

Ralph J. Gleason

Have We Been Schizoid?

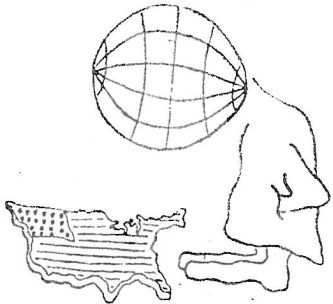
HAVE WE truly lost the ability to feel? How can it be that the Americans who historically have responded so magnificently to every tragedy around the world now remain relatively undisturbed over what is happening to our honor and our spirit and to the minds and bodies of countless residents of Indochina? Has the continued violence, from Korea to Quang Tri, to which a generation has grown up and an older generation come to accept as part of the Six O'Clock News, just simply gone on so long that we have no sense of it any more?

Doctors in wartime — as M.A.S.H. so neatly satirized — become numb to pain and suffering. Under battle conditions, soldiers use the dead bodies of their friends as shields against enemy bullets. In Flanders Field where the poppies grew, a generation learned the ineluctable inhumanity of modern war.

It is not that we are totally impassive. Senator Humphrey, I believe it was, used the word "disturbed" to describe his reaction to the bombing. It seemed so pitifully inadequate, such a demonstration of language deficiency to talk about it like that. Yet, we have been trained now, almost in Orwell's 1984 rhetoric, to speak, not even of targets, but of "target areas." And the standard language of our Pentagonese reads like some satirist's version of the bulletins from the German General Staff Headquarters during World War II.

Von Clausewitz Definition

Speaking of Germans, there is one whose name is strangely absent these days from the discussions of American actions in Asia. That name is Von Clausewitz, and if ever man defined a national action, he defined the American bombing when he de-



clared war an extension of politics by other means. We do not seem to apply the Prussian militarist's classic definition to what we are doing. And we do not seem able, in any real way, to see why this thing we are doing is hideous and unspeakable and destined to mark our name in history as surely as the German reaction in World War I to the Belgium treaty of neutrality as "a scrap of paper" marked theirs.

Have we been made schizoid by television? Is all of life now a spectator sport, like the Super Bowl, its violence and its bloodshed somehow far enough removed from us so that we are immune from the pain even of guilt? Something has gone deeply and tragically wrong. When a series of official spokesmen can alter and re-alter history to favor a momentary position, we cannot even summon the energy of a Jackson, a Grant or a Roosevelt and call a lie a lie.

The other night I watched a network broadcast of a film report by Swedish TV from Hanoi. The CBS commentator, Dan Wrather, repeatedly used the word "purports" in connection with the film. "It purports to show . . ." and so on. I found this of great significance. In earlier days we would have treated a film report by the Swedish TV network with exactly the same respect we treat a film report by our own correspondents. But now, shivering in the paranoia that evidence which contrasts to our official Pentagon party line automatically produces, we treat the Swedish report as possible propaganda!

This World, Sunday, January 21, 1973

Any objection to the status-quo or the official position must be the work of outside agitators. It certainly can't be the truth because the definition of truth is ours alone. Therefore, by definition, we cannot have bombed a hospital because we bomb only military targets. If the hospital was, in fact, hit, and we strongly suspect the entire story is the work of agitators, then it must have been hit by their OWN bombs falling back down on them after failing to hit our planes. And as for the prisoner of war camps, well, . . .

How is it, I wonder, that every now and then we manage to bomb our own side? At that point it is an error, of course. Like the death of General McNair under American bombs in Normandy. And how is it, I wonder, that men in a concrete city block on the Eastern shore of the North American continent can better tell what happened in a city on the other side of the world than the people who are there?

We have a great deal of adjusting to look forward to in our future. What if those prisoners of war turn out not to have been brainwashed but actually to have been well fed and decently treated by their captors and to have expressed, in those TV interviews, the way they actually feel about the results of what they have done? How will we face that in our textbooks in our schools and in the pulpits of those churchmen who can presume to address themselves to God but not to the President?

'Terrible Dilemma'

This is a terrible dilemma we have gotten ourselves into and one from which there is no easy retreat short of admitting we were wrong and are wrong and must needs get out.

Our rock stars sing of a new world while filing lawsuits over the money from this one, and of freedom and equality while riding to the stage in rented limousines and private airplanes. And any American, no matter his reputation, no matter his credibility in other areas, is greeted as a traitor if he says his on-the-spot investigation shows we are doing things we say we are not doing.

Years ago some historian remarked — his name escapes me now — that there was a German national character even if Hitler said there was. And there is now in the making an American national character and it gives every evidence of being one of which we cannot be proud. It is unpatriotic and immoral to send money to rebuild that hospital but moral and patriotic to help the victims of the Managuan earthquake.

If we believe there is a God and that our lives on Earth will one day be set to judgment, we cannot selectively apply that belief. To kill to satisfy the self-image of man or of nation is a terrible step to take.

Concept of Duty

There is violence in the streets and in the schools, there is challenge to the concept of duty. It is remarkable there is so little, given the contradictions we have created. Our leaders speak of moral fibre in a world in which they selectively impose the measurement. German military officers were immoral for obeying orders they knew were immoral and inhumane. If that is true, and the corollary that they not only could but should have disobeyed, what price the action of the pilot who refuses to fly any more missions?

But all of this deals with a small nation, a far country and, by implication, a sub-human group below our civilized standards. Would we sanction similar action against say the Irish, by the British?

It is impossible now to tell where we will go with all of this. We may, in truth, bomb them all back to the Stone Age. But you cannot bomb ideas, and mankind around the globe has found these recent years, that a life is a life and that no one, no super-state, can truly justify the morality of killing. May God have Mercy on us all. We will need it, if a Day of Judgment comes.