

The Pragmatic Idealist

By Ronald L. Dart

I used to think “pragmatic” was a bad word. I had heard it applied to this or that politician, which almost automatically gives it a bad name. I don’t know why it bothered me, unless it was because I believed (and I still do) that there is an ideal that we should all strive for and that we should not compromise that ideal. I thought pragmatism meant that you were somehow selling out. But the definition is: “relating to matters of fact or practical affairs often to the exclusion of intellectual or artistic matters: practical as opposed to idealistic.”

The President can promise the moon, but can barely deliver green cheese

So do we act on principle, or on what works? The pragmatic politician is not necessarily unprincipled, but he adjusts his principles to what can reasonably and realistically be done. In the 2008 presidential campaign for example, Mike Huckabee promised a “fair tax.” Good idea. I am all for it. The problem? It will never take place. The reason is simple enough. Congress has to make the laws about taxes. The President can promise the moon,

but he can barely deliver green cheese. There were times in the 2008 campaign that some, not all, of the candidates were running for emperor. They were promising to do things that they simply would not have the power to do.

Idealistic vs Pragmatic?

Don’t get me wrong. I like idealism. I am a bit of idealist myself. But consider this: What if the ideals, the principles being acted on, turn out to be wrong? Was Hitler, for example, idealistic or pragmatic? Hitler had an ideal of a master race. It was unrealistic, but never mind. To achieve his master race, getting rid of the Jews was an important step. But that wasn’t all, not by a long shot. He ended up getting more than 30

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million people killed for his ideal Germany.

I am coming to fear idealism more than pragmatism. The reason is simple: Idealists too often don’t give enough thought to the practical consequences of what they want to do. There is this thing called “the law of unintended consequences.” Take the decision to transfer the terrorists from Guantanamo to New York for trial. As far as I can tell, this decision is based almost exclusively on

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You’ve Asked . . .

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For Such a Time as This

By Lenny Cacchio

Over the millennia, religious folks have often felt the need to separate themselves from the world and its foibles, whether it be to hole up in a monastery, form separate communities, or even to trek across mountains, prairies, and oceans for a completely new start in an untamed land.

I understand the sentiment. I confess to having such thoughts in my melancholy moments. After being bombarded with several days worth of distressing news stories, I have blurted out more than once a desire to move to Honduras or other such climes and, while the events of the past few weeks have changed my fantasy destination, the desire to tell the world where to get off is a very real one.

In 1527, the plague afflicted the German city of Wittenberg. Wittenberg is otherwise famous as the site where Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* on the church door. Luther was in the city at the time of this plague while many of the residents were leaving for healthier locations. The question naturally arose: What is the duty of the Christian in such a time as this?

Luther gave his answer in his treatise *Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague*. Wrote Luther, "This I know, that if it were Christ or his mother who were laid low by illness everybody would be so solicitous and would gladly become a servant or helper. Everyone would want to be bold or fearless; nobody would flee but

everyone would come running. If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well; you have a sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him."

Martin Luther in essence was saying what many Christian teachers have said for many years: It's time for the church to be the church. This is an ailing world, and times such as these require a cadre of committed people who have their wits about them and are motivated by nothing less than a willingness to serve.

The world is hurting and it needs us. Perhaps, as with Esther, we have been brought to the kingdom for such a time as this.

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idealism (unless, of course, it is entirely cynical). The reason I say this is because the practical, pragmatic thing to do is just try them in Guantanamo and execute sentence there.

I have heard it said that other nations will be impressed with how we apply our Constitution fairly. That is, it is good PR. But consider the real world consequences of the decision: It will be far more expensive. It will be a media circus. It will be downright inconvenient for New Yorkers. It may even prove to be dangerous.

And I keep asking myself, “What is the upside?” Practically speaking, there is no upside. It has to be idealism driving this. So what ideals are driving this forward? Some talking heads on TV might lead one to think that it is the Bush administration that will be on trial along with the terror “suspects.” A couple of congressmen seemed almost orgasmic at the possibility of exposing President Bush and Vice President Cheney. All this, when all they had to do was try the terrorists in Guantanamo, hang them, and be done with the whole thing.

