

Utopian and Realistic Thought in International Relations: Some Scriptural Perspectives

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TWO "COMMON SENSE" THEORIES of international relations have been with us from ancient times to the present: utopianism and realism. Both share a common belief that understanding man will help explain international relations, and power is at the center of international politics. However, they disagree as to man's "nature" and disagree on what should be done about power. This note will discuss utopianism and realism as defined by traditional international relations theory, and identify some scriptural references to support both theories. This note assumes that the utopian-realism framework is a useful, though limited, guide to the study of international relations.

WHAT IS UTOPIANISM AND REALISM?

Before World War II, both utopians and realists were concerned with the means of preventing another world war, but they clashed over the best means. During this period, E. H. Carr, in his important study, *The Twenty-Years' Crisis*,¹ defined and analyzed the philosophical differences between the utopians and the realists. The utopians, said Carr, are the intellectual descendants of eighteenth century enlightenment, nineteenth century liberalism and twentieth century Wilsonian idealism. Utopianism is an Anglo-American tradition, and the United States entered World War I as a

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reluctant champion of this tradition. The American utopians such as Woodrow Wilson emphasized how men ought to behave in international relations rather than how they actually do behave. They disliked power politics, big armaments, secret alliances and the use of force in international relations. They stressed international law, seeing a "harmony of interests" in international relations reminiscent of Adam Smith. They placed a high premium on negotiations, mediation and the arbitration of disputes. This, they said, was the age of democracy and majority rule. They had confidence in public opinion. They firmly believed that events could be shaped by these democratic forces. They often exaggerated the freedom of choice in foreign policy-making and sought changes which would bring a peaceful restructuring of political systems, including the international system. In sum, they were optimistic about man and his capacity to bridle power for his own purposes. They were optimistic about democratic governments and their ability to secure the peace.

Realism, with no less a historic tradition, stresses the role of power and interests; it is suspicious, conservative and pessimistic about man. The realist believes that political ideologies rationalize rather than shape events. Realism tends to exaggerate causality bordering on determinism. "The drive to live, to propagate," says Hans J. Morgenthau, "is common to all men." "Nations, like men, act like beasts of prey driven by the lust for power." To Morgenthau, it is an evil world and the evil can be traced to man and particularly the twin traits of selfishness and the lust for power. Politics, says the realist, is a struggle for power. The realist has little confidence in international morality and law. He looks to military force to support diplomacy; he reads history pessimistically and runs the risk of cynicism. And he is influenced by the thought of Machiavelli.

The realist defines the national interests in terms of power. There are no "harmony of interests," but conflicting interests which often lead to war. The interest of the state says the realist is to care for its power. "Weakness," said realist Heinrich von Treischke, "is a sin against the Holy Ghost of Power."

In summary, utopians and realists base their theories of international relations on their perception of man, but they do not share the same view of man. Both are concerned with power but for different reasons. While the utopians seek to domesticate power the realists see the need to recognize the "realities" of power and to care for it.

In ancient and modern scripture there is much reference to utopian and realist assumptions. What are some of these references? Do these scriptures give further insight into the study of international relations?

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR UTOPIANISM

The Book of Psalms assumes goodness in man: For the Lord "hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour."² In his day King Mosiah spoke of the goodness of man when he said

it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore, this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.³

King Mosiah's statement is like to that of James Mill, who helped give modern utopian thought its form. Mill said

Every man possessed of reason is accustomed to weigh evidence and to be guided and determined by its preponderance. When various conclusions are, with their evidence presented with equal care and with equal skill, there is a moral certainty, though some few may be misguided, that the *greatest number will judge right*, and that the greatest force of evidence, whatever it is, will produce the greatest impression.⁴

While these statements by Mosiah and Mill are not the only arguments by which Wilsonian democracy can be defended, their assumptions are fundamental to the utopian thesis.

