

Introduction for Western Civilisation Conference

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What a pleasant surprise! I expected a slothful and lazy bunch. That's what the rest of the world says that the people of the so-called "West" have become.

That's why we may be losing the respect of the rest of the world.

Simply because we are not seen to understand the significance of the legacy that has been left to us.

This has worried me for some time and that's why the Mannkal Foundation conducted our Western Civilisation Conference (just like this one) in Perth last year, where we examined the legacy that has enabled the genius of Western Civilisation to rule the world intellectually for the last 200 years.

Other civilisations and cultures strive to learn our languages and grapple with the concepts of property rights, individual responsibility and the rule of law, because it is not something they have been born with. We, fortunate people, simply breathe it from birth in the same way as we breathe the oxygen in the air.

This may partially explain the sense of contempt that visitors and settlers from other cultures exhibit because they feel that they have a better understanding of why our systems work so well, especially as most of the Westerners they meet appear to have no idea.

This was explained to me in great detail by the noted author, Ayan Hirsi Ali, during her visit to Perth last year. She mentioned that she felt very much like this after leaving Somalia and settling in Holland, where the Dutch had about as much understanding of the intricacies and workings of Western Civilisation as most Australians do.

Occasionally, we need to be reminded of the reasons why perhaps two-thirds of the world's thinking population watch on in wonderment, as the West continues to indulge in Keynesian/bailout remedies which create more debt as a solution to a problem which was caused by excessive debt in the first place .

They watch in bewilderment as the U.S. continues to give annual 'foreign aid' to 16 countries that hold more than US\$10b in US Treasury Securities (including China, India, Brazil and Russia), whilst simultaneously the US borrows back these funds and accrues interest on these borrowings!

That makes as much sense as Australia giving another rich nation, Indonesia, \$500 million. Why? To build Muslim schools!

Observers from other countries question whether the West has forfeited its right to give advice to them on how they should run their economies, and whether the accepted status quo of a European running the International Monetary Fund and an American running the World Bank should continue unquestioned.¹ They even question the very existence and purpose of these expensive institutions.

To them, it appears that we continue to reward bad behaviour in much the same way as we would spray lollies all over our children each time they broke a window.

The last few years have seen a turn for the worse where the public perception of Western Civilisation in many parts of the world is identified with fraudulent practices emanating from Wall Street, which managed to export the Global Financial Crisis to the rest of the world, and, more recently, on the increased level of publicity given to the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and its Chief Executive.

Questions are being asked about how a public servant can be entitled to a \$3,000 per night hotel suite when his only claim to fame is 'producing nothing and spending other people's money'.

Probably the first time I was drawn to Western Civilisation's extensive timeline was on a visit to Taiwan in 1970, where I was introduced to the philosophical wisdom of Lao Tsu (a contemporary of Confucius, during the 6th Century BC). Lao Tsu had an impeccable understanding of the importance of freedom and limited government. For him and his fellow Taoists, harmony cannot be forced; it must be natural.

The minute I read his works I wondered if it were possible that these early writings had had some influence, on the Greek scholars, on Western Civilisation flowing through to Thomas Jefferson and the founding fathers and, in fact, to all advocates of civilized societies.

Here's what Lao Tsu said 26 centuries ago:

"The more laws and restrictions there are,
The poorer people become."

And here's what Tacitus, the Roman Senator and Historian said 21 centuries ago:

"The more corrupt the state, the more numerous the laws."

And here's what Thomas Jefferson said two centuries ago:

"I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labours of the people under the pretence of taking care of them."

And here's what I said; last week:

"Canberra can be defined as 200 sq kilometres; surrounded by reality."

Only joking, but back to Lao Tsu!

In China's mainland, this philosopher, Lao Tsu, is relatively unknown and, indeed, where he is known, is thought to be politically threatening.

So what's the reason for the invisibility of Lao Tsu in mainland China? Well, the answer is easy.

During the so-called Cultural Revolution they simply burnt the books of Lao Tsu.

Well, in much the same way, but without the use of matches, in Australia (and other Western countries) the books on our wonderful heritage of Western Civilisation may as well have been burnt, if reading the new National Curriculum for schools and examining what is taught in our schools and universities is any indication.

The eminent historian, Paul Johnson (in his epic study *Modern Times*), puts our challenge clearly:

“In the last resort, our civilisation is what we think and believe. The externals matter, but they cannot stand if the inner convictions which originally produced them have vanished.”

So friends, we have a task in front of us: to explain in simple terms the genius of Western Civilisation and the benefits that it has brought to us. This responsibility can be regarded as a small price to pay for restoring the nobility of our civilized society.

That's what today is all about and I urge you to participate to the full.

ⁱ Non-western countries comprise most of the current world's population, some 80 per cent. They hold most of the world's currency reserves and are not mired in debt.