As you watch all the goings-on, ask yourself if anyone is really making much of a case for doing it this way. I don’t know the motivation of the Obama administration in doing this. And please don’t insult our intelligence by telling us the Attorney General did this on his own and the President was unaware of it. If that is true, in the climate we have right now, the President should fire the Attorney

General on the spot. Because if the motivation of all this is to put egg on the face of the previous administration, I have a Scripture everyone should consider.

Biblical truisms

“A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him. A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin” (Proverbs 26:24-28 NIV).

I don’t know why this is so, but I have seen it happen often enough to believe in it. I think it is entirely possible that what the government is about to do is going to blow up in their faces, perhaps literally. It is possible for the smallest mistake in government policy and action to destroy all the good they think they have done. Why would I say this? Consider something else Solomon said: “As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left” (Ecclesiastes 10:1-2 NIV).

Forgive me, but I don’t think Solomon was referring to our political right or left. In fact, I have no idea where the ideas of right and left politically came from. They are just convenient labels. Solomon wasn’t finished: “Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows

everyone how stupid he is. If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest” (vv. 3-4).

I can’t tell you how much grief this little principle has saved me. No one can get through life without making some mistakes, big and small. Sometimes, all you have to do is stay put, calmly, until the storm passes. It is always worth asking, “Do I really have to do anything here? Or can I just wait it out and see what happens?” It is the difference between folly and wisdom to know when action is required and when not.

During the 2008 campaign, I worried a lot about the mantra of “change.” When we are at 30,000 feet in the air over Nebraska, on our way to Atlanta, what, exactly, should we want to change? Government is not always the answer. Often as not it is the problem, and we could just wish government would sit still for awhile. Calmness can lay great errors to rest. More of this quote from Solomon: “There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones” (vv. 5-6). I don’t think Solomon was using rich in terms of mere money and wealth. I think he was talking about the truly able people, the wise among us. He went on: “I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves” (v. 7).

Let me comment on Solomon’s literary technique lest we miss his point. He was drawing opposites: Fools versus rich, slaves versus

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princes. When you have a ruler, says Solomon, who turns things upside down, this is really bad.

There is much more to say on this theme, and I developed it fully in a new program titled, *The Pragmatic Idealist*. To get an advance CD of the program at no cost to you, just check the return card, confirm your address, and send it back to us. We have included an envelope for your convenience.

We're still doing our best to proclaim the Word to the world. If you would like to have a part in this, your help would be greatly appreciated.

*YOU Should Know About...
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on timely biblical subjects can be heard in your living room or with your church or fellowship group. The worship service is followed by a round-table discussion, usually directed by Ron Dart. Questions and comments can be emailed to us at cembtw@gmail.com.



Radio Update

NEW STATION:

Omaha, NE
KOIL 1180 AM
Sunday 9:00 am

CHANGES:

Portland, OR
KKPZ 1330 AM
M-F 12:30 p.m.

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KARI 550 AM
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*That the man of God may be proficient
and equipped for every good work.*

In Memory

Betty Jo Price

Christian Educational Ministries gratefully acknowledges a generous donation given in memory of Betty Jo Price, a real Christian lady, who lived in Jemison, Alabama. She passed away on December 14, 2009. She was survived by her two daughters, Katrina and Bridgett. Betty Jo will be greatly missed and our thoughts and prayers are with her family.

Sharon Pike

Christian Educational Ministries also acknowledges a generous donation given in memory of Sharon Pike of Condon, Oregon, who was the daughter of Chuck and Jan Oehlman, our very devout sister in the faith. Sharon died suddenly on December 17, 2009 and is survived by her husband, Tim; her two sons, Remington, 20, and Tyler, 18; her parents; and her sister, Karenda. This was such an unexpected and tragic death. Please keep the entire family in your prayers. Our love and sympathy are with them at this time of deep grief.

Robert Hawkes

Christian Educational Ministries is also very grateful for the very generous donation given in memory of Robert Hawkes of Houston, Texas, who died November 30, 2009 of congestive heart failure. Mr. Hawkes was the father of Darlene Yblood of Arlington, Texas. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family for the loss of such a fine Christian man.