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An Additional Response to 9.11 -- Principles to Guide our Steps

Principles to Guide our Steps
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Principles are unchanging, immutable truths by which our actions should be guided and by which they will be judged. As America responds to the horror of September 11th, she must be guided by the following principles.

The first principle is: "God is not a terrorist!" God does not use the careless slaughter of innocent people to awaken the consciences of those who are violating His Law. As President Bush determines our response to terror, he must reject the counsel of the Jerry Falwells who guided him thorough the South Carolina primary in his presidential campaign. Now that he is President, Bush must show himself to be a man of principle, not of opportunism.

There is no doubt that America has wandered far from her moral and spiritual roots, and it is indisputable that God is able to judge America. But, it is also truth that when God judges America, it will not be at the hands of terrorist who hope to get the attention of those they judge guilty by the pain of the innocent. When God judges America, it will be in a manner through which America will recognize that it is her sins which have brought the calamity upon herself and not the sins of madmen.

The second principle is that while the world and Americans are solidly behind the president, America does not have a modern mandate for a 21st-Century crusade against the Muslim world. The challenge facing America does not pit Christian against Muslim, but freedom-loving, peace-loving and law-abiding people of ALL nations and religions against fear mongers, who use religion as a pretext for their own evil purposes, whether they are white, Anglo-Saxon's who claim to be Christians, or whether they are dark-skinned Semites who claim to be Muslims. The greatest challenge for America, and one which is of more importance even than removing Osama bin Laden from this world, is to make sure that the entire world knows, understands and accepts the reality that it is terrorism which we oppose, not any particularly people, nation, or religion. If the opportunity facing the world -- an opportunity created by tragedy -- is not to be squandered, a coalition of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and others must be created to effectively and permanently oppose terrorism.

The third principle is that our friends must not be forgotten when the moment of danger has passed. In particular, the leaders of Pakistan -- the name means "Holy Land" -- have put their political futures and in some aspects their own lives on the line by agreeing to help the United States and by confronting Afghanistan with the declaration that they must give up bin Laden. Their actions have been those of great leaders. They have acted at great risk. There are probably few American politicians who would act contrary to the emotional and electoral power of the American people, even if acting such would be doing what is right. President Bush must do nothing which betrays the trust of our friends. All efforts must be made to be sensitive to the beliefs, feelings and realities of our Pakistani allies. And, once the immediate need is passed, America must not forget, even for a moment, those who risked everything to aid us in our hour of need.

The fourth principle is that great opportunities must not be squandered. The American people are justly angry, but justice requires that that anger not be the pretext for a cathartic act of vengeance, which squanders the world's favor toward us. Great leadership -- statesmanship kind of leadership -- will take this opportunity to coalesce the emotional energy of the world into resolve to oppose terrorism anywhere in the world. The coalescence of that energy will take Solomonic wisdom, which is beyond the capacity of any one man or woman. But, it is a capacity which is available to a person who cares more for the future of mankind than for his or her own political future.

The fifth principle is that this is not the time for silence. All over America, there have been "moments of silence." While the motive is noble, the effect is temporary. If our tragic loss can be the catalyst for a world united against terrorism, it will partially be because all of us have been motivated to return energetically to the faith of our fathers. Several years ago, I was asked by a Hindu friend whom I greatly admire to offer the invocation at the annual Indian celebration in Southeast Texas. As a Christian, there was no doubt that I would not offer a moment of silence and there was no doubt that I would pray as my faith dictates, which is to and in the Name of Jesus Christ. As I began, I invited everyone to pray as they had been taught, as I would pray as I have been taught.

A "moment of silence" implies that we are silent because no one is listening. To pray as we have been taught is to celebrate truth and faith and to respect the faith of others, even as I practice my faith. Let America, let the world, pray, but let us not pray silently. Let Hindu listen respectfully as the Muslim prays. Let the Jew listen quietly while the Christian prays. Let the Jew call upon God as he has been taught, as we all listen. And, as we listen, not in contemptuous silence, but in gratitude for others who believe, even when they do not believe as we do, let us celebrate faith. Each of us should, when allowed by others, declare to them what and why we believe as we do, and when the opportunity is not afforded, let us practice our faith in such a manner that its vitality will be seen by our acts.

In his review of Norman Rose's Churchill, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger contrasted the hero with the superstar. He said:

"Our age finds it difficult to come to grips with figures like Winston Churchill. The political leaders with whom we are familiar generally aspire to be superstars rather than

heroes. Superstars strive for approbation; heroes walk alone. Superstars crave consensus; heroes define themselves by the judgment of a future they see it as their task to bring about. Superstars seek success in a technique for eliciting support; heroes pursue success as the outgrowth of inner values.

The ultimate test of statesmanship is a combination of insight and courage. Insight leads to assessments that define a society's freedom of action, while courage enables the statesman to act on his convictions before they are generally understood. Great statesman operate on the outer margin of their society's capabilities; weak statesman tend to be overwhelmed by events." ("With Faint Praise", Henry A Kissinger, The New York Times Book Review, July 16, 1995, p. 7)

It is only the hero who will successfully attract to his standard a world desperate for leadership, which transcends geographic borders. We need men and women who will move beyond the rhetoric of "smoking then out of their hole" to statement-like pronouncements which we associate with Lincoln, Roosevelt and Churchill.

Politicians typically tell people what they want to hear and take them where they want to go. They lead in appearance only, for, in reality, they only run ahead of the crowd without giving it direction. Prophets -- and heroes -- tell people what they need to hear and take them where they need to go. The prophet rarely deals in religious dogma, but addresses the logical implications of the faith espoused by his or her individual listeners.

We have a great opportunity; I pray that we will not squander it. We must all pray that our President will look past the obvious and temporary to that which is visionary and permanent. In the end, the greatest and the most lasting memorial which we can build to the those whose lives were lost September 11th, is to be able to say, "Terrorism is no longer acceptable on the face of the earth and it is effectively opposed by Muslim, Christian, Jew and Hindu." If George W. Bush is able to lead us to build that kind of memorial, coming generations will speak his name with the reverence associated with Lincoln, Roosevelt and Churchill.

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