

Are human rights "subversive" to the current "society of states"?

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



FOREWORD

In keeping with the assertion postulated as subject of discourse in this essay, this Writer intends to pursue a path of thought-process guided by what is perceived as a radical-sounding claim by Mark R. Amstutz, a Professor of Political Science at Wheaton College, Illinois, USA. Allegedly, Professor Mark R. Amstutz claimed that Human Rights are "Subversive" to the International Status Quo - The current state of a "Society of States".

Whether or not Amstutz really made such a claim, and if he did, is he serious? He must have concrete and well-founded bases in saying so.

For the purpose of this essay, I would like to be directed in my discussion by the following questions: 1) What does Amstutz mean in his alleged claim?; 2) Am I agreeable to it?; 3) Either way, what is my stand?; 4) Is the alleged potential subversion a good thing or not?

AMSTUTZ'S PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

In his book, *The Healing of Nations: The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), Professor Mark R. Amstutz posed a challenge to the International Community which to him would tend to focus their efforts mostly on imputing retributive justice and punitive actions to past political offenses. And in carrying out their strategies, they would use their resources and exhaust efforts in a course of action that would only aggravate, widen, and worsen even more the gap between the offended and the offending parties. To Amstutz, the

appropriate, effective, and lasting approach should be by way of restorative justice.

Simply put, what Amstutz appears to mean is to break the barrier and bridge the gap by giving allowances and offering of incentives to offenders, while motivating them to come out of their belligerent stance and return into orderliness and peaceful co-existence with the rest of the freedom-loving populace.

Professor Amstutz's central contention in his book as quoted by Eric Brahm (Conflict Research Consortium, 2005) is that "The most expeditious and effective way of reckoning with past collective offenses is by intentionally seeking to foster political healing through reconciliation based on moral rehabilitation of antagonists". With that contention, Amstutz, a Political Scientist, exhibits an image of being a Moralist, too. Furthermore, Amstutz is not only resourceful as a Political Scientist and a dedicated Moralist, he also appears to be a Minister of Gospel Truth. In his thesis, *Human Rights and the Promise of Political Forgiveness* (Wheaton College, IL, 2004), he wrote, "Forgiveness addresses serious wrongs by calling on transgressors to confront and acknowledge moral culpability and to repent through the implicit promise of not repeating the evil action again. For their part, victims refrain from vengeance and release debtors from some or all of the deserved punishment. By encouraging such actions, forgiveness fosters a context that encourages the moral renewal of persons and the transformation of enmity into communal solidarity".

ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Now, why would Amstutz qualify Human Rights as "Subversive" to the current state of "Society of States"? My intelligent guess is that his understanding on the meaning and sense of what Human Rights means, is a world different from the common people's conception. For sure, there are as many definitions of Human Rights as there are various advocates fighting for their respective rights, be it male, female, third sex, minors, juniors, senior citizens, black, white, brown, yellow race, etc.

For a better understanding of Human Rights in its practical sense, today's common people can learn from the statements of the two candidates for US Presidency. Senator John McCain is quoted as saying, "We are Americans. We hold ourselves to humane standard of treatment no matter how terribly evil or awful they may be...We stand for a lot more than that in the world: a moral mission, one of freedom and democracy, and human rights at home and abroad. We are better than the terrorists, and we will win...

The enemy we fight has no respect for human life or human rights...These are values that distinguish us from our enemies"(Human Rights First, July 25, 2005).

For his part, Senator Barack Obama said, "To build a better, freer world, we must first behave in ways that reflect the decency and aspirations of the American People. This means ending the practices of shipping away prisoners in the dead of night to be tortured in far-off countries, of detaining thousands without charge or trial, of maintaining a network of secret prisons to jail people beyond the reach of law"("Renewing American Leadership", July/August, 2007).

AFTERWORD

In light of the common conception of Human Rights as reflected through the statements of the two presidentiables, McCain and Obama, I see no clear reason to call Human Rights as subversive, no matter how qualified the term may be. Although Human Rights may not be as perfect with reference to the standard of the Moralist and Evangelist in Amstutz, but there is almost no doubt, theirs is one of complementary role in the common aspiration of people in all walks of life to co-exist in peace and to live a life grounded on the Principles of The Golden Rule.

References:

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