



Eagleton, Frederick the Great, Kennedy, Dulles, Forrestal, McNamara

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The Lessons of Eagleton

By Arnold A. Hutschnecker

The tragic episode of Thomas F. Eagleton last July, of first winning the Democratic Vice-Presidential nomination and then losing it on grounds of three psychiatric hospitalizations, has opened up an intense debate about the question of mental stability of our political leaders. Generated by deep anxiety, the debate continues, at least in medical circles.

This anxiety is only too well justified, for never before in history has one man had as much power as an American President.

Now there is added anxiety about the Presidential running mates, who heretofore played a rather secondary role. Twice in less than two decades Vice Presidents have become Presidents. In each case they have led the country into war. The question for historians to answer is how sound was their judgment and how essential to our national survival were these wars?

Leaders are driven by their inner aggression and an often gnawing hunger for a plus of power. And since in the words of Erich Fromm, "The lust for power is not rooted in strength but weakness," the need to compensate may become obsessive-compulsive and relentless. Childhood experiences of inferiority and helplessness generate a drive to prove oneself one's worth, or one's very existence.

Aggression, when it is positive and realistic, is a healthy, forceful, goal-oriented drive. But it must be balanced so that it may serve the individual and help him to make use of his potentials in a constructive self-fulfilling way. Aggression that is unrealistic becomes destructive and may be directed against society or oneself. The long line of mad leaders throughout history had been men who were whipped by their pervasive delusion or grandeur and an inability to control or sublimate their destructive and unconsciously homicidal aggression.

The realization of weakness or inadequacy are not necessarily detrimental. On the contrary, it may generally serve as a stimulus to mature. In fact, it has given many leaders a powerful incentive to overcome handicaps, as was the case with Teddy Roosevelt.

The classic image of the heroic seems to be on the wane, not because man has become more mature but because the risks of a total holocaust have become so much greater.

A new ideal of leadership seems to emerge. It is based on the preponderance of the creative instinct over the destructive drive and of controlled judgment over impulsive pressures. In today's world, a leader's greatness seems to lie less in a dramatic display of might than in a less spectacular policy of patient negotiation and of resisting the urge of acting out inner aggression to back up a political philosophy by military might.

It is a symbol of statesmanship if a leader dares to change the trend of well-established foreign policy in order to build a bridge of understanding with his antagonists and a peace that is based not on fear but on friendly relations. Whatever the scope of action, control of self is the key word. In a politically explosive situation, the exercise of control is a supreme test of a leader's inner strength.

Eisenhower, at the height of the cold war, resisted the relentless pressures around him and actually paid with his health for his promise to keep the peace.

The strength of character of an American President is not only challenged by the constant threats and provocations of a restive world, but by some of his overaggressive and sometimes mentally unstable advisers. There was the mentally disturbed first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, and John Foster Dulles, with his constant brinkmanship, and Mr. McNamara, who saw human lives in the light of cold computerized statistics, to name only a few.

In the life of any nation, there may be, of course, unprovoked bona fide attacks, not always on as huge a scale as those hatched by psychopaths such as Hitler or those who ordered the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Leaders of vision may at an early stage even have prevented that disaster.

To make the point, I would like to quote Haile Selassie's wise and valid words: "Throughout history it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most, that has made it possible for evil to triumph."

Failure to act may be as destructive as is over-reaction. The criterion is

an objective evaluation of a crisis. If a threat to survival is not real but exaggerated or even imagined, if a theory that a small war might prevent a big war is considered valid, then the neurotic judgment of a leader can push a nation into a bloody quagmire.

How can we as people distinguish between mentally healthy leaders and men who under an appealing facade hide an inner rage and a mind in disarray? How can we know whom to trust, who will keep his word or who might betray the trust of the people?

Pavlov could by his scientific method of conditioning produce aggressive behavior and leadership and so did the fathers of John F. Kennedy, Frederick the Great and Thomas F. Eagleton. These three fathers were overly ambitious men who carefully or brutally groomed their sons for their future tasks. All three young men performed superbly. All three were ill; Frederick the Great had the mood swings and depressions of a homosexual, John F. Kennedy suffered from Addison's disease and Senator Eagleton had three nervous breakdowns.

Does that mean that neurotic men cannot be great leaders? Is there one man of stature who has not gone through the tortures of the damned and who has not gone to the rim of an abyss before his upturn to a meaningful and creative life began? Does the so-called "normal" man, who has a minimum of trouble because he functions like an automaton, make a better leader?

The answers lie in the personality structure of the man who strives for leadership, and whether his drive to power is motivated by creative or destructive forces, whether he wants to

serve the people or whether he needs the people to serve him and his ambition.

As a nation, we need safeguarding principles. Are there really any? Doctors have suggested that Presidential candidates ought to make statements about their health as they do about their financial status.

This writer, while endorsing this thought, does not believe it to be a foolproof guarantee. Also, it could involve a candidate's physician and bring him into conflict with his concern of protecting a patient's confidence. In the Eagleton case, his physicians did refuse and rightly so, to make any statement as to their patient's health.

Evidently, the fear in the case of Eagleton was that under the pressures of his high office, he could break down and then possibly make unsound or destructive decisions. This was obvious in the controversy that captured the headlines of the press.

Generally speaking, it takes insight and enormous courage for a person to decide to go through a process of self-examination as in psychotherapy, when he must come to grips with the person he really is and his place in a world of reality. Consequently, to consult a psychiatrist is not necessarily a sign of mental instability and may often speak more for than against a political leader.

In our search for security, we need some safeguarding principles to do away with the worry every four years about how well put together a candidate is.

Nearly twenty years ago, I suggested that mental health certificates should

be required for political leaders, similar to the Wasserman test demanded by states before marriage. Valid psychological and axiological (value) tests exist today, which would pinpoint psychopathology, so that mentally unstable individuals would be prevented from attaining jobs of political importance. More sensibly, testing should be required at a student level, before a candidate has acquired a position of power.

An all-embracing and truly preventive plan ought to begin with programs that encourage children from 6 to 16 to learn to understand one another. This plan, based on the new technique of role playing, goes far beyond the prevention of drug addiction or delinquency for which the plan was originally designed.

This would do more than to wipe out delinquency and tendencies to violent crime and drug addiction. It would in the long run help the development of healthy citizens and mature judgment but it would also build a vast pool of healthy stable competitive leaders, capable of using their creativity toward the growth of a nation as well as a brotherhood of man.

It might cost this nation an estimated three billion dollars, for less than the amount that would be saved from loss through violence and destruction and very little when compared with the \$76 billion we spend for arms, especially if we realize the values we would be buying for ourselves, our country, for our future generation and for our world.

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