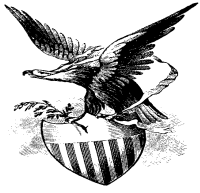


Light Brings Salt

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Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



Point of no return

By Thomas Sowell

Looking back at the history of tragic times often reveals that many -- or most -- of the people of those times were often preoccupied with things that look trivial, or even pathetic, in view of the catastrophe looming over them. Will later generations looking back at our times see a similar blindness, and even frivolousness, in the face of mortal dangers?

Terrorists and terrorist governments are giving us almost daily evidence of their fanatical hatred and violent sadism, as the clock ticks away toward their gaining possession of nuclear weapons. They not only hold a harmless young woman hostage in Iraq, they parade her in tears on television, just as they have paraded not only the terrorizing, but even the beheading, of others on television.

Moreover, there is a large and gleeful audience in the Arab world for these gross brutalities, just as there was glee and cheering among the Palestinians when the televised destruction of the World Trade center was broadcast in the Middle East.

Yet what are we preoccupied with or outraged about? Whether the American government should intercept the phone calls of these cutthroats to people in the United States.

That question has been sanitized in the mainstream media by asking whether the government should be engaged in "domestic wiretapping," just as the

terrorists themselves have been sanitized into "militants" or "insurgents."

The way the question is posed by many in the media and in politics, you would think our intelligence agencies were listening in on you talking on the phone to your aunt Mabel.

Be serious! There are more than a quarter of a billion people in the United States. Intelligence agencies have neither the manpower, the time, the money, nor the interest to listen in on you and your aunt Mabel.

Lawyers may differ on fine legal points about the Constitutional powers of the commander in chief during wartime versus the oversight powers of the courts.

But, a Supreme Court Justice once pointed out that the Constitution of the United States is not a suicide pact. The Constitution was meant for us to live under, not be paralyzed by, in the face of death.

When some honcho in the international terrorist network is captured in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the phone numbers in his computer are found by his American captors, it is only a matter of time before his capture becomes news broadcast around the world.

In the hour or two before that happens, his contacts within the United States may continue to use the phones they have been using. Listening in on their conversations during that brief window of opportunity can provide valuable information on enemies within our midst who are dedicated to our destruction.

Precious time can be wasted filing legalistic documents to get some judge's permission to tap the domestic terrorists' phones before CBS or CNN broadcasts the news of the captured terrorist leader overseas and the domestic terrorists stop using the phones that they had used before to talk with him.

With Iran advancing step by step toward nuclear weapons, while the Europeans wring their hands and the United Nations engages in leisurely discussion, this squeamishness about tapping terrorists' phone contacts in the United States is grotesque.

Has anyone been paying attention to the audacity of the terrorists? Some in the media seem mildly amused that Palestinian terrorists are threatening Denmark because of editorial cartoons that they found offensive.

Back in the 1930s, some people were amused by Hitler, whose ideas were indeed ridiculous, but by no means funny.

This was not the first threat against a Western country for exercising their freedom in a way that the Islamic fanatics did not like. Osama bin Laden threatened the United States on the eve of our 2004 elections, if we didn't vote the way he wanted.

When he has nuclear weapons, such threats cannot be ignored, when the choice is between knuckling under or seeing American cities blasted off the face of the earth.

That is the point of no return -- and we are drifting towards it, chattering away about legalisms and politics.

Thomas Sowell is the prolific author of books such as *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* and *Applied Economics*.

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Voting with their feet

Churchgoing in Britain is in freefall in the "mainline" denominations. Membership of the Church of England declined 27% between 1980 and 2000. This realization led to a survey in 2003/2004 to find out why. In all, 14,000 people in Britain and Ireland responded to the widely-advertised invitation to say why they were giving up on church. People wrote responses, rather than answering multiple-choice questions.

Astonishingly, 91% gave very similar reasons for disenchantment with church, which can be summarized in the words of one person: "The church needs to give a more robust defense of the reasons for believing." People pleaded for the churches to answer the skeptics and defend the faith.

Respondents wanted evidence for their faith and teaching that upheld the authority of the Bible.

The second reason for disillusionment was frustration with church leaders not teaching the holiness of God and moral standards. A huge number of respondents grieved over the ordination of homosexuals by the Anglican Church. But then if you discard the Genesis account of creation, with its straightforward history of the first marriage of a man and a woman ordained by God, why not have a man and a man? And why stop at denying Genesis?

One liberal archbishop in Australia, commenting on the hemorrhage of members from his denomination, blamed "fundamentalist" (i.e., Bible-centred) churches for "sheep stealing"! He can't see that starving sheep will look for pasture elsewhere (sadly, many just starve to death).

If church leaders do not uphold the authority of the Bible from the very first verse and do not emphasize teaching that shows the truthfulness of Scripture, people will increasingly see the churches as irrelevant . . . and vote with their feet.