

That Person Should Be the Next President Who...

This is the second in a series of comments. Previous contributors include Robert Coles, Theodore Hesburgh, and Herbert Scoville, Jr.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM Says

I have the opportunity to travel a great deal throughout the country and speak to a cross section of Americans—young and old, black and white, rich and poor. This has afforded me some understanding of what the mood of the country is right now. That mood distresses me because I see there is more frustration and despair than there is happiness and hope. There is more anxiety toward, instead of anticipation of, the future. A recent national survey indicated that for the first time the majority of Americans are not optimistic about the future of this country. They believe that the economic situation is going to worsen, that the crime rate will continue to go up, that more and more citizens will become disaffected.

I believe that those feelings and the fact that they are now shared by so many Americans is a direct response to the political turmoil we have experienced in the last few years. The scars of Watergate reside deep in the American conscience; it will be a long time before we can expect the populace to trust the political process and our system of government.

It has not always been this way. Those of us who were active in politics in the early 1960's saw the system infused with new vitality as the young people of this country involved themselves in projects and learning experiences designed to bring about positive social change here and throughout the world. That was a time when Middle America became more aware of the problems of poverty and racial injustice. Determined to do something about these problems, they endorsed the expansive efforts of a Democratic Administration to wage a "War on Poverty."

That spirit has since been crippled by assassins' bullets, and by a growing realization that the government had been illegally and recklessly involved in a war in Vietnam that took millions of lives and drained our resources. Perhaps the most bitter expression of what has happened to the youthful energies once har-

nessed for positive change were the tragedies at Kent State and Jackson State, when the government found itself at war with its own children.

It does not surprise me when young people tell me that they no longer trust "the system." We have not offered them any reason to do so. And the national leadership has been traditionally and consistently white, male, and over fifty-five years of age, thus unable to speak to, or even represent, the ideals of young people.

The contradictions of our own materialism and consumerism are becoming increasingly clear, for we are a nation that has reached its height of power and influ-



ence at a time when the old order is crumbling. It is thus becoming imperative that we realign our priorities and reassess our national values. We must be led away from policies that have caused excessive use of our natural resources and food supply. And we must redirect our national interests, which have resulted in pouring billions of dollars into the military while many of our own go hungry.

The question facing us is not only who best can lead us, but what kind of leadership we need. I suggest that we do not need a "compromise" candidate, because such candidates, by trying to please everyone, really

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please no one. And often the term "compromise candidate" has come to mean a candidate who compromises principles more than political ideologies.

We do need a President who can lead us out of lethargy, away from frustration and societal division. We need national leadership that can combine new ideas and untried solutions with the lessons of the past. *That person should be President who shares a broad and deep hope for the future of this land, who measures progress not by the growth and strength of the GNP, but in terms of the quality of life for all Americans.* With that kind of national leader we can begin to heal the wounds inflicted during a decade of division and despair, and we can once more begin to feel and act like a nation of the highest principles.

RICHARD J. MOUW Says

Millions of citizens will enter the voting booths in 1976 with unprecedented questions and confusions about what it means to be a spouse, a parent, a student, a wage earner. Not the least of these confusions will have to do with what it means to *govern*. So many of our institutions and quasi-institutions are in trouble—or, to put it more modestly, are subject to conceptual challenge—that it is difficult in any given context to know where to look for standards of realignment. The application of athletic modes to ecclesiastical ("team ministries") and political ("the Ford team") units is not a very encouraging sign in a time when athletes themselves are trying to humanize their trade by joining "spiritual fellowships" and electing political "representatives." If churches should become more like families, then what shall we do with the complaint that families are too much like political units—especially when, as we all know, governments have been engaged in "missionary" activity, which makes them too much like churches...?

That we are entering a bicentennial/Presidential election year with widespread conceptual and communal confusion seems to me to be both true and important. I suspect that it is a crucial factor to consider in assessing the prospects for the coming Presidential campaign.

If we are presently experiencing multilevel confusion, then we need leadership that will aid us in owning up to our confusions in order that we might avoid courses of action that are based on self-deception. Consider the current tensions stemming from recent events in the United Nations. I have heard intelligent people argue that "we ought not to let ourselves be dumped on in the U.N."; I have heard equally intelligent people respond that "maybe we deserve to be dumped on." The crucial issue in such debates is one of national self-image, and I am convinced that neither

of the images projected in the above argument is very healthy.

The manner in which the "big" questions are being asked—questions about the U.N., détente, nuclear controls, redistribution of wealth, etc.—bears a strong likeness to the ways in which many of us are asking the "little" questions. A young man recently expressed the dilemma of his marital difficulties to me in this way: "I know I've been too chauvinistic in the past, but what do I do now when I think that some of her complaints are unfair? Let her dump all over me or try to act strong?" Here too the prior question is one of self-image. Ideally, the young man might greatly benefit from an extended period of isolated self-reflection—but the heat of "negotiations" does not afford this opportunity. Much can still be gained, though, if he can find the strength to articulate his confusions, along with the hope that humanity does not necessarily lead to self-destruction.

