

CONSEQUENCES OF NO CONSEQUENCES

Very Reverend Glenn Jones

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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Ah, warmer weather cometh, and with it, the perennial onslaught of protests. Right now, the cause *de jour* continues to be the conflict in Gaza, with protests on various college campuses and in some cities. Who woulda' thunk that in such, we'd be witnessing [calls](#) even for beheadings of campus officials here in the U.S., with terms like "intifada" and "jihad" tossed around casually, the tossers obviously not fully realizing the implications? Certainly, young protesters love to utilize hyperbolic lingo, but mobs are known to take hyperbole and run with it. Might we see another Kent State-type event if protests become more violent? Or, conversely, an anarchic takeover of large areas as in Portland a few years ago?

Without law, the mob rules. Then you have ... well ... mob rule. Never very pretty. The thinking person wonders how anarchists believe conditions will improve with anarchy ... anarchy never lasts very long, by the way, since someone or some oligarchy always takes power quickly and enforces whatever law that power can maintain. Also never very pretty. It's not a dissimilar result than has happened when "defund the police" advocates have crimes committed against them and then call ... the police.

Civilization becomes possible because of law and the observance of it—even enforced when necessary. The societal challenge comes in the attempt to establish laws that are for the benefit rather than the detriment of society as a whole and to individuals in particular—seeking the observance of our founding principle (even if very imperfectly executed) of "justice for all".

And this is a Biblical principle as well. Much of the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—concerns itself with Law, both of worship and of secular interactions in general. And while Christians believe that Jesus came to take the punishment merited by our sins—our moral crimes—upon Himself, neither did He give *carte blanche* to do whatever we feel like doing—the enslavement to passion rather than to reason, as St. Paul terms it. As Jesus challenged: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46), for "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me ... If a man loves me, he will keep my word ... He who does not love me does not keep my words ..." (John 14:21-24). And finally, in John's first letter: "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this, we may be sure that we are in him." (1 John 2:4-5)

St. Paul himself was rather adamant about obedience even to secular authority, the whole first part of Romans 13 addressing it, such as with: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." (Romans 13:1) Obviously, there are less-than-perfect, or even bad, governance which can and should be challenged lawfully and with popular movement, but one should do so peacefully and be wary about making a bad situation worse. Rid yourself of an autocrat? Beware of getting a tyrant in his stead. And certainly, if a government requires its citizens to do evil, then the righteous should refuse, for as Peter and John proclaimed: "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) King Baldwin in "The Kingdom of Heaven," though a movie, spoke a great truth: "A King may move a man ... but remember that even when those who move you be Kings, or men of power, your soul is in your keeping alone. When you stand before God, you cannot say, 'But I was told by others to do thus,' or, 'Virtue was not convenient at the time.' This will not suffice."

As far as consequences go, Paul wrote: "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (1 Timothy 5:20). In Paul's context, the "standing in fear" was more of shame before the worshipping assembly at best, fear of being excommunicated to the more extreme. Such trepidation presupposes the desire to be accepted into a group or assembly. However, in secular society, a mere rebuke against order or law is likely to be scoffed at and certainly not a strong motivation to correct one's behavior; in fact, a "slap on the wrist" only emboldens the determined criminal. Any parent understands that all too well.

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In our democratic republic, we are privileged to choose our government, though that choice can be a two-edged sword. Balancing mercy and justice is always one of the greatest challenges, especially since dividing lines can differ widely from one individual to another, as do strategies for dealing with situations. Will protests, for example, “burn out” over time, or will they continue to expand and force a harder line from authorities? We certainly hope for a peaceful solution, both in the protests and in Gaza. Perhaps we’ll see the former, but after thousands of years of conflict and Hamas’ and others’ pledge to destroy all Jews, one cannot but doubt the latter. Yet, as the angel Gabriel told Mary (Luke 1:37), and as Jesus affirmed (Matthew 19:26), with God, all things are possible. Time will tell ... and summer is just beginning.
