

A lot of people don't want to live like us

Too often in the West, do we assume that almost everyone really wants to live as we do, with our system of government and our cultural freedoms?

Consider our regular promotion of democracy and human rights as examples. What are now promoted as expanded human rights, often things that would be considered socially liberal in the U.S., are thoroughly despised by many cultures around the world. Yet, we hope to make the rest of the world like us by creating incentives through foreign aid, trade deals, etc. to implement our views of human rights.

The same is true of democracy. While it can be a great system of government, in some cases it can be despotic. Furthermore, some societies simply have not developed the necessary social habits and civic institutions to support it. Democracy isn't for everyone. Yet, we tirelessly promote it around the world and in some cases force it upon countries with our military power.

But what if people don't want to be us? For better or worse, what if they would prefer to live as they do or pursue their own paths?

The question came to me while reading *The Eagle* with my sons. If you have Netflix, you might have watched the movie *The Eagle of the Ninth*, which is based very loosely on the book written by Rosemary Sutcliff. If you're unfamiliar with both, the story is that of an honorably discharged Roman soldier attempting to restore his father's honor in Britain. Rosemary Sutcliff spends a good deal of the book detailing the culture clashes between the Romans and the various British tribes. Some of the tribes were content to go along with the Roman way

of life and law, while many other tribes were not and waged war against the Romans to show it.

The section below of *The Eagle* captures well that cultural clash, especially the notion that some people will prefer their ways over the ways of the others –being willing to die for their preferences, while admitting that in many ways the others' ways can be superior.

"Marcus [the Roman] leaned back, his hands behind his neck, and looked up at his slave. The thought of Guinhumara and her baby was still with him, standing behind the thought of Cottia. 'Esca [of the Brigantes tribe], why do all the frontier tribes resent our coming so bitterly?' he asked on a sudden impulse. 'The tribes of the South have taken to our ways easily enough.'

'We have ways of our own,' said Esca. He squatted on one heel beside the bench. 'The tribes of the South had lost their birthright before ever the Eagles came in war. They sold it for the things that Rome could give. They were fat with Roman merchandise and their souls had grown lazy with them.'

'But these things that Rome had to give, are they not good things?' Marcus demanded. 'Justice, and order, and good roads; worth having, surely?'

'These be all good things,' Esca agreed. 'But the price is too high.'

'The price? Freedom?'

'Yes – and other things than freedom.'

'What other things? Tell me, Esca; I want to know, I want to understand.'

Esca thought for a while, starting straight before him. 'Look at the pattern embossed here on your dagger-sheath,' he said at last. 'See, here is a tight curve, and here is another

facing the other way to balance it, and here between them is a little round stiff flower; and then it is all repeated here, and here, and here again. It is beautiful, yes, but to me it is as meaningless as an unlit lamp.'

Marcus nodded as the other glanced up at him. 'Go on.'

Esca took up the shield which had been laid aside at Cottia's coming. 'Look now at this shield-boss. See the bulging curves that flow from each other as water flows from water and wind from wind, as the stars turn in the heaven and blown sand drifts into dunes. These are the curves of life; and the man who traced them had in him knowledge of things that your people have lost the key to – if they ever had it.' He looked up at Marcus again very earnestly. 'You cannot expect the man who made this shield to live easily under the rule of the man who worked the sheath of this dagger.'

'The sheath was made by a British craftsman,' Marcus said stubbornly. 'I bought it at Anderida when I first landed.'

'By a British craftsman, yes, making a Roman pattern. One who had lived so long under the wings of Rome – he and his fathers before him – that he had forgotten the ways and the spirit of his own people.' He laid the shield down again. 'You are the builders of coursed stone walls, the makers of straight roads and ordered justice and disciplined troops. We know that, we know it all too well. We know that your justice is more sure than ours, and when we rise against you, we see our hosts break against the discipline of your troops, as the sea breaks against a rock. And we do not understand, because all these things are of the ordered pattern, and only the free curves of the shield-boss are real to us. We do not understand. And when the time comes that we begin to understand your world, too often we lose the understanding of our own.'"

It may be better for us in the long-run to learn to love our own traditions and history while leaving the people of the

world free to live according to their own. War and strife will always be around, but attempting to create a unified, global culture based on the ideals of the West is a prescription for unnecessary and possibly even greater war and strife.

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