

A NEW WORLD ORDER

by

Ed O'Rourke

David C. Korten's *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* (Kumarian Press, Inc. and Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006, Inc., 402 pages) offers an alternative vision, turning away from fear to hope. He paints 5,000 years of history with a broad brush offering a refreshing look at the rise, fall and liabilities of empires. Those who do not agree with him may still find his presentation to be interesting. According to Mr. Korten, humankind has been living in an age of Empire for about 5,000 years. He turns back to pre-civilization societies that were egalitarian. Based on archeological studies, the size of the homes was about the same. Women exercised leadership roles in these societies, served as priestesses and the Supreme Being was a goddess, usually Mother earth. The great mother deity was a source of life and protection against nature's threatening forces. In these societies, there was no slavery, no conquest nor heavy fortifications.

Nomadic pastoralist tribes formed societies that worshipped violent male gods that honored the warrior, treated women as male property, and allocated a significant amount of resources to weapons improvement. These tribes increased prosperity by conquest rather than improving animal husbandry techniques.

In the period from 4300 BC to 2800 BC god-worshipping nomadic tribes conquered goddess-worshipping agricultural societies. The sky god replaced the earth goddess. Pre-Empire societies honored power to give life. Empire societies honored the power to take life. Kings increased their power by claims of personal divinity or divine appointment.

Empire's social, political, economic, cultural, theological, and philosophical patterns started about 5,000 years ago and last to this day. Humankind must turn to earth community if it is to survive. Pre-Empire societies set priorities on public works and an improved standard for all. Empire elites take the best for themselves, dividing the society between haves and have-nots. It is no accident that two billion people today live on \$2 per day or less. This is not part of the natural order. Mr. Korten states, "It is no coincidence that the United States has the most unequal wealth distribution of the industrial nations and is the most imperial of modern times." It is no coincidence that the ratio of CEO compensation to the average worker rose from 141 to 1 in 1995 to 301 to 1 in 2003. It is no coincidence that there are 2 million people in US prisons, the majority for nonviolent drug offenses, while criminals who commit offenses using political and social power go largely unpunished.

There is a widespread notion that empires (the Roman Empire, ours or anyone else's) bring peace, stability and well run public services. Rome had a succession of five relatively wise and benevolent emperors over 84 years (96 – 180 AD). Such sustained periods of peace are rare. The Roman Empire was more noted for civil war, strife, intrigue, and slavery.

The United States was an empire even before the Declaration of Independence. Americans took land from the Indians and committed genocide until about the 1880s. The United States took what are now the southwestern states in a war that Abraham Lincoln said was wrong. The War of 1898 with Spain ended quickly enough. Phillipinos fought for 10 years and lost 100,000 lives to oppose American occupation. In the 1903-1934 period, the US sent troops to Mexico, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua and Haiti.

During the Cold War, the American government destabilized popularly elected governments alleging that they were linked with Communists. In 1953, the Central Intelligence Agency engineered the overthrow of the popularly elected Iranian president, Mohammed Mossadeq because Secretary of State John Foster Dulles thought that Communists had influence in Iran. President Mossadeq's true offense was the nationalization of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. After his departure, the American government heavily supported the Shah of Iran and his hated torture squads.

The United States has an empire administered through financial markets, the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, the International Trade Organization, and the military. Gone are the days of administering colonies. It is cheaper for a superpower to ensure that governments do not take independent positions rather than occupying them.

Current day empires are still expensive. Our country is living beyond its means as seen in the trade deficit and federal budget deficit. The US defense budget is greater than that of the next 25 countries. Running the largest military establishment in the history of the world takes resources. To top it off, conventional armies are ineffective at dealing with terrorists who are everywhere and nowhere. Our country would be far better off by eliminating conditions that trigger terrorist recruitment. Our nation has to eliminate causes of violence (hunger, poverty, lack of medical care, human rights abuse) or otherwise live in perpetual fear.

The world faces genuine threats in nuclear war, climate change, toxic contamination, water shortages, population explosion, and an unjust economic order. The terrorists are themselves a reflection of these conditions. Work on the underlying conditions and the terrorist threat will become manageable.

The Empire's driving force is the transnational corporations, which should be broken up into small companies which would be relieved of inflated compensation packages for their executives. Nation states should pass legislation prohibiting corporate influence on legislation (lobbying) and campaign contributions. The society should return corporations to the role of obeying legislation, not writing it.

In the next edition to this book, I hope Mr. Korten will explicitly call for the abolition of war and poverty through a second Marshall Plan for the world's poor, ending agricultural subsidies in rich countries allowing products from poor countries to enter the market, declaring a moratorium on weapons research, and instituting a sales tax on international arms sales.

Since the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have shown themselves proficient at protecting the creditors and devastating the poor, a new agency will necessary to administer the second Marshall Plan. The new agency's board of directors will have some farmers, teachers, and union members from the poor countries as well as those who have expertise in international lending.

Isaiah invited humankind to turn swords into ploughshares. General Douglas MacArthur advocated the abolition of war. A more recent call during the Vietnam War challenged the world to give peace a chance. That's what we must do now.

Ed O'Rourke is an environmental accounting in Houston, Texas.

Ed O'Rourke
713-664-4343
eorourke@pdq.net