

Current Affairs # 9 – Reflections on the Orphan Culture

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In these times of great uncertainty, the obvious question that occupies all of our minds is: Of what may we be certain? We live in an era described as the post-truth era, and we hear public figures speaking all the time about truth being personalized, namely, my truth or your truth. What is happening is a real jostling for a position in the minds of people to be able to say what you want to, and yet be immune from the social, political, and financial costs associated with people saying whatever they want to say.

A very interesting and rather subtle development has come about as people try to position themselves to both influence society, as well as to avoid the usual financial costs associated with taking a position that alienates large groups of people. We are watching the development of an interesting phenomenon, and that is how the market that popular figures depend upon is being defined according to the patterns of how people are thinking. In short, there are many people who take very controversial positions today, and when they do so, they do so with skillfully noting how that particular point of view survives in the marketplace. This is true of politicians. It is true of social commentators. It is true, certainly, of recording artists, movie stars, etc. Instead of the society being able to come together, it is being further and further fragmented by operatives who are very skillful in carving out their particular portion of society that ensures that they have an audience that both guarantees them a voice and cushions them and provides certain immunities from the financial consequences associated with their positionings. So we see all manner of people, and they are all over the map.

People are pretty disgusted, right now, with the extremes of positions taken. It seems like everybody has a cause, and they are trying to rally support for that cause irrespective of how it tears at the overall fabric of society. From a long view, from the long lenses of this perspective, it is very clear that any society—any kingdom, any nation—divided against itself is headed for the dust bin of history. Do not take my word for it. Take the word of the greatest Prophet who ever lived, for He said, “Any nation or kingdom divided against itself cannot stand” (cf. Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24-25; Luke 11:17). It is not: maybe it will or maybe it won’t. It is that, when you divide and divide and divide and divide, soon enough the resulting portions are too small to represent anything significant. In the end of it, not only do these portions become too small, but they become

warring among each other—warring for market share, warring for influence—to try to contain as much influence as they can, so that their voice is the last voice heard.

Now, the folly of this seems altogether apparent. You would think that people would get this. So, the question underlying a lot of this is: What is really driving this race to the bottom? The answer is: The culture of the orphan is driving it all, because all the orphan knows is that he or she can only depend upon himself or herself. An orphan has no concept of anything bigger, any world that is bigger than his or her own. An orphan has no concept of being able to depend upon anyone except his or her skills. For the orphan, the resource on which he or she can depend begins and ends with what they can control. In this race to the bottom, the typical orphan never thinks in terms of overall consequences, because they are forever in the place of victims and their position is always the position of outsiders looking in—the us against them or me against the world kind of perspective. So, people are trying to get their arms around what can be done about this obviously, recklessly divided society. People see that there is a need for people to come together, and they will say so. They will get on television, they will get on their shows, they will write opinion pieces, the whole bit. Whoever has any modicum of influence today is advocating for people coming together. But, when we begin to talk about the specifics of how anyone can come together, the deal breaker is: Come together on my ideas. If we could all agree that my ideas carry the marketplace or carry the day, then we would all have a wonderful, happily-ever-after existence.

What they are not understanding is a culture that has been here since Adam has now reached its full, flowering, fruiting apogee. The fruit of it is ripe. That is the culture of an orphan. An orphan has no stake in the bigger picture. In fact, the bigger picture threatens the orphan, because the question always in the mind of the orphan is: What is in it for me? Underlying that is the question: How am I going to survive in a world that I do not control? So, we are watching how society is evolving at a pace that is really exponential, and the aspect of society that is evolving as rapidly as this is an aspect that is defined by the amalgamation of ideas—ideas based in the culture of survival and how that amalgamates with technology. The combination of the two are rapidly dividing society along the lines of *ad hoc* constituencies, meaning, get enough people together on Twitter and you have assured yourself of staying power, of longevity, and it keeps you from falling into the abyss of anonymity.

People who are using technology at this level understand that they must have a marketplace for their ideas. They must create a constituency that, in the main, presents them and presents their ideas as if enough people will subscribe to their point of view, so they must be heard. If you can command millions of Twitter followers, for example, or millions of Facebook followers, then you, in the eyes of the public and in the eyes of competing constituencies, have carved out a marketplace. This potential marketplace is your support base and gives you a measure of immunity from just suddenly falling off the charts and going into anonymity. I will give an example. It used to be that artists would commit themselves to record labels and the record labels would promote their music and would develop their marketplace for them. But, the record labels had tremendous control over the artists—over the artist’s future and etc. Today, if you “drop an album,” you typically do so with a reference to a Twitter account, bypassing the old structures and the old forms like a record label, and you go directly to the marketplace. Of course, with the ability to download the song electronically, you can literally bypass every other structure.

So, it is important to the artist to develop a constituency that remains loyal to the artist. What we are noticing is how there are no artists today who hope to have staying power or longevity, who can afford not to adopt a social position, because a social position is the marketplace. So, we have a top-name artist who will interrupt a concert, for example, and go on a political rant to the cheering and adoration of that crowd; or, we will have someone getting ready to “drop an album,” leak videos—in one particular case of this young artist swinging naked on a wrecking ball. Most of you recognize what I am referencing at this point. What is that stunt about? It is about exciting the emotions of a certain constituency. It turned out that the particular artist ended up with 13 million Twitter followers. Well, what did that do? It granted her immunity from criticism, because she had carved out a market all for herself, loyal to her, and would guarantee the financial success of the album upon its arrival. You have people who use media like Instagram—people with no particular gifting or talent except the desire to be famous, and being famous *for* being famous, they will post pictures practically by the minute, of their daily existences. Of course, they are tied to that medium and they are entirely created by that medium. Needless to say, they recognize that everybody else recognizes that that is a path out of anonymity, so you have fierce competition by people who elect to take that path upward out of their positions of anonymity in order to become famous.

