

THE UNCERTAIN WORLD AND THE ETERNAL TRUTHS

by Frank Shakespeare

Frank Shakespeare has been president and chief operating officer of RKO General since 1975, having been executive vice president for broadcasting since 1973. Mr. Shakespeare came to RKO from Westinghouse Electric Corporation, where he was executive vice president for broadcasting, learning and leisure time from 1973.

Before joining Westinghouse, Mr. Shakespeare was for four years director of the United States Information Agency, a multi-media governmental agency charged with informing people in foreign countries about U.S. foreign policy and the life and culture of Americans.

Prior to that, he was with CBS for seventeen years in the following capacities: president of CBS television services, senior vice president of the network, executive vice president of the television stations, general manager of WCBS-TV and W XIX-TV, and general sales manager of WCBS-TV.

Mr. Shakespeare gave these extemporaneous thoughts to this year's class graduating from Hillsdale College.

The thoughts that I share with you are taken from my own experience in the hope that they might be useful, and because I believe them to be important as you make a real transition in your life . . . in your evolvment as free human beings.

Like us, you were first children in the homes of your parents and were guided by them. Then you moved into the first real freedom that one gets as young adults—life at college. You were away from home and on your own, but you were not totally independent, because you were guided by the professors in your collegiate home. Now, however, you are going to be independent with little external guidance in your lives. From now on you must make decisions. In that frame of reference I suggest three things for your consideration. One deals with the general judgments that we all have to make in life. A second deals with the nation state, this country, the society in which you live and in due course will direct. And the third deals with the world in which your family will live as humans and in which your nation will live as a state. In making

these comments I'm going to use examples which are real.

First, a simple but fundamental point about general judgments. In the course of life, whether it has to do with family or business, joy or sadness, one needs a basic compass for judgments. I suggest that your compass be the eternal truths. Let me give you an example in which some of the world's presumably wisest men went very wrong, in my view, in judgments that affected our world and society significantly, because they failed to take into sufficient account the simple eternal truths which govern us all.

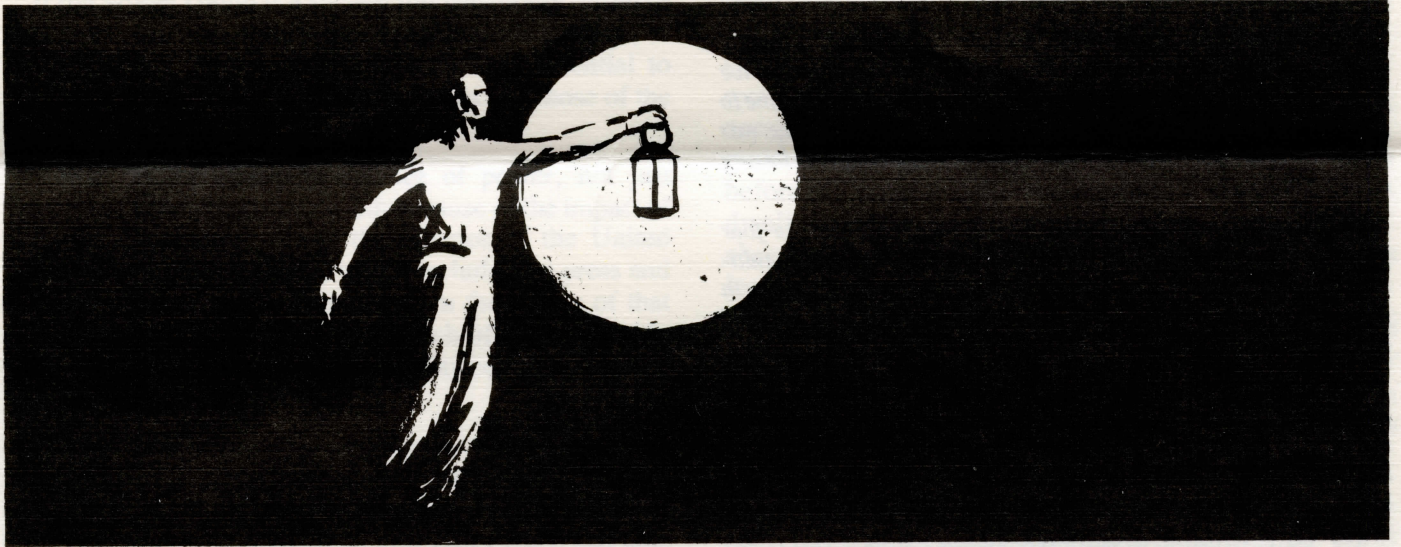
In 1917 a new state came into existence, the Soviet Union, whose premises were a radical departure from those of previous societies. Many Western intellectuals seriously misjudged that new state—what it was and what it was to become. Why? I submit they were overwhelmed by the enormous theoretical appeal of the development of a "new man." Pride, fashion, and peer pressure made contributions, of course. But the center of the wave of

