

# Developing Leadership for Democratic Nations: Creating Statesmen Rather Than Politicians

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**Dr. Gary I. Allen**  
**Delivered at the United Nations**  
**21 March 1996**

A democracy is a precious achievement for any society. But a democracy is an extremely fragile institution. From the moment that a democracy begins, there are always two competing forces—one to build it up, and one to tear it down. To illustrate the latter, listen to the warning issued by Prof. Alexander Tytler nearly two centuries ago:

*A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the Public Treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the Public Treasury.<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, people can abuse a democratic system for their own selfish interests. And the candidates for office exploit this, to the detriment of democracy.

The reality is that man is selfish by nature. It is the nature of man to focus on his desires, and rarely to be more concerned with the greater societal good. The nature of man blinds him to the reality that the healthier is the society in its totality, the better off he will be. Such a person will vote for the candidate that will give him the greatest personal benefits.

It takes a strong leader to guide a society made up of such people. It takes a strong leader to even try to move a people in an unpopular direction. Then, when you factor in that democracy consists of frequent re-issuing of the mandate from the people to lead, i.e., elections, it is a further temptation for the leader to be more concerned about re-election, therefore, with what will make the people happy, than with what is best for the society. It is in this way that man's selfish nature applied to those who gain power hurts our societies. This combination of man's selfish human nature driving the electorate to choose officials who will give it what it wants, and driving the leader to focus on his political future leads to the destruction of the democratic society. Thus, the tendency for the deterioration of a democratic society is a very powerful one. It is this that caused Prof. Tytler to conclude: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government."<sup>2</sup> To state the problem clearly: man desires democracy, but his very nature destroys democracy.

When you couple this with the fact that our world is moving at an ever-increasing speed—more rapidly than the ability of our leaders to anticipate, or even react—we have a serious problem. Leadership today appears preoccupied with reacting to crises rather than exerting visionary leadership. We are more focused on damage control. Leadership is reactive when it needs to be proactive.

I would like to consider the problem from the point of view of the responsibility and challenge facing leaders in democratic societies. The true leader must serve his people and meet their needs, although he must distinguish between what they want and what they really need. I

mean this in the sense described by the former President of Columbia University when he said:

*Our world is made up of three kinds of people: the few who make things happen, the many who watch things happen, and the great majority who have no idea what is happening.*<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, no responsible leader can leave it to the latter group to determine national policy. And yet, in a democratic society, it is this very group who must approve the leader's performance.

It was the pondering of this dilemma that caused Edmund Burke, the political thinker of eighteenth century England, to conclude:

*The great difference between the real statesman and the pretender is that the one sees into the future, while the other regards only the present; the one lives by the day, and acts on expediency; the other acts on enduring principles and for immortality.*<sup>4</sup>

According to Burke, there are two characteristics that distinguish the statesman from the common politician:

1. The statesman has the capacity to think long-range.
2. The statesman operates on enduring principles.

Although Burke's analysis was made two centuries ago, I am convinced it is just as relevant today. It is these two characteristics necessary for statesmen that I would like to think through with you.

Let us consider the first principle: The statesman has the capacity to think long-range. According to Burke, the statesman envisions where the nation must go. He acts as if he believes a plan for his nation exists, a plan that is a guide for his actions. The statesman operates with the conviction that there is a plan that transcends the particular leader. I would submit to you that the statesman operates as if there is a plan that is authored by someone greater than himself, someone with ideas more significant than his own. Implicit is the conviction that this plan is knowable. The statesman's major effort is to discern that plan and to implement it. He is more concerned with what is best for the nation than his own political future. The implication is that he sees the steps necessary to get there, even what obstacles may get in the way and how to overcome them. He has a high view of his own role, and he has a deep sense of personal responsibility.

Clarke adds the following insight:

*A politician thinks of the next election, a statesman of the next generation. A politician looks for the success of his party; a statesman for that of his country. The statesman wishes to steer, while the politician is satisfied to drift.*<sup>5</sup>

Men and women in high office recognize the need for visionary leadership. Winston Churchill quipped, "The nation will find it very hard to look up to the leaders who are keeping their ears to the ground."<sup>6</sup> Morrow added:

*The difference between a politician and a statesman is that the politician sees which way the people are going and tries to stay ahead of them, whereas the statesman sees what is best and right and does that even if no one follows.<sup>7</sup>*

His words, sadly, strike very close to home. The statesman must exert visionary leadership!