Utopians also argue that good men will shape events and can structure desirable political systems. This view is implied in Nephi's vision of the discovery and settlement of America; wherein the spirit would guide the "gentiles" to the promised land where . . . "they would set up a free and righteous land. . . ."⁵

Utopian notions about man's freedom of choice is likewise expressed in modern scripture where the Lord says:

men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.⁶

When the Lord endorsed the American Constitution, he proclaimed that under the Constitution "every man may act . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him."⁷ Thus man can introduce change; he can engage in good causes and he has moral agency. These assumptions are at the heart of utopian thought.

The utopian assumption about what to do with power is also evident in scripture, particularly the Book of Mormon. King Mosiah abdicated his throne because he objected to the existence of kingly power. Kings had governed the Nephites for years, but they were convinced by King Mosiah that kingship should be given up in favor of judges chosen by "the voice of the people." Mosiah's argument centered on his concern that kings could make law, and this kind of power if exercised by an evil king, could corrupt a whole society. The advantage of rule by judges was that the people would be judged by God's law and they would be responsible for their own behavior.⁸

The scriptures also have something to say about the utopian search for disarmament. It was Isaiah who said

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.⁹

J. Reuben Clark devoted much of his public career working for the utopian goal of disarmament. While he was pessimistic about the power of governments to affect disarmament, he saw basic changes in man which could come through the "civilizing" process of time.

If the thirst for wealth, the greed for territory, the ambition for power and dominion could be removed from men, there would be no more war. But these are some of the basic immutable human passions to be softened at least possibly eliminated only by civilizing centuries.¹⁰

Clark did not have illusions about the ambitions of men, but he saw a "civilizing" process or the reform of man and his institutions. He said: "Guns and bayonets will, in the future as in the past, bring truces, long or short, but never the peace that endures."¹¹ The right course for the United States, he wrote, was to "honestly strive for peace and quit sparring for military advantage." Peace, he insisted, would be achieved only through the "strength and power of the moral force in the world."¹²

In one of his finest rhetorical passages on America and international relations he said:

For America has a destiny—a destiny to conquer the world—not by force of arms, not by purchase and favor, for these conquests wash away, but by high purpose, by unselfish effort, by uplifting achievement, by a course of Christian living; a conquest that shall leave every nation free to move out to its own destiny; a conquest that shall bring, through the workings of their own example, the blessings of freedom and liberty to every people, without restraint or imposition or compulsion from us; a conquest that shall weld the whole earth together in one great brotherhood in a reign of mutual patience, forbearance, and charity, in a reign of peace to which we shall lead all others by the persuasion of our own righteous example.¹³

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR REALISM

There is much realist pessimism in the scriptures, particularly in the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes, reflecting on some of the deepest problems of life, said

All the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the *side of their oppressors there was power*; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.¹⁴

In modern history scripture expresses a pessimistic view of those who acquire authority and power. The Prophet Joseph was instructed

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.¹⁵

Thus "almost all men" with power exercise unrighteous dominion, not a few but almost all. This scripture would seem to support Morgenthau's realist thesis that the "drive to . . . dominate is common to all men."¹⁶

The realist concept of "interests" as the essence of politics and a guide for policy is implied in Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

. . . all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgements are best calculated to secure the public *interest* . . . human laws being instituted for the express purpose of regulating our *interests* as individuals and nations. . . .¹⁷

The theory of political realism, particularly after World War II, associates interests with power. This notion was discussed by John Taylor more than a century ago when he said:

There have been a variety of governments on the earth, and very powerful ones too have existed in different ages of the world. Those governments have generally been established and maintained by force of arms—by power.¹⁸

But then, John Taylor, unlike King Mosiah, seemed quite pessimistic about man. For he said ". . . it is my opinion that there are no people under the heavens that now exist, nor are there any that ever did exist, that are capable of governing themselves."¹⁹ This assertion seems to contrast the Prophet Joseph's optimistic assumption about man when he said: "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves."²⁰