Now, what exactly do these people think about the long-term, broader impact on society for their attempts to seize a particular aspect of social culture and to enlarge it to grant themselves immunity both from anonymity and the opportunity to benefit financially? What do they actually think? Who are these people? Are they any great social thinkers? Are they spiritual leaders? Are they great political leaders? No. This is the empowerment of the masses of people to no greater end than the motivation not to be anonymous and to survive financially. Does anybody ever think about the impact, on say, such issues as moral convictions—the images that they are portraying and sustaining, when really all that most of these people have is a body to be clothed or unclothed for the purpose of gaining notoriety, for the purpose of gaining wealth, etc.? That is why we cannot come together. Everyone is doing what is right in his or her own eyes for no greater purpose than to grant them immunity from anonymity and to supply them financially.

This is the undeniable expression of the culture of the orphan, which says also that our culture currently, across the globe—whatever it was, whether it was tribal, familial, national—it is actually being replaced by the culture of the orphan, which is: me first. So, probably the most insidious result of the culture of the orphan in this “me first” expression is that in carving out these constituencies, it is defining a new culture with no cohesion to it at all. Each expression is as different from the other as the individuals are different from each other. I think it was in a video game based on a popular children’s series, in which the children are encouraged to identify with one of the storybook characters, and there are like tribes of these storybook characters. The idea is to define these characteristics of the particular villain or the particular hero in these stories and to identify the characteristics of these people, socially, so that young, impressionable pre-teens can identify with these characteristics, in the absence of a greater overarching definition of personhood.

So, not only are marginal actors seizing the center of cultural development, but fantasy is also pushing its way to the center. Of course, one of the more significant aspects of this is that it is targeted at younger and younger people, which is to say that the social engineering hopes to have a long-term effect. It is true that older people tend to change less readily—they are more difficult to change; they are more set in their ways; they have a greater infrastructure to maintain and are a part of, and the like. From a marketing standpoint, of course, it is far easier to target the younger and younger audience, but the cumulative effect of doing so is that you are defining the generations

before they even have much of an opportunity to choose how they are to be defined and how the society in which they are to live is being defined. Aided by technology, everybody has the opportunity to take their cut, their slice of society, and to take it wherever they want to with themselves.

The breakdown of the family really created a vacuum, so that these social actors became the surrogate parents. If you look at how young men dress and what their ideas are for success, it is all based on popular figures or even mythical figures. If you look at what fashions are popular with young women, you pretty well know who the reigning Instagram star is at the moment, or who is the reigning social media person. You look at the choices of music and you can tell who are connecting with the young people. What I am saying is, it may sound like the typical rant of an old, gray-haired fellow, but I hope that you would recognize that I am raising issues of a long-term nature that would preclude this being a rant of any kind. Rather, it is a wake-up call, or at least a commentary on the drift that is presently occurring in society.

You see, in some ways it is the law of unintended consequences, in that what began to emerge primarily in the field of philosophy and religion about 25 years ago was a thought about the post-modern era. The young people of that time were, as a group—obviously, when you use generalizations like that, you should recognize there are specific exceptions and there are significant exceptions, but the purpose of generalizations is to speak to a trend. So, a trend began to evolve in religious and philosophical circles about 25 years ago called the post-modern period. Now, it is sort of a label that has dropped off, but it was to rail against the existing order of the day with no clear understanding of what it hoped would replace it. I am not for a moment arguing that the social order of 25 years ago should have been the continued and preferred baseline for society currently, because so many things have changed, including the pace of the evolution of technology and the way that that connects people. What I am saying is that it would appear that there is a vacuum of ideas, because in the instantaneous destruction of prior order, no thought was actually given to the order that would replace it. So, we have ended up with the destruction of family as a model, or at least a complete redesigning of it. So much so, that by comparison to notions of family 25 years ago, there are hardly any recognizable references to family today. But with that also, another great pillar of society was hurled down, and this by its own doing. Religion was hurled

down as the corruption that had become endemic in society has burst open in all of its filth, in all of its unchecked and gross excesses. The Roman Church leads the way in this, but it is nearly being matched step for step by the evangelical church. The leaders have continued to fight for market share like any good orphan, and society is at a loss as to what to do next.

In the next broadcast, I want to talk to you about unchanging things, things that are eternally true, therefore, they are going to be true in time. When we connect to these eternal truths, it does not matter whose culture is prevailing, our culture will be firmly rooted in eternal things. Eternal things are not the same as religious things, just as God is not the same as religion. God is a person, and eternal things are the reflections of His unchanging nature. Connection to God will become the replacement culture that people seek, who are trying to find a way forward in the midst of this chaos, and the growing darkness and hopelessness, frustration and depression, actually, that have come to characterize our present order. So, I want to talk to you about the spirit of adoption in the next broadcast.

Thank you. I am Sam Soleyn, and I will talk to you then. Bye-bye.