While we are looking at this characteristic—the capacity to think long-range—we must ultimately ask the questions: Where does this characteristic come from? How can we build this characteristic into our leaders? I have argued in other places that God has a specific plan for each nation.<sup>8</sup> For the sake of time, I will not repeat those arguments here. Rather, I would like to focus more on how the leader fits into those plans. As a reminder of God's plans for our nations, listen to God's words to one nation two and a half millennia ago: “I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”<sup>9</sup> While His plans are specific for each nation, the intent is the same for all nations: well-being. There is a plan for each nation for each era that is established by the Master Designer of our nations.

It is one thing to be convinced of the existence of a plan. It is another to know the plan. Many leaders operate as if they see such a plan. However, history judges whether the individual was a statesman or a politician. Knowing God's plan requires knowing the Author of the plan. God made this very clear to us when He said:

*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.<sup>10</sup>*

Trying to think noble thoughts does not give us the mind of God. Knowing God's plan can only be gained by Him pouring His mind into us as a result of our living our lives in dependence upon Him.

Can a Head of State discern the mind of God with regard to his nation? Abraham Lincoln, while President, said:

*I have had so many evidences of His direction, so many instances when I have been controlled by some other power than my own will, that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above. I frequently see my way clear to a decision when I have no sufficient facts upon which to found it. But I cannot recall one instance in which I have followed my own judgment, founded upon such a decision, where the results were unsatisfactory, whereas, in almost every instance where I have yielded to the views of others, I have had occasion to regret it. I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do a particular thing, He finds a way of letting me know it.<sup>11</sup>*

Lincoln added further insight on another occasion:

*If it is probable that God would reveal His will to others, on a point so connected to my duty, it might be supposed He would reveal it directly to me....It is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. And if I can learn what it is, I will do it!<sup>12</sup>*

Not only can God give His mind to leaders, but the leader can seek God's mind with confidence. However, the key to Lincoln's certainty was his commitment to follow God's plan once it was revealed to him.

The statesman sees a long-range plan, operates according to it, and measures the performance of his administration against it.

The second characteristic of the statesman according to Burke is: The statesman operates “on enduring principles and for immortality”. I understand Burke to say that the statesman operates according to high principles which can withstand the judgment not only of the electorate, but of God. The statesman accepts that there are ground rules by which the government official must operate. To the statesman, not only is the goal important, but the way he achieves that goal is just as important. The statesman, although he has compelling goals, operates as if he does not have to achieve these goals by his own strength. He does not have to take ethical shortcuts to ensure success. He has a strong code of ethics.

What are these enduring principles? I would submit to you that they include qualities such as: integrity, justice, diligence, and sacrificial service on behalf of others. Dwight Eisenhower said:

*The supreme quality for a leader is unquestionably integrity....His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose.*<sup>13</sup>

Again, these values are best achieved when there is obedience to God. George Washington, in his farewell address, gave his best advice for the well-being of the nation on whose behalf he had sacrificed so much:

*And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education,...reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.*<sup>14</sup>

High principles must be based upon reverence for God. As an example, God Himself gave the following instructions:

*Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.*<sup>15</sup>

Obedience to God in the life of the leader will lead to the administration of justice, as well as a concern for others, including the weakest members of society—those who can never pay him back politically. Gibbons summarized the relationship when he said a century ago:

*Every philosopher and statesman who has discussed the subject of human governments, has acknowledged that there can be no stable society without justice, no justice without morality, no morality without religion, no religion without God.*<sup>16</sup>

In these brief remarks, I have argued that these two key characteristics of a statesman can

best be built into the life of a leader through dependence upon God. The fundamental question is: Can a leader provide visionary leadership without dependence upon God? Can a leader know God's plan without seeking God? Lincoln said:

*I should be the veriest shallow and self-conceited blockhead upon the footstool, if, in my discharge of the duties which are put upon me in this place, I should hope to get along without the wisdom which comes from God and not from men.*<sup>17</sup>

Lincoln was saying, "I need to get my instructions from the ultimate ruler over my nation." With these words, he acknowledged that the uniquely effective plan for his nation can only be obtained by dependence upon God. He gives us insight which is essential for all statesmen in all cultures in all eras.

My observation is that the leader who sees the existence of a long-range plan makes a far greater impact. The leader generally acknowledged to have been the wisest, King Solomon, speaking under God's inspiration, said: "Without a vision, the people perish."<sup>18</sup> He recognized the truth that we need a framework as a guide for our actions. Given that framework, we can order all of our activities and those of all who are responsible to us. For the person who knows his God, no challenge is insurmountable. One Prime Minister, inspired by God, said, "The people who know their God will display strength and take action."<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, the person who does not see the existence of a long-range plan, generally sees less significance to his actions. I think you can see the impossibility of anyone who would deny the reality of the Master Planner being able to envision a plan. Listen to the words of one skeptic: "Man,...his origins, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms."<sup>20</sup> With this perspective, there can be no long-range planning with any sense of conviction. The one who cannot see God cannot possibly comprehend His plan. The failure of Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot as leaders started with a failed perspective that denied God.