There appears to be "realist" themes throughout scripture. For example, "the Lord is a man of war"²¹ to the wicked; "Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."²² In the New Testament there are "realist" inferences, such as ". . . he [God] doth judge and make war."²³ Also the Lord said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword."²⁴ Was it not the Prince of Peace who used force to drive from the temple the moneychangers? Luke records ". . . But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."²⁵ The justified use of force is common in scripture, particularly in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon. Even the Doctrine and Covenants says that force is justified when "diplomacy" has failed, as:

we believe that all men are justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property, and the government, from the encroachments

of all persons in times of exigency, where immediate appeal cannot be made to the laws, and relief afforded.²⁶

RELATIONSHIP OF UTOPIANISM AND REALISM

The theories of political realism and utopianism are often a reaction to one another, feeding one upon another. The realism of the Renaissance was a reaction to the excessive utopianism of the middle age; the modern utopians a reaction to the excesses of the Renaissance. By the 1920s, American utopian thought in international affairs reigned supreme. During the '30s and '40s realism once again became dominant, with books like Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* making an important impact and Machiavelli's *The Prince* becoming fashionable.

American foreign policy over the years has alternated between "weekday diplomacy," or the language of realism, and "Sunday diplomacy," or the language of utopianism. Weekday diplomacy, it was said, is essential to survival, and Sunday diplomacy is essential to a "moral" policy. The U.S. containment policy was a realist response to the Soviets; and the "liberation" policy was an expression of utopian values. But America soon retreated to realism with the entry of Soviet tanks into Hungary. Later, John F. Kennedy set a utopian tone when he declared that America would "support any friend or oppose any foe in order to assure the survival and success of liberty." But this was soon replaced by the "defense of the national interest" in South Vietnam. The "fundamental moral imperative," became the avoidance of nuclear war; hence U.S. commitments abroad were to be based on security needs, not on moral judgments. In the 1976 election campaigns there was a return to utopian ideas, particularly under the theme of "human rights," as President, Carter moved from "soft illusions to hard realism." The 1980 Reagan campaign victory reintroduced themes of realism with pledges of "making American power respected again."

No President, Secretary of State, or politician will claim that they are utopian or realist. They will insist that they are "idealists without illusions or realistic idealists." Most see themselves as a blend of many things: optimistic, pessimistic; utopian, realist; etc. They see goodness in men and also badness. They see the "ought" (idealism) and the "is" (realism) in man and his institutions: whether they are utopian or realistic is a question of degree.

The realist image of man does exist; man is "carnal, sensual and devilish." But man is also a child of God, a deity "in embryo."²⁷ There is evil in man and there is good in man. Man has built both cathedrals and concentration camps. He has gone to the lowest depths but he has soared to great heights. There are many forces working upon the thoughts and behavior of man, and we see both good and evil consequences. This is explained by King Benjamin who speaks of the "natural man" and the "saintly man." He said

. . . the natural man is an enemy to God, has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticing of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint

through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.²⁸

Man can change and perfect himself. Man can also change and perfect his institutions. This was demonstrated in the secular world by "the hands of wise men" who were raised up to establish the American constitution, a document based on the belief that some men are good and some men are bad. The Constitution was established because there were men of virtue; a need to provide security and opportunity for good men to do their uplifting work. But it was also established because there were men of evil. These "wise men" saw the need to set up a constitutional system with "checks and balances:" to curb and bridle "carnal, sensual and devilish" men; to curb men who "lust for power"; to bridle men who will "exercise unrighteous dominion." There are elements of truth in both the utopian and realist assumptions: These elements are found in the American constitution. A close reading of the Mormon Declaration of Belief regarding Government and Laws in the 134th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants also reveals an impressive composite of utopian and realist views brought together into a higher view.

The use of force and war is as acceptable to utopians as to realists if certain conditions are met. For example, the Nephites were encouraged to go to war because they were

... inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for . . . their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.²⁹

The Doctrine and Covenants also says one is justified to go to war "if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them." But, "they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue."³⁰ This is to be done three times before war is justified.

