



A Suggestion: Psychiatry at High Levels of Government

By Arnold A. Hutschnecker

Absolute independence is an illusion: unrestrained self-assertion would lead man on a road back to the jungle. Independence is a state of relative freedom from domination within boundaries drawn by tradition, the culture and the laws of society.

Inherent in man is his drive to power. The will of the aggressive to subdue the passive causes, if successful, a subjugation of individual or group independence. Unless beaten into complete submission, the subduee resists, for man in order to create needs freedom from fears and controls. Throughout history, he has risen therefore to fight against oppression and tyranny.

In pursuit of such an ideal, a spirited group of men met to turn their dream into reality. On July 4, 1776, in the name of the newly formed United States of America, they presented one of the most stirring documents ever written by man: the Declaration of Independence.

Today, when children in America learn by heart—that all men are created equal—that they are endowed—with certain unalienable rights—that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—they also learn that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." And it is this sentence that provides the key to the startled reaction of the American people when they learned that their cherished guarantees of liberty had been threatened. Men charged with the responsibility of being the guardians of their basic rights had dared to violate a sacred

trust. And a method, low on the scale of human values, one we have attributed contemptuously to totalitarian forms of governments only—namely spying on one another—had been used by some of the guardians themselves.

A deeply disturbed nation had been watching—in rapid progression—the unfolding of bizarre deeds and the painful spectacle of a group of men who had held powerful positions only yesterday, giving the image of frightened small men as they confessed their crimes and, worse, seemed to have difficulty in dealing with the first law of morality: Truth.

The evidence is growing that a conscious level of intellect, even in its sharpest form, may not unravel fully the motivation for some of the absurd tales presented.

The understanding lies in the psychoneurotic personality structure of some of the people who displayed a minimal capacity for human understanding and a greater need for omnipotence. An emotional immaturity and an obvious identification with an image of power was evident in some of these men's nearly blind loyalty and hero worship.

In a professional life, such as mine, one learns to refrain from rash judgment of people—and many times I have thought of Spinoza's impassionate words: "I have striven hard neither to laugh at any of man's doings nor to detest nor cry about them but only to understand them."

But understanding does not mean that a disturbing reality, which affects a whole nation, does not hurt. Nor does it mean to excuse crimes committed against the basic rights of the people. Whether shocked or dismayed,

we must try to learn the lesson from a human disaster.

Perhaps we, the governed, have been too complacent and ought to strive for greater participation in government, oppose secrecy and paternalism and resist the shifting of power away from the people to those who govern.

There can be no independence without responsibility, nor can there be freedom without the determination to defend it. Now that the American people have become aroused, and display their strong will for justice, integrity and the preservation of their rights, they may gain a greater understanding of the full meaning of independence.

It is more these reasons and not because of sensationalism that the greater majority of the people support so strongly our First Amendment guarantee of a free press, and freedom from search without a warrant.

When we review the last two decades with two undeclared wars, with an unleashing of dormant human aggression and violence and a protesting movement of the young people, and when we further consider all the unmeasurable human suffering, the loss of life, of wealth and of prestige our country has undergone, we may perhaps wish to take a second look at all "the best and the brightest" in the nation who, while serving as advisers, advocated and concocted tough policies or armed intervention, when goodwill negotiations could probably have served all concerned better.

Now that the tragedy of the cold war is coming to an end, those who opposed these ventures find indeed how poor in judgment, in wisdom and vision these advisers have been and to

what degree their own voracious ambition or irrational fears of imaginary attacks has caused them to plot holy wars in the name of self-defense.

What method of measure can we apply to evaluate the integrity or honesty of purpose and humanness of a person who is about to enter a position of power in any branch of Government?

Having been concerned with the mental health of political leaders for over two decades, this writer has been attacked for having suggested that candidates, before being allowed to enter a political race, ought to be cleared by a board of physicians and psychiatrists to make certain that they are healthy in mind and body. Or in order to avoid a possible argument of governmental interference, that the evaluation of mental health, like physical health—should take place in childhood so that parents are made aware of problems and have a chance to have their children helped.

Personally I can't shake the belief that had we applied personality evaluation—either psychological or the newer and more precise axiological (a mathematical method of value examination)—our maturer members of Congress might have questioned and possibly fought harder against the tragic ideologies of the cold and the two shooting wars.

The revelations of top secret files have only helped to demonstrate what the psychologist has been aware of: how easily an aggressive human mind can inflame others or be inflamed and how equally easy a cause belli can be manufactured.

Perhaps the time has come for us, the people, who love our country, who

respect its laws, who cherish freedom and who are responsible and independent men and women and who believe in the progress of our civilization to apply psychodynamic principles and to explore possibilities other than purely political to secure that our best and brightest leaders are also our mentally and morally healthiest and soundest.

Progress demands that the many people who still consider psychiatry a branch of medicine only for the insane be made aware of their prejudice or ignorance and be helped to accept not only the curative but also preventive principles in this as in all other areas of medicine.

Today, in view of our country's enormous power and its responsibility, this writer believes that both a clinical as well as a psychoanalytically oriented physician should take part in the policy-making of our Federal or local governments. While some of these doctors may not always be inflexible or the wisest, they have at least been trained in assessing human behavior objectively and can raise their voice when human ambition and greed or drives for an unbridled use of power seem to be getting out of control.

Imperfect perhaps, it would be a beginning. Such an innovation would be a rational step forward in view of our struggle for world peace, freedom and respect for the dignity of the individual and his rights. It would secure our own individual independence, allow healthy interdependence and foster the "pursuit of happiness" in the spirit of 1776.

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