

Our State of Moral Confusion

Isaiah, one of the major biblical prophets, has a lot to say about social injustice. In one memorable passage he announces judgment on “you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” [5:20]. Isaiah’s words constitute a denunciation of moral confusion. These words frequently come to mind as I reflect on the state of affairs in our national political life.

Great political battles are being waged in our society. Words hurled back and forth often seem intended precisely to obfuscate and mislead. The quality of public discourse is lamentable. Blowhard commentators on the cable “news” networks prattle incessantly, reducing the events of the day to simplistic soundbites that succeed primarily in inflaming passions while dulling the mind and conscience. The moral complexities are wrung out of real life, replaced by melodramatic bunk.

Far too many political leaders seem bent on making virtue out of vice (and *vice versa!*). Since when is it morally acceptable to engage in the torture of human beings, based on unproven claims about who they are? Since we stopped calling it torture, and started calling it enhanced interrogation or extraordinary rendition. Since when is it morally acceptable to invade and occupy another sovereign nation, even though it poses no immediate threat? Since we stopped calling it imperial aggression, and started calling it preemptive war, or better yet, liberation. Since when is it morally acceptable to deprive the needy of services and neglect the interests of the majority while finding ever more new and creative ways to enrich the wealthy? Since we started railing against class warfare, “death taxes,” socialism, and the welfare society while touting the virtues of private initiative and investment. Since when is it acceptable to deny human beings their basic human rights? Since we started calling them terrorists, enemy combatants, detainees, suspects in the “war on terror.” Since when is it acceptable to deny citizens their basic civil rights? Since we decided to wrap government curtailment of these rights in the folds of a “Patriot” act. Since when is it acceptable to label a monstrous crime against humanity an “attack on America”? Since we decided we needed an enemy dangerous enough to warrant a permanent state of war.

Language misused and abused by people in power is propaganda. When the rest of us follow suit we become complicit in the moral degradation of our society.

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