CONCLUSION

It is perhaps unfair to "wrench out of context" scriptures which seem to support the utopian or realist assumptions, for when they are read in context, there is a blend of the ideal and the real, the spiritual and the temporal, for man and his institutions are a mixture. For instance, the modern scripture on authority and its tendency to corrupt man is placed in its proper perspective as one reads the verses which follow. For men will not "exercise unrighteous dominion" and power over others if they live righteously, and it is assumed they will live righteously if they are taught righteously.

President Kimball implied a duality in man as he discoursed on the "False Gods We Worship" He said:

We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrications of Gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus in the manner of Satan's counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior's teaching: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.'³¹

President Kimball is optimistic about man and says that we forget that if we are righteous the Lord will "not suffer our enemies to come upon us—and this is the special promise to the inhabitants of the land of the Americas." He says that the Lord will fight our battles for us. He has this capacity, for as he said at the time of his betrayal, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"³² The Lord will use force, when needed but it often depends upon man's righteousness. President Kimball is telling us we need to be spiritually as well as physically prepared to defend ourselves, even enter war, for just causes.

President Kimball's discourse on the "False Gods We Worship" is utopian but it is also realistic. He is not calling for unilateral disarmament. He sees a need for defensive armaments but not our worship of them. He sees a greater need for spiritual armament: Christ-like living, for there is security only in obedience to the Savior's teachings. Like J. Reuben Clark who spoke of our "destiny to conquer the world . . . with high purpose . . . and Christian living," President Kimball says "our assignment is affirmative" not negative. We should "leave off the idolatry" of armaments and "press forward in faith; to carry the gospel to our enemies, that they might no longer be our enemies." President Kimball is, in a realistic way, seeking to bring this about, for the missionary effort of the church has since penetrated the "iron curtain." It is being taken to our "enemies." The Church is recognized in Poland, and International Representatives of the Church are now in Hungary and Yugoslavia. This has required a "realist" accommodation between the Church and Communist regimes. Will the Soviet Union and China be next?

NOTES

¹E. H. Carr, *The Twenty-Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan Company, 1939).

²Psalms 8:4–5.

³Mosiah 29:26.

⁴James Mill, *The Liberty of the Press*, as quoted in Carr, pp. 22–23. Italics have been added.

⁵I Nephi 13. Also see Ether 2:7 and II Nephi 10:11.

⁶Doctrine and Covenants 58:27–28.

⁷Ibid., 101:78.

⁸Mosiah 29.

⁹Isaiah 2:4.

¹⁰J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "Preliminary Memorandum No. 3" (Prepared for the United States Preparatory Committee for the Washington Disarmament Conference, 1921), p. 2.

¹¹J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "Let Us Have Peace," in *Stand Fast by the Constitution* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1962), pp. 71-78.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "Some Factors in the Proposed Postwar International Pattern" address delivered before Los Angeles Bar Association, Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, California, February 24, 1944, pp. 30-31.

¹⁴Ecclesiastes 4:1-3. Italics have been added.

¹⁵Doctrine and Covenants 121:39.

¹⁶Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man and Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946). Also see Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 3-14, 25-29.

¹⁷Doctrine and Covenants 134:5-6. Italics have been added.

¹⁸John Taylor, "Union—Human and Divine Government, etc.," in *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 9 (Liverpool, England: Latter-day Saint Book Depot, 1862).

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Joseph Smith.

²¹Exodus 15:3.

²²Psalms 24:8.

²³Revelations 19:11.

²⁴Matthew 10:34.

²⁵Luke 22:36.

²⁶Doctrine and Covenants 134:11. Brigham Young saw a need for preparedness in the event of war. He said: "Let the boys from ten to twenty years of age set up schools to learn sword exercise, musket and rifle exercise, and, in short, every act of war. Shall we need this knowledge? No matter, it is good to be acquainted with this kind of exercise." See *Journal of Discourses* 9:173 & 26.

²⁷See "Oh My Father," LDS Hymn no. 139.

²⁸Mosiah 3:19; Romans 8:7; I Corinthians 2:14.

²⁹Alma 43:45.

³⁰Doctrine and Covenants 98:34.

³¹Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship" *The Ensign* (June, 1976) p. 6.

³²Matthew 26:53.