It would be wrong to assume that we could draw strict parallels between personal and national salvation. But we would also be wrong if we were to assume that individual and national entities are so unlike that no helpful analogies can be drawn between them—here we may have to unlearn some bad lessons we have been (reportedly) taught by both Reinhold Niebuhr and Billy Graham. Whatever the differences may be between the two kinds of entities, this much seems true: A nation, like an individual, cannot love its neighbors unless it has a healthy, realistic love of self.

We need a President who can lead us in the difficult task of self-examination. To be sure, we also need leadership that is capable of formulating sane policy on the complex issues we face. But this means, as I see it, that policy formulation must be accompanied by the presentation of a model of *sanity* in decision-making, a model that will communicate a sense of self-worth, a recognition of self-limitations, humility, and the confident hope that the way of suffering can lead to renewed vitality.

I am not certain that any visible candidate has the appropriate qualities, but I do not think I am asking for the impossible. I suspect that Lincoln was capable of



providing the leadership and vision we now need. There have been occasional hints in the past that Gene McCarthy and George McGovern had the capacity to grow into the task. It may even be that George Romney's "I was brainwashed" confession should be rightly viewed as a sample of the humble candor that must now characterize Presidential leadership.

This is a time for recognizing the *fact* of individual and collective vulnerability, and for refusing to respond to that fact with either self-hatred or arrogance. The coming Presidential campaign is a crucial matter in that it will provide us, both electorate and candidates, with a test of whether we are willing to face up to our complex predicament. The election of a President will not solve our problems. But it can occasion the hope that Socrates once offered to his disciple Meno: that since "all nature is akin," it is possible, by finding out the truth about just one thing, to discover the clue to "all the rest" if we do not grow weary in the search. *That person should be the next President who is capable of leading us in the project of realistic self-examination with hope rather than weariness.*

JOHN C. BENNETT Says

I believe there are two types of issues, one in regard to national economic policy and the other in regard to foreign policy, which are equal in importance, and I would test any candidate for the Presidency by his/her attitude toward both.

On the first I hope that our next President will have a very different social philosophy from that of the present Administration. While it is true that threats from worldwide inflation may complicate the choices available to any Administration, regardless of its basic views about economic policy, I believe that we need a President who will attempt to deal directly with unemployment and poverty and not be content with a policy that is designed to improve the general health of the economy in the hope that economic gains will "trickle down" eventually to its present victims.

I hope that the next President will be shocked especially by the fact that in our cities often 40 per cent of our young people, especially those belonging to racial minorities, are unemployed, that he/she will see this as a moral scandal and a social disaster. Direct dealing with this problem by providing employment is essential. There has been a great deal of loose talk about the idea that the "welfare state" has not solved problems and that it is no longer viable. The plight of New York City is used as an object lesson. I do not doubt that the vast accumulation of social legislation since the early 1930's needs tidying up and coordinating and that New York City made many mistakes both in the extravagant



John Bennett with Reinhold Niebuhr, 1971 (RNS)

provisions for pensions and in covering up its fiscal condition. But there is no substitute for the responsibility of the largest political unit with the greatest access to resources to compensate for the injustices which are by-products of the free enterprise system. Without such compensatory measures the system would be morally and politically intolerable. I hate to think what the present situation would be without the cushion provided by the social security system.

In the lifetime of the next Administration I hope and even expect that there will be two extensions of the welfare state: a national system of medical insurance that will protect people from the astronomical costs of medical care and some form of guaranteed income. The latter is often supported by conservatives because it will call for less bureaucracy than the present welfare system. I hope that the next Administration will also have the courage to seek ways in which the great private centers of corporate power can be made more accountable to the public.

There is a complex of issues in regard to foreign policy that are extremely fateful. I hope that the next President will not be a person whose mind has been formed by the early stages of the cold war. I hope that he/she will move away from the American habit of intervention by military force or by covert operations to prevent revolutionary changes that do not meet our specifications and that he/she will move away from our tendency to support rightist tyrannies in so many countries. I hope that the next President will be compassionate and imaginative and ingenious in efforts to use our food surplus to meet the problem of hunger on other continents. I hope that he/she will avoid the tendency to separate ourselves with self-righteousness from most of the Third World, that he/she will continue the policy of détente between the two Superpowers—who possess the power to incinerate the Northern Hemisphere—for this is a condition of survival. Alertness to the military power of the Soviet Union as another imperial power is essential for a President, but this should be kept distinct from the obsessive anticommunism that has dominated American attitudes toward Russian power in the past. *That person should be the next President who is able to think new thoughts about foreign policy and to free his/her mind from the grooves of thought and the stereotypes that have been pervasive since the Second World war.*

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