approval that went through Western intellectual circles in the 1920s and 30s about the new society being built in the Soviet Union was that man himself was to somehow be changed. What they failed to take into account was that the concept of the creation of a new man necessitates atheism, the rejection of God, as state policy. In order to create a new man, man's nature must be changeable. Therefore, God's creation of man with an immutable nature must be invalid.

Horrors developed within that society, one of the greatest of which was the mass killing in the 30s of millions of its leading farmers. Even during those

of Mao, who carefully built a godlike image.

In the contemporary world we have further illustration as to how judgments can become cloudy if we drift from basic truths—in this case the unchanging nature of man. We are swept in our country today with pressures for egalitarianism. These took a legitimate form, in their earlier stages, of equality of opportunity. Now, however, one finds pressures not for equality of opportunity but for equality of result. This, of course, flies in the face of the differences that God put in us as human beings. Malcolm Muggeridge recently expressed it well when he said, "The contemporary notion of equality has proved par-



horrors, the excitement of the theory continued to appeal to the pride, and in some ways the arrogance, of many in Western intellectual leadership who rationalized by saying that you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. They forgot the eternal truth that man's nature is unchangeable and that good cannot come from evil.

Lest you think of events in the 20s and 30s as irrelevant to modern life, I suggest to you that when Communist China was "opened" by the Nixon administration in 1971, it was initially greeted with hosannas of praise by many in the media and the academy for reasons not dissimilar from those relating to the Soviet Union in the 20s—namely, the appeal, the excitement, the *hubris*, if you will, of the development of a "new man."

A recent article in the *New York Times* quoted from the Communist party newspaper in China on the demystification of Mao Tse Tung. A discussion of the difference between philosophy and religion raised a question about Mao himself. The paper criticized those who have treated the thoughts of Mao and Marxism and Leninism as objects of faith rather than just knowledge. I quote part of it. "They make this a blind faith and do not allow people to use their brains, much less to discern truth from falsehood. Marxism is a philosophy not a religion." How extraordinary to have that in the leading communist theoretical paper in China just a few years after the death

ticularly disastrous. The notion is fallacious. Human beings are not equal, but they are brothers and sisters, belonging to one family and all created in the image of their creator. All the ruin of Western man lies in the change from 'brother' to 'comrade.'"

The compass of eternal truth will help you to avoid shallow, trendy judgments of the type Lamb referred to in saying, "The greater majority of the people have no reason for their opinions, other than that they are in fashion."

In considering this talk today, I was struck by a front page story in a recent issue of the Hillsdale *Collegian* on the proposal to have a Christian Studies Institute here at the college. Probably you know about it in detail, but it was new to me. In the editorial—I thought a superb editorial—the editor said that the Christian Studies Institute proposal came about to fill the "need to teach universal values that will hold up in a chaotic world, and that there exist certain truths that are as constant as the nature of man." So then, use eternal truths as a fundamental compass.

The second subject I raise for your consideration is the limitation of government. I put it to you this way. As citizens, I suggest that you exert yourselves to be sure that we in this nation limit the role of government to that

which is essential. I say that for two reasons, one stemming from personal experience in the national government, and the second as a general observation.

The personal experience in government was this: I went into government, as you might someday, knowing little in detail about it, loving the country and desiring to serve it. I came away with some disturbing observations. The people in the Washington bureaucracy are, for the most part, decent, able, hard-working citizens. They are, like all of us, frail, but they have a special handicap of which they are rarely conscious—their remoteness from the effect of their actions.

they could no longer carry on. They all died trying to hold on to power.

Now lest you think that is just a phenomenon of authoritarian states, consider the recent leaders in the democratic world. Franklin Roosevelt, one of our strongest (and some think greatest) leaders ran for four terms. At that time there was no law that the president had to limit himself to two terms. It was because of him that our nation adopted a constitutional amendment that presidents cannot, whatever their desires, stay for more than two terms. They are not the best judge of when they become frail.