I am not saying that every acknowledged statesman lived his life in dependence upon God. However, I am firmly convinced that the one who desires to become a statesman can best achieve that goal by living in dependence upon God. Gladstone shared with us his insights:

*During the many years in the Cabinet I was brought in contact with some sixty master minds, and not more than perhaps three or four of whom were in sympathy with the skeptical movements of the day.*<sup>21</sup>

His observation was that, although it may seem fashionable to express independence from God, the outstanding public servants were men of faith in God.

God clarified the wisdom He provides to His children as they walk in dependence upon Him:

*We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it....However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him"—but God*

*has revealed it to us by His Spirit.*<sup>22</sup>

I believe leaders realize their need for God more than any other segment of society, because leadership, as we enter the twenty-first century, is beyond the capability of the unaided human mind. Jesus elaborated on this when He told His closest followers:

*Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.*<sup>23</sup>

Kings have always been driven to try to understand the mysteries of God. And yet, I submit to you that statesmen throughout the centuries have realized that the simple follower of Jesus Christ understands what the one who walks in his own strength can never understand.

God has given the following insight:

*There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God....The authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.*<sup>24</sup>

Leaders are servants of God. They are servants of God just as much as any clergymen. As such, the servant must acknowledge his master.

To be called to be a leader is to be called by God to be a statesman, which in turn is a call to live in dependence upon God. The statesman recognizes himself as a servant inadequate to fulfill the responsibilities by himself. He is servant first of all to God and second of all to the people.

Lincoln bluntly stated, "Faith in God is indispensable to successful statesmanship."<sup>25</sup> He who served during the greatest crisis to the constitution and the national integrity in the history of the United States was convinced that a statesman cannot be other than a man of God. If there is any area within the sphere of human activity where one-dimensional thinking is unacceptable, it is, first and foremost, in the piloting of nations.

The leader must place himself in dependence upon God. The leader must lead his people in humbling themselves before Almighty God, their Master. This is a challenge to the Head of Government of any nation. I believe that the challenge to leadership was clearly expressed at the time of Jesus:

*Many even among the leaders believed in [Jesus]. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.*<sup>26</sup>

"They loved praise from men more than praise from God." This is the trap for leadership. It ensnares the politician and must be resisted by the statesman. The leader must be willing to deal with his own ego. We must be willing to humble ourselves.

Statesmen, as Burke has defined them, are not always popular. They do not always become Heads of Government. However, I am convinced that they do make a contribution. Consider William Wilberforce. In 1780, he entered the British Parliament at age 21, the youngest Member, a gifted orator and a talented politician, a rising star in British politics. Many felt he

could have been Prime Minister. However, five years after he entered Parliament, he was drawn to God. He described it this way: “It was not so much the fear of punishment by which I was affected, as a sense of my great sinfulness in having so long neglected the unspeakable mercies of my God and Saviour.”<sup>27</sup> Wilberforce's goals changed. Up until this point, he described his goals as follows: “The first years I was in Parliament, I did nothing—nothing that is to any purpose. My own distinction was my darling object.”<sup>28</sup> This is nothing less than the honest admission of a politician! However, based upon his change of heart and his new relationship with God, he wrote two years later, “God Almighty has set before me two great objects—the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.”<sup>29</sup> He had a vision. And these two goals drove him until he died 46 years later.

Wilberforce worked tirelessly toward two changes in England: a spiritual change, i.e., the change of heart toward God; and social changes, including abolition of slavery and other reforms, based upon the application of Biblical principles and justice. He drew several others into the endeavours with him. The spiritual renewal spread throughout England led by many other people and gradually penetrated every level of society, including government. He sacrificed his own political career in his politically unpopular campaign to abolish slavery. However, with time, the changes came. In 1807, the slave trade was abolished. In 1833, days before Wilberforce died, Parliament voted to abolish slavery.

He never became Head of Government, but I submit to you that he made a far greater contribution than any Prime Minister. By Burke's definition and my understanding, he was a statesman of the first order. The basis for his vision, his diligence and his accomplishments was his faith in God. Without that faith, he would not have made the contribution that he did. And who knows how the history of slavery would have been affected.

We need statesmen, as Burke has defined them, at every level of government. This includes public administration. My challenge to you is: Are we allowing God to make us the statesmen that our nations need? Or, are we allowing petty, selfish goals to stand in the way?

