

An Unbalanced Mind

The

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A number of years ago, I read an article in which the author used the Hummer automobile as an American example of conspicuous consumption. The author was describing a segment of the population that he felt was over the top in terms of commercial self-satisfaction. He felt that buying the Hummer represented an in-your-face example of flaunting one's economic well-being before friends and neighbors. It was not a matter of the keeping up with the Joneses; it was a matter of getting ahead of and staying ahead of the Joneses.

I do not know that this is absolutely true in every case, but I think that the Hummer represented an interesting metaphor. It is especially interesting since the Hummer has now been cancelled by General Motors, as far as production is concerned. That probably means that it was losing money.

During this morning's 8 AM news broadcast on WBT, I heard a similar example of an excessively costly price for something that apparently there is a market for. At least one enterprising entrepreneur thinks so. There is a restaurant in New York City that contains only eight tables—in a city of around eight million people. Apparently the food is very good there, and the pricing really is not it all that expensive, considering what I have heard from other areas of the country, or other nations, like in Japan, where it might be one hundred dollars or so—maybe more than that—for a steak. However, this restaurant—and being seen at this restaurant—has become a thing in New York City, and so this enterprising entrepreneur was able to get a reservation for one of those tables at that restaurant for July 27. You know what he did? He put it for sale on eBay. The reservation—not the meal; just the reservation—and his asking price was \$5,000.

By way of coincidence, this past week I heard two men discussing the possible financial gains that might accrue to the National Football League and the advertiser *if* the Super Bowl was moved to New York City. The one man asked the other, "How much does the cheapest seat cost at the ticket window in recent locations?" This man said \$350 for the cheapest, poorest seat in the whole football stadium. However, the man said, it's not at all difficult for a scalper to get a \$1000, \$1500, maybe \$2000 for a seat—a little bit better seat—at the Super Bowl.

Now, that's certainly something that's completely beyond us to do. But there are people who want to be at the place, at the time, that certain things are going on, and there are

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people who have the wherewithal to be able to do this kind of thing.

I got to thinking about that this morning, and I thought, *You know what? I know a little bit about human nature. If I were a betting man, I would bet that during Roman times they were doing the same thing at the Coliseum in Rome with the gladiators to get better seats.*

I had a personal look-see at a small example of this sort of practice in the 1960s, whenever my father, who at that time owned a jewelry store, was preparing for a retirement and he was going to sell off the jewellery store and all of its stock. In this example, we're getting down to a much lower level, but it's the same sort of thing in lower economic levels as these people were doing here. Anyway, I got a chance to look at the books, the bookkeeping, by this small store from back in the 1930s when the Depression was on. My dad did not own it then, but he was an employee at that store. I was really surprised to find out that little jewelry store was making what we would say today "tons of money." This is during the Depression. The jewelry store was located in a low-economic level of the city of Pittsburgh, surrounded by an awful lot of people who used to work in those factories, but they were out of work. But somehow, in some way, people had money to buy diamonds and pearls and rubies and sapphires and watches and so forth, despite the economic hardships of life that those people were experiencing in that area. As a result of these people spending money that maybe they really did not have (I do not know), my dad worked right through the Depression, and he never lost a day—in a jewelry store.

People have every right as an American citizen to spend their incomes as they see fit, so what these people are doing is certainly legal. They are also free to enjoy the free moral agency that God gives. But what they are doing in that regard may very well be on the immoral or unethical side, but that's another matter—kind of skinning things there. But what I am thinking of here is the spirit of the times that we are living in right now.

These seeming imbalances are quite noticeable to me here in the United States. They are happening, they are a reality, but they are also happening on a worldwide basis. It is not limited here in the United States, and it's certainly not limited to spending money in an extremely self-centered way.

II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

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Garner Ted Armstrong was the very first person I remember expounding on this word "sound." He spent a good bit of time on it during a sermon. It's capable of being translated in several ways, but the way that Garner Ted concentrated on—and it really stuck in my mind—was that it means "balanced." I later heard it expanded on again by Raymond McNair in a Ministerial Seminar, and Raymond said he got it from Herbert Armstrong. It came from Herbert Armstrong, Raymond McNair, and down to Garner Ted.

Today, we might say—instead of "balanced," which would certainly be all right—we might say instead that a person is level-headed. In other words, they are not given to extremes like buying a Hummer, let's say, to make that connection.

I perceive that the entire world is drifting. Perhaps it might be better to say, "being driven in the direction of extremes of thinking." We commonly say whenever a person "loses it" that "they go off the deep end." In society, in our culture, it means that they are becoming radicalized to some level. The practice of spending great amounts of money on a Hummer or a Super Bowl seat are actually very minor examples of this drift. But unfortunately it is not limited to that, because it quickly spreads to other areas of the culture, and perhaps most importantly, into economics and politics. Extremism in those two areas is almost always a prelude to warfare. Mark it down. They are almost always a prelude to warfare.

A fairly recent example of this is it gripped Germany, and especially their leadership, before World War II, and eventually gripped most of the population and proceeded the Holocaust and the deaths of approximately fifty million people, because of people with extreme, radical views about race, about political things, about military—and the military was going to be their means of accomplishing it.

Baron von Clausewitz, who was perhaps the world's most influential author of military strategy, said that warfare is politics extended to the battlefield. So, what kind of comments are we beginning to see more and more of from the leadership of people saying or encouraging their followers to say?

I'm going to limit myself to two that I received in emails just this past week. One came from a man named Augustin Cebada. He is a leader in the Brown Berets: "Go back to Boston. Go back to Plymouth Rock, pilgrims. Get out of here! We are the future. You are old and tired. Go on. We have beaten you. Leave like beaten rats, you old white people. It is your duty to die."

A second one came from London, England, from a newspaper there, as a result of

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comments on the "religion of peace" demonstration staged by the Islamic community on signs during a raucous march through the streets of London: "Behead those who insult Islam. Europe, you will pay. Demolition is on the way." "Europe is the cancer. Islam is the answer." "Exterminate those who slander Islam." "Europe: Take some lessons from 9/11. Be prepared for the real Holocaust."

This commentary's simple point is this: that the voices are rising to extremist levels, and they will continue to become more extreme. If the emotions shown in these comments continue, it will not be long before they will have deadly results, and that is a long step from buying a Hummer to keep ahead of the Joneses.