When you are in school and you take a test or you are in a discussion with your teacher, you are close to the result of what you did or didn't do in studying or preparing for that course. When you're in business and you produce a product, or make a change in your product, you are close to the market results. If you change some aspect of employee relations, the employees are there with you and you quickly know the result of your actions. You have a constant feedback and adjust accordingly. In the government, particularly in the bureaucracy, you are very remote from the effect of what you do. It tends to create a feeling of separateness that soon runs to pride—pride that you, with your wisdom, are directing the people "out there" and bettering their lives. That is at once noble and terribly dangerous, because it leads to the thought that you are superior and you know best. In that can lie awesome danger for the country.

An observation about society in general prompts me to urge you to limit the role of government to that which is essential. It would be hard for any one of us to name a major political figure in the Western or Communist world who, in your lifetime or that of your parents, gave up power voluntarily. Think of that for just a moment. The major tyrannical leaders, Stalin and Mao—the authoritarian leaders, Chiang and Franco—achieved power early in life and then stayed on until they were 75, 80, 85, until

Look at Churchill. Churchill in his eighties stayed on as a weakening prime minister of England. In a remarkable aside to his doctor in the middle 1950s when he was a weak, sickly man, he said, "It is such a burden to carry on, but I must because there is no one else." That came from one of the greatest democratic leaders the world has produced. Anthony Eden had been waiting in the wings for twenty years, but in Churchill's self-rationalization for retaining power, there was "no one else." Consider deGaulle in France, as well.

The narcotic of power apparently affects all men, whatever the nature of their government. Look today—Brezhnev and Tito are old, tired men seeking to hold on to power until death takes it from them.

Lord Acton encompassed it when he said, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." You've all heard that. Blake caught the essence of it when he said, "The greatest poison ever known comes from Caesar's laurel crown." And Jefferson said it in an indirect way when the Constitution was being written and the question was how much our government should be limited. Many voices at the Constitutional Convention were advocating leaving a great deal of "flexibility" with the central government, because, after all, it would be run by decent good people. Jefferson listened to that for some while and then made a statement which I suggest to you

has the wisdom of the ages in it. He understood the frail nature of man and the seductiveness of power. Jefferson said, "Let us hear no more of the goodness of man, but bind him down with the chains of the Constitution." It is because of such wisdom that you and your parents are free people today. So I propose that you limit the government to that which is essential.

And thirdly I point your attention to the world situation. Your family and your nation are going to live in a world made especially dangerous by the changing military balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.

If the Soviet Union is a society fundamentally different than ours, and one which does not value the freedom of men, religion, and opportunity, then it is essential to prevent it from threatening our freedoms and those of the Western world.

I refer to the changing balance of power, not just because of published reports, but because of the impact of personal experience. I was the director of the United States Information Agency, which includes the press and cultural attaches in our Embassies. In the course of that assignment, I had to travel over much of the world. My wife, Debbie, and I visited about eighty countries in just a few years.

I came away from that experience with a particular awareness of how militarily alone our country is. You go to England and find the great English navy is no more. You visit Italy, and it is ailing; you visit France and note that thirty percent of the people vote Communist and their society is rifting; you go to Germany and find a nation formally and legally split in two. The little European countries like Holland, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Denmark have, of course, only small military forces. In

Africa and Latin America, the military is local in capacity and generally weak. In Southeast Asia you find demoralized peoples. Japan's constitution limits it to small defense forces. The only power in the world that can stand up and preserve freedom against the Soviet Union is our country. Militarily we are alone.

It is disturbing to face, as citizens, life in which you must make enormous expenditures for things you don't want—tanks, planes, missiles. There will be a tendency not to do it. You must do it . . . for as long as necessary to keep the nation free.

How long? I close on that point with another quote from Muggeridge. "The most important happening in the world today is the resurgence of Christianity in the Soviet Union, demonstrating that the whole effort sustained over sixty years to brainwash the Russian people into accepting materialism has been a fiasco. In the long run, governments, however powerful, fall flat on their faces before the Word which, two thousand years ago, came to dwell among us full of grace and truth. In other words, absolute power collapses when confronted with absolute love."

If Muggeridge's perception of societal changes within the Soviet Union is correct, then you may not have to bear the military burden quite as long as you might fear. But in any event you must keep this nation strong as long as necessary.

As students who will be going from here to gradually take charge of the greatest and freest nation that the world has produced, I leave you with three thoughts: if you stay with eternal truths, if you keep your government limited, if you keep your nation strong, you will have the opportunity to work out your life in truth, in freedom, and in security.

Hillsdale College is marked by its strong independence and its emphasis on academic excellence. It holds that the traditional values of Western civilization, especially including the free society of responsible individuals, are worthy of defense. In maintaining these values, the college has remained independent throughout its 133 years, neither soliciting nor accepting government funding for its operations.