Lincoln admonished his people:

*It is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.*<sup>30</sup>

He used the word repentance—which means to let our hearts break with the things that break the heart of God. We must allow our hearts to break over our disregard of God. We must allow our hearts to break over our busyness and our preoccupation with our own agenda rather than with God's. We must do this as individuals and as nations.

How can you and I have this intimate relationship with God where He can reveal His mind and His plans to us? God created us out of love and for the purpose of bestowing love upon us as part of this intimate friendship. The God who reigns over nations is holy—without moral imperfection. However, we are not morally perfect. We have the capacity for evil. We hurt others, even the ones we love, with our selfishness. Our moral imperfection—our unholiness—blocks this friendship with God. It excludes us from the presence of Holy God. Our unholiness is incompatible with God's perfect holiness. The problem is insurmountable from a human point of view. By ourselves, there is no way we can come into the presence of Holy God. By ourselves,

we are eternally separated from the One who created us and loves us. The eternal consequences are great when one recognizes that being separated from our Creator at the end of this lifetime means a literal hell.

How can this blocked friendship with God be overcome? We need a way to be forgiven so that God can draw us close to Himself. By ourselves, there is no way we can accomplish this. Only Almighty God can do it. That is precisely why God Himself came to earth as Jesus to die on our behalf to pay the penalty for our sins. God has told us:

*Jesus is the image of the invisible God....By Jesus all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things...by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.*<sup>31</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi described that sacrifice when he said that Jesus, “a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Jesus has told us, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”<sup>33</sup> God has told us, “There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”<sup>34</sup> Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God is able to forgive us and to see us as holy. Jesus' death and resurrection is the only provision given to man whereby we can have our sins forgiven and have this intimate friendship with God. God has told us:

*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*<sup>35</sup>

*God took the sinless Christ and poured into Him our sins. Then, in exchange, He poured God's goodness into us!*<sup>36</sup>

Let me be very clear: What I am advocating is not religion. It is the person of Jesus. As God Himself, Jesus is for all of us, not just certain races, cultures, or regions of the world. I believe this is what Mahatma Gandhi meant when he said:

*Because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that he belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world; to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.*<sup>37</sup>

The repentance and forgiveness which allows us to have an intimate friendship with God, and therefore to be able to receive instruction from Him, is centered in the person of Jesus. Let us not leave here today thinking we can have this any other way but through embracing Jesus and Him

alone.

How do we place our faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, so we can experience this intimate friendship with God that lasts forever and helps each of us to understand the mind of God, as we fulfill the responsibilities He has given us on this earth? The illustration that communicates best to me relates to the region where I grew up—near Niagara Falls. Many people do risky things over Niagara Falls to gain attention. One of these was a tightrope walker. He had a wire strung over the Falls, from one side to the other. This man first walked along this wire from one side of the Falls to the other, and back. Then, as the crowd grew, he repeated his walk but this time he pushed a wheelbarrow in front of him as he walked over to the other side and back. Then, he boldly filled the wheelbarrow with bricks and guided it along the wire to the other side of the Falls and back. By this time, the crowd had grown very large and was cheering loudly for him. He then asked the crowd, “How many of you believe I can take this wheelbarrow to the other side of the Falls and back carrying a person inside instead of these bricks?” The crowd cheered wildly. Then, he asked the crowd, “Who is willing to get into the wheelbarrow?” The crowd became silent. Their belief lacked 100% confidence. To place our faith in Jesus Christ means to get into the wheelbarrow with Him, making ourselves completely dependent upon Him. Our sole basis for having our sins forgiven and for entering a close friendship with God is Jesus' death on our behalf.

It is this making ourselves dependent upon Jesus that gives us the capacity to walk intimately with God. God's solution for a leadership guided by God applies to everyone. No one—neither you nor I—can have access to the mind of God without the life of Jesus living through us. Therefore, if you are serious about helping our nations to enjoy all the benefits God intends for us, I challenge you to come to Him. Jesus invites us:

*If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”<sup>38</sup>*

As we come to Jesus and drink, He will satisfy us and this will spill over to others in our societies, causing them to come to Jesus and drink. As sufficient numbers within our societies drink, our societies will be made up of individuals who are making decisions more in agreement with God's plan.

For this reason, I can invite you to come to Jesus and drink. Let me encourage you to embrace the Master Designer of our world and your life. I encourage you to invite Jesus into your life by praying to God:

*Holy God, please forgive me for sinning against You. Thank You for loving me enough that You came to this earth as Jesus and died on my behalf so that I could have real life with You. I ask You to come into my life to give me unbroken friendship with You forever. I ask You to change me and, with me, the world. Thank You. Amen.*

Not only will this start you on the most exciting journey known to man, but it is the most significant thing each of us can do to be useful in the service of our nations.

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