

BILL COOK COMMENTS

BEING ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN

As most of you know, Lindsey Gunn has an innate grasp of strategy and a sincere dedication to its most noble use. He has taught us many things, not the least of which is the critical necessity of distinguishing absolutes from artifacts. This is the fundamental question in any application of strategy. Regrettably, few are willing to accept its terms. Inevitably, crisis forces the issue and we must choose which holds our allegiance, and in which world we plan to live.

Simply stated, an artifact is an object, an order, or a system created by human beings. It may be physical, intellectual or spiritual. But, in any case, it is an expedient; that is, something intended to serve a specific purpose. The larger and necessary inference is that it is useable only as long as its purpose holds and it, itself, remains effectual. Therefore, it is subject to obsolescence, or, otherwise, perversion for its own sake. No doubt that explains its etymological connection to the word “artifice,” implying deception. Serving that which is obsolete is a fool’s game. Serving that which is perverse is immoral.

In dramatic contrast, absolutes were here long before any of us. They are not the product of human genius. I suppose that is why they are called “The Eternal Verities.” Things like, right and wrong, good or evil, love, peace, compassion – all unassailable, subject to neither negotiation nor fade. Absolutes hold the entire universe together. And, if, we will let them, also all of us.

Marcus Aurelius nailed it: “One universe, made up of all things; and one God in it all, and one principle of Being, one Law, one Reason shared by all thinking creatures, and one Truth.”

In practice, absolutes push truth to the edge of ambiguity, which is the limit of our understanding. It is here that life is most vibrant. Artifacts cannot tolerate ambiguity, so they are lifeless from the start. There is no place for stabilizing faith.

The great danger in a convergence of crises is that we, conditioned by rationalistic thinking, allow the chaos surrounding us to set up within us as confusion, moral and spiritual. We become trapped in a double irony: Thinking artifacts are permanent, and absolutes, ephemeral. The great tragedy is that we yield to gloom and despair, or worse, cynicism. The greatest tragedy is that we allow the crumbling of artifacts to precipitate to our own demise.

Of this we can be sure: Any person or organization not predicated on absolutes is lost. And any person or organization without noble purpose is doomed. The only reliable order is the order of the soul; and the only noble purpose is service to others.

Now you know why the Cambrian Strategic Planning process begins with Beliefs and is realized in Purpose. And why our districts are absolutely certain of who and why they are.

Thank you, Lindsey.

WJC
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