

What do we, the American people, want in our leaders?

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Reverend Sun Myung Moon addresses members of Congress in Washington, D.C., October 1974. Col. Bo Hi Pak, right, is his interpreter.

Frequently these days we hear the plea -- We need leaders! Where are they? What do we, the American people, want in our leaders, if we are not satisfied with what we're getting now? What kind do we need? "Americans have a lot of difficulty making up their minds what they want from their leaders," Dr. James David Barber recently told citizens assembled for a debate on Character in Politics and Public Office. "We want them to come from the people and at the same time to rise above us, to be superior in integrity, skill, etc. We want them to have mud on their shoes and to be a king."

Barber, a professor of political science and author of the book *The Presidential Character*, pointed to two more areas of dichotomy: In polls of admired people, the top ranks are often held by political figures, yet there is also a great deal of cynicism about politicians. We are also ambivalent about the characteristics we want in our leaders.

His co-panelists were Coretta Scott King, president of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Social Change, and Dr. Walter Judd, former Congressman from Minnesota. Dr. Judd, a veteran of 20 years in the House of Representatives and a stint as a medical missionary in China, pointed out that in evaluating applicants for surgeons at the renowned Mayo Clinic, "Character, industry, native ability, and manual dexterity are considered, in that order. Surely these same qualities are necessary for elected office."

However, he raised the question, can a person be both successful and honest? "There is always the temptation to put expediency before principle. You ask yourself, 'How can I save the country unless I get elected? And how can I get elected without telling the people what they want to hear?'" While recognizing the need to be practical in making voting decisions ("It's hard to judge whether a bill is 51 percent good or 49 percent good") Dr. Judd said, "Once in a while you must remind yourself, 'I do have to live with myself.'" For Mrs. King, the most important quality in political figures is their compassion and concern for all people, those who will take a stand "because it is the right and just thing to do. People are so alienated from each other and from the structures of society," she said, "that they need to feel a caring concern from their leaders. It's a very special kind of quality."

"But we need a cool head at the service of that warm heart," Dr. Judd added. "The cool head asks, Will it work, is it practical? Both qualities are necessary. It's a poor surgeon who would give a patient a pain-killer only to have the patient die for lack of being diagnosed as an acute appendectomy."

Dr. Barber, in his book, also described what the American people expect of their presidents: "People look to the President for reassurance, a feeling that things will be all right, that the President will take care of his people... Another theme is the demand for a sense of progress and action. The President ought to do something to direct the nation's course -- or at least be in there pitching for the people. The President is looked to as a take-charge man, a doer, a turner of the wheels, a producer of progress.... A third type of expectation is the public need for a sense of legitimacy.... The respectability -- even religiosity -- of the office has to be protected by a man who presents himself as defender of the faith.... The President is expected to personify our betterness in an inspiring way, to express in what he does and is (not just in what he says) a moral idealism which, in much of the public mind, is the very opposite of 'politics.'"

These are very lofty ideals for our politicians to live up to. To what extent are they successful? Our founding fathers defined human happiness as an ultimate political criterion. Certainly by that standard something is definitely missing in American political life. Recent surveys have shown a deep underlying suspicion and frustration among the American people.

"People seethe with anger over what they regard as the total failure of public officials to cope with problems of the economy and morality," commented U.S. News and World Report in a survey on the "Mood of America." The report continued, "Where will we turn for help? That question is asked more and more. Many have given up hope that government can cope with today's problems. Result: resignation... Many single out lack of real leadership as the nation's biggest problem... Ask people to name somebody who could lead the nation the way they want, and they're hard-pressed to think of any."

It is easy to see that there is a shortage of heroes today. For Resignation in Protest, a study of political and ethical choices between loyalty to team and loyalty to conscience in American public life, the authors examined every known resignation in protest by a high federal official in this century and concluded, "At no time during this century has there been anything like a flourishing of ethical autonomy among top officials in the U.S. federal government."

Lone strivers in science, exploration, business, education have by and large been replaced by anonymous members of a team. The media have held a great deal to do with this, and particularly so in politics, where every action is held up to scrutiny and a candidate's television image requires bland likability rather than courageous conviction.

Nowhere do we see men of the same caliber as the founding fathers of this nation, of whom Revolutionary historian Richard B. Morris has written: "The Revolutionary leaders viewed their public offices with great seriousness and dignity and operated with great integrity." Professor Morris does not think we have seen their like in any period since. "Government" today, he wrote, "is in the hands of the second-rate and the third-rate, and we've got to do something to regenerate that enthusiasm for government on the part of the younger generation and on the part of the first-rate people."

The public still wants heroes; it feels an unmet need for outstanding leadership that can grasp hold of the complex problems of today, deal with them in an energetic way, and bring results. We are used to failure from our public officials, not to strong leadership, especially after so many government programs spent billions of dollars but achieved little.

We have been educated to care about the problems of the minorities and the poor and want to see them solved, we are personally affected by crises such as in energy or morals, but people are bewildered by all these crises piling up around them. The frustration grows.

There is another side to the problem, too. We want solutions to be handed to us, but are not willing to actively get involved in being part of the solution. Political scientist Andrew Hacker put it this way: "My life is far more pleasant and much more interesting than that my grandparents knew. But these opportunities for enjoyment have undermined my ability to be the kind of citizen my grandfather could be... We claim to want new styles of leadership, overlooking our own inability to serve as followers in any but the most marginal of ways."

There is a great danger here. The Communists will be quick to take advantage of the internal demoralization in America; in fact, part of their strategy to overcome America is to undermine our faith in ourselves, in our system of government, to undermine our morals. It has become fashionable today, even among some religious leaders, to see the faults in our society as being a result of the economic system and the injustices which prevail. This is unfortunate because it places the responsibility for change outside of ourselves, in a vague need to "restructure the government and the capitalist system." It is easy to scapegoat.

It is important that we realize that our leaders are a reflection of the society that they serve. National morality is constructed from personal morality. It is useless to demand legislation on morality if we are not prepared to lead morally exemplary lives ourselves. It is useless to demand an energy or an anti-inflation policy if we are not willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

Definitely we should expect and demand a higher level of conscience and positive action from our public officials, but we cannot realistically expect more of them than the common standard of their society. If we succumb to pretty packaging, we can only blame ourselves. Look at the substance of the man, is how Dr. Barber summed up what to look for in political candidates. For this, we must understand too what it is that we want from our leaders. What qualifications do we want them to have? They are sometimes referred to as public servants. Are they that in actuality?

"Whatever we say about the world, or nation, it is the aggregate form of individuals; in the end everything about them depends on the condition of the individual. Only if individuals are on the

side of good can the society become good." -- Reverend Sun Myung Moon

This is what Reverend Sun Myung Moon has to say about leadership: "Any individual who sacrifices for his family will become the lord of his family. Anyone who is willing to sacrifice for his society will become its leader. Those who are willing to sacrifice in order to save their nation will be the leading group of that nation. Any nation which sacrifices and serves in order to restore the world will lead the world."

Jesus was a leader of men, but he was not too proud to wash the feet of his disciples. The most essential quality in a leader is the willingness to serve others and to sacrifice for others. America's leaders must learn to consider the needs of the whole. If they put the needs of their particular district or state ahead of the needs of their nation, if the nation goes under so will their district. If the world is engulfed by totalitarianism while the United States only cares about itself, we will find ourselves with few allies and fewer friends, and we cannot stand alone, no matter how independent we think we are.

Ultