

The Not-A-Problem Folk

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Arnold Toynbee was a British historian who died in 1975. He viewed history as a textile of challenges and their responses. Some challenges to civilizations come from nations, and other challenges result from changing weather conditions, social, economic conditions, even technological. How would the ancient Pueblo folk of the American southwest respond to a long and severe drought? How would Britain respond to the Argentinian occupation of the Falkland Islands? You get the picture. Simply, Toynbee posited that when a civilization responds to a challenge correctly and creatively, it survives and it thrives. But when a civilization fails to rise effectively and creatively to a challenge, then it declines. In fact, he contends that most civilizations commit suicide—and that is his word, by the way—by inadequately responding to a challenge.

In point of fact, brethren, history can be viewed as a panoply of responses to various types of challenges. Some responses are good ones, effectively answering the challenge, but mostly, sadly, as you look at history you come to realize that many responses are extreme, they are over-reactions, they are wrong-headed and misguided, or they are ignorant, and in some cases they are just plain silly and we can think of examples of all of those. Many are politically negotiated half measures, which are used as a stop gap, which are only a band aid rather than a solution.

Toynbee's ideas certainly have merit on the historical viewpoint, but we all understand that responses to challenges begin at the individual level. Individuals need to make correct responses to moral and to physical challenges that they encounter.

In David's time, in David's case, we see that he had a whole bunch of challenges—we call them children. How did David respond to the challenges

that were presented by these children? When they were young, he saw pride in them, he saw disobedience in them, he saw disrespect in them. When he saw incipient moral difficulties in them, how did he respond?

I Kings 1:5-6 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king”; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. (And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, “Why have you done so?” He was also very good-looking. His mother had borne him after Absalom.)

Adonijah had quite a sense of pride, or one could say, was quite full of himself. Conversely, David could have been said by some to have read Dr. Benjamin Spock. He never spanked his children, and never so much, apparently, as reproved them in any way, and in time, he was faced with rebellion, and it was not just a domestic rebellion, as is so common in a dysfunctional family, as his certainly was. It was rebellion on a level where the consequences would be spilled over to the entirety of the Israelite civilization. All of Israel was involved, and that is why it is so much more important. When you fail to make proper responses, we will see that it spreads.

David's failure to respond to Adonijah's pride and his self-will only led to greater problems when conspiracy, later on, reared its ugly head. This failure to respond properly came to threaten his office and—had God not intervened—his life.

David's situation here is a crossover because it refocuses the issue of response to a challenge. It transfers and refocuses it away from the realm of national government and focuses it on family governance and even on self-governance. How a nation responds to a challenge makes a difference, obviously. That is clear to most of us, but nations are made up of individuals, and how we as individuals respond to challenges in questions of right and wrong makes a real difference.

In the experience of America there is a certain flow of events I want to discuss. It began in the early 1930s. This flow of events served as an epitome, almost as a metaphor, in the change in Americans' ability to

respond, at least somewhat properly, to a challenge. It is an example of how people of one generation can see a moral challenge and more or less properly, appropriately, respond to it, and how those in a later generation, not that far along in the line, can fail to even perceive the issue, much less respond to it properly.

It is all about comic books. The first comic book, as we know today, appeared in 1933. As time went along, the graphics in comic books became more and more 'graphic,' shall we say, in terms of sex and gore. And consequently, story-lines and language and became more explicit, more gory, more subtle. Themes became more adult.

There were notable exceptions of course. But in general, that was the challenge in the comic book industry and matters only degenerated as activities progressed and moved into the war years in the early '40s. I cannot show you any examples of this now, of course, but I did want to take a few minutes to tell you about a website you can search. Just look on YouTube for 'Bimbo's Initiation.' What you will find there is an example of this incredibly low level of culture in the form of a cartoon. It was published in 1931.

Now please understand that Bimbo's Initiation is not pornographic or anything like that. I would not be discussing it here if it were. There was no nudity in it or anything like that, but brethren, I want you to be aware it is in extremely bad taste. It is salacious. It has unmistakable undertones of violence, sadism, and masochism. Like so much of what has come out of, and continues to come out of Hollywood, is clear demonic influence.

Importantly, this cartoon, which was shown in movie houses frequently in the 1930s, is a pretty fair representation of the level of culture that American comic books exhibited in that same period of time in the '30s and into the '40s. Therefore I offer it as an example.

In conservative religious circles, the matter was really considered nothing less than scandalous at the time. I grew up with any number of boys in the late '40s and the '50s who were simply not allowed to have comic books in the house. It was forbidden to even have them in the house. And that is a fact. I myself did not have the money, so I never was able to subscribe to one or even buy one occasionally, but I will tell you that even in my youth, my

parents really did not like them so I never pushed the issue. But I really liked to go to the barber shop every month or so to get my monthly "fix" of comic books.

In the early 1950s, PTAs across the land had discussion groups regarding the moral level of comic books. Action groups had developed. Mothers in droves would go out and visit barber shops of their sons' to make sure the comic books there were appropriate.

My point is that in those days people saw a moral issue and they responded to it. Now they did not respond perhaps fully adequately, but they did respond to it. They saw a moral issue, and indeed comic books in that day were simply despicable.

A clinical psychiatrist named Fredrick Wortham, in that same period of time in the late '40s and the early '50s, also responded to the issue of comic books. He was not an ivory tower academician; he was a clinician and he dealt with hundreds and hundreds of young people as teenagers in Harlem. He wrote, based on his work there, in 1954 a book called, *The Seduction of the Innocent*. It was a shocker, and in no time at all the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency was holding sessions to investigate the publishers of comic books.

This was at the time of the McCarthy era. If you know anything about the McCarthy era, you know that it was a time when some American leaders were having trouble in giving up all that power that they had appropriated to themselves at the end of the Second World War. Some leaders at that time had a lot of power. Everything from flour, sugar, to gasoline was rationed, and the press was censored. Everything was censored as well. In fact, Mr. Armstrong had to be very careful what he wrote about Germany, and what he said about Germany, in those years.

In many cases you could not even change jobs, just to put this in perspective for the young people. In many cases, if your job had anything to do with a strategic industry, you could not change jobs without the permission from a department called the 'War Department Manpower Board.'

Because of this, in the early 1950s, there were rumblings that the federal government would take upon itself the role of comic book censors. Censorship was the last thing that the comic book industry wanted. So in 1954, the industry itself responded to this challenge in an interesting way. It funded and created the 'Comic Magazine Association of America' and in that same year of 1954, it established a 'Comics Code Authority'. This agency is more commonly known by the name 'Comics Code.'

The idea was that comic book publishers would submit their wares to the association before they were published, and the association would prominently place its seal of approval—it was a large "A." They would place this seal of approval on comic books that passed the test established by this code.

I am not arguing that the industry of comic was motivated by anything but self interest, because it was. I understand it was not fully altruistic. DC, and Marvel, and Archie did not want the United States Senate telling it what it could and could not publish.

Despite all of that, the industry's response was not to hide behind the Bill of Rights and its protection of free speech, but rather, the industry developed in 1954, it funded and then voluntarily submitted itself to the rigors of a code.

Symbolically, it was a law. They symbolically submitted themselves to that for decades. That code hedged them in just like a law does, and to the extent that the publishers voluntarily submitted to that code, you have an example of self-government.

Let me cite to you this response, specifically key elements of this code. Please consider the fact that, looking backwards, one detractor—one liberal commentator—points out that the code, in his own words, 'neutered the comic book industry for a quarter of a century.' As you read what is written in this code, ask yourself how is this code/hedge applied today:

Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust for the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with the desire to imitate criminals.

If crime is depicted, it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.

Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited.

Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife play and gun play [which riddled comic books in those days], physical agony, gory, and gruesome crimes shall be eliminated.

No comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in the title.

All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gore, and gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism and masochism shall not be permitted.

Inclusion of stories teeming with evil shall be published only with the intent to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.

Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with the walking dead, torture, vampires, vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.

Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.

Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure suggestive salacious illustrations or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

Illicit sexual relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed.

Rape scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested, and sexual perversion or any inference of same is strictly forbidden.

What would the U.S. Supreme Court, the oligarchy of immorality that we live under now, do with that code today? It never had a chance, because as times had changed, beginning about 1971, the industry itself began to mar its own code.

On a number of occasions, into the '80s and beyond, as it sought to water it down and make it reflect the lower standards of the American people at large, and so it was that in just a short period of time, it became a pale shadow of its original form, and certainly into the '90s. Marvel, DC, and Archie pulled out of the enforcing organization in 2011. The code died! There were no mourners then. That is an important point. The times had changed. It was not 1954 anymore.

Few even knew that the Comic Magazine Association of America had closed its doors. No one responded, no one cared, there were no Senate hearings, no mothers went to barber shops across the country to ensure the decency of comic books as they had done in the '60s and even into the '70s. The PTAs did not seem to raise an eyebrow. And there was essentially no response. As Simon and Garfunkel sang, it was simply 'The Sound of Silence,' and that is all there was.

That is not the rest of the story, however, so let me go ahead and tell you how the story ended. What replaced the Comic Magazine Association of America? Some of you could almost guess. If you guessed 'The Comic Legal Defense Fund,' you would be correct. It was established in 1986 to defend the First Amendment rights of comic books writers, publishers, and sellers, and over the years, the activities of the Fund have broadened. Today it deals with more than just comic books, but it carries the cause of any First Amendment issue.

I am going to give you an example of the kind of smut that this organization now defends and advocates. I found this on its web page—it does have a web

page. It seems that there was a Jessica Wilson. She discovered the presence of a book on her child's middle school shelf in the library there, and it was called "Two Boys Kissing." This was in 2013, I think it went into 2014, and it was in Virginia. The book is not explicit. In fact, it has no pictures at all except for the dust cover, and there's a picture of a couple of teenage boys kissing.

It seems they had a buddy who had been attacked by boys objecting to his homosexuality, so in order to raise money for his medical costs, these two seventeen year old boys decided that they were going to break the record for the longest kiss as recorded in the Guinness Book of Records. Now, this was a simple minded, silly plot as well as a repulsive one. I have not read the book. I am not going to read it, but you get the picture. Twenty years ago, this was the kind of book that would not be on a library shelf, not a school library, public library, or anywhere. It is the kind of book you would not want, and twenty years ago it would not be there, but today it is there.

Jessica Wilson, one lone parent, tried to respond to the challenge. She went to the school board, and of course, she lost. The Fund, along with a number of other liberal groups, such as The National Association of the Teachers of English, and the National Coalition Against Censorship, e-mailed a letter to the superintendent of this particular Virginia school district, dated April 27, 2014. It is on the website mentioned previously. In this letter, they attempted to intimidate the school superintendent and apparently it worked, because the book is still there. So much for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, a victim in the battle for decency in that particular industry.

Please turn to Numbers 25. What we will do there is we will see an example of an earlier individual, Fredrick Worthern, who responded, and responded correctly, to a moral challenge. His choices and his actions affected the entire nation. Just as we saw with David, his choices and his wrong response, affected the entire nation.

Numbers 25:6 And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

They were weeping because of a plague that had killed quite a few people. Notice that the man did not secret the woman into the camp, but apparently paraded her defiantly through it, just like the homosexuals today seem to be doing in our society with their so-called gay parades, gay pride festivities. What happened?

Numbers 25:7-9 Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

There was clearly a moral issue here. We are not going to go into it in detail. Verses 14-15 indicate that the Israelite involved was the son of a leader of the tribe of Simeon and the woman involved was the daughter of an elder of the Midianites. So these were not 'nobodies.' These the adult children of honchos, of tribal leaders.

Phinehas said basically, 'Phooey.' He was not concerned with what was politically correct, and he was not concerned with the political fallout associated with dispatching with these two people. He had, of course, himself a position of responsibility. He recognized a challenge that was facing the Israelite people and he took action, and he took that action rather vigorously, with zeal, and fervor.

Did God consider him to be a reactionary? Did God consider him to be an extremist?

Numbers 25:10 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.”

Phinehas responded correctly, and consequently, he and his posterity were blessed. If you read the story, you will see in the end his posterity were blessed, and indeed all Israel was blessed, because the plague was stopped.

Fredrick Worthen responded more or less correctly to another moral issue in the 1950s, and his nation was blessed as well. As the plague of trashy comic books was halted (with some exceptions, but it was basically halted) for about a quarter of a century.

I have entitled my comments today, "The Not-a-Problem Folk." That moniker describes America to the extent that American culture has affected the rest of the world through globalism, and that moniker describes much of the world today.

Its like a coin. My concept of 'not-a-problem society' has two sides. On one side, there is the fact that the not-a-problem society recognizes problems that in reality are not a problem, not real problems, but we think they are. On the other side of the coin, the not-a-problem society claims that real, genuine problems, are really not a problem at all. Therefore, it fails to address them.

In other words, the 'not-a-problem' society, the not-a-problem culture, calls evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). The 'not-a-problem' society is confused, and confusion is one of the principle characteristics of Western culture of today. It is the result of Satan's deception, but he is more than merely a deceiver, he is the deluder. I keep going back to that term.

This deception has resulted in all kinds of disorientation, confusion, and chaos in Western society. The issues Americans are likely to define as problems are usually physically based rather than moral, and they are not really problems at all. For example, Americans by the millions have come to believe that climate change is a real problem. Your kids hear about it all the time. It is in the news, and it is a real problem to Americans, and yet, of course, we know it is not a problem at all. It is really just an excuse to justify the agenda of the extreme environmentalists.

Another example, Americans worry about overpopulation. This is in view of the fact that statistics indicate declining population rates. Overpopulation is

not a real problem, brethren. A third example, Americans are coming to believe that guns should be removed from the hands of the population. Apparently they believe that guns, rather than people, kill. In all these cases, Americans are defining wrong problems. This leads to the writing of legislation to address problems that are not really problems. I am sure you can think of many examples in recent years.

At the same time, on the other side of the coin, Americans are not responding properly to real problems, the genuine moral issues, and to these Americans are simply saying, "It's not a problem." Otherwise, they are coming up with this absurd comment now, that does not even make sense. It is an illogical comment, an impossible comment, it is called "the new normal." There is no such thing as a 'new normal.' I will not go into why, but there just is not.

Marijuana: We term it 'not-a-problem' and we go ahead and legalize it. Well, that is a wrong response. Or what about abortion? We term that 'not-a-problem' and we legalize it, and that is a wrong response. Same-sex marriage? We term that 'not-a-problem' and we enshrine it in law. That is a wrong response.

What about euthanasia of the old or the infirm, or people who are born with infirmities and things like this? Now, at the present time, we do not go in for euthanasia, but it is only a matter of time. I think we will see this with medical policies that are instituted by the government as time goes on. And in time, they will say "it is not a problem" and they will go ahead and permit it, and that will be a wrong response.

What about pedophilia? Society, at the present time, has drawn a line in the sand on that issue, but maybe perhaps it is only a matter of time before they begin to permit that. And if we do, that too, will be a wrong response.

You can think of other examples of real moral issues, authentic issues and challenges, the improper responses to which undermine a society. Its almost unnecessary for me to say anything about it so I am not going to say a lot about it here, but almost every adult reading this understands that the proper response involves a response that is undergirded by God's law.

Americans, however, have left God's law. They have forgotten it. They have left it out of their knowledge. Therefore they have simply lost their ability to recognize, and therefore to respond to, real problems adequately.

So we ask, how many wrong definitions of problems can a folk make before it is too late? How many wrong-headed responses can a folk make, before it is too late? How many wrong-headed responses can a folk make? How many will the fiber of a civilization permit before it is torn asunder? And how long can a folk stumble as blind over actual issues while shadow boxing with problems that are merely phantoms, that are delusions, and that are fantasies?

Always remember Phinehas, because Phinehas did not say 'it is not a problem!' Of course, God has not called us to go and find a spear and spear the adulterers next door. We know that. However, ours is the job to take the spiritual initiative.

In I Corinthians 5:1-2, Paul talks about a problem in the church where people did not respond to a man who was in a sexual sin. They thought it was perfectly okay, but Paul corrected them on the matter. This is a good example of where this kind of thing happened in the church, pointing out that even we are not immune to this kind of behavior.

What is the ultimate effect of making the wrong response or no response at all to moral issues? I think Toynbee was right. It is suicide. Death by suicide. In Ezekiel 7, I will begin in verse 14. I am going to be reading this from *The Message*.

Ezekiel 7:14 (MSG) “The trumpet signals the call to battle, to present arms, but no one marches to battle. My wrath has been paralyzed.”

You see, eventually the last challenge rears its ugly head. It is the attacking enemy. But God has sent the people such strong delusion that they do not even recognize that challenge as salient and obvious as it might be. "It is not a problem!" They say, at least in their hearts, if not in open speech, 'The enemy has never reached these shores before, and it won't do it this time.' The attitude is akin to the thinking of our forefathers, 'The temple, the temple, the temple,' and great was its fall!

Going back to verse 8, Ezekiel quotes God, 'I'm going to make you pay for the way you've lived. Your disgusting obscenities will boomerang on you.' You will not be able to get away with these kind of comic books that are, by the way, now appearing.

America cannot escape judgment. Sin hurts, and in the figure I developed today, you can recognize that the comic code is an emblem. It is an allegory, as it were, of the law of God. Just a few decades ago, Israel abandoned the comics code, replacing it with a vigorous, though specious, defense of licentiousness in the name of First Amendment rights. But more importantly and in a broader sense, Israel has abandoned the law of God. Israel's response to moral issues is no longer informed by a profound respect for God's Word.

I want to read Ezekiel 7:2-11. I am going to be reading from the Living Bible which presents a picture of the consequence of Israel's disrespect for God's law and its a picture that is more graphic than any comic book could ever make.

Ezekiel 7:2-11 (TLB) “Tell Israel, ‘Wherever you look—east, west, north, or south—your land is finished. No hope remains, for I will loose my anger on you for your worshiping of idols. I will turn my eyes away and show no pity; I will repay you in full, and you shall know I am the Lord.’” The Lord God says: “With one blow after another I will finish you. The end has come; your final doom is waiting. O Israel, the day of your damnation dawns; the time has come; the day of trouble nears. It is a day of shouts of anguish, not shouts of joy! Soon I will pour out my fury and let it finish its work of punishing you for all your evil deeds. I will not spare nor pity you, and you will know that I, the Lord, am doing it. The day of judgment has come; the morning dawns, for your wickedness and pride have run their course and reached their climax—none of these rich and wicked men of pride shall live. All your boasting will die away, and no one will be left to bewail your fate.

As Julius Caesar said at the Po, “The die is cast.”

Inexorably, America continues her suicidal activities, blind to her own immorality and to its impending judgment. It appears that really there is no turning back for America at this point. For our part, we, as God's people, must be studious to avoid falling into the "not a problem" mind set. We do not dare fall into that mindset. Ours indeed is the active task of preparing to meet our God, and that is a task which requires us to respond to the challenges that God gives us, instructed always by His code, and by His law.