of view are all too much about me and not enough about us. And that is...

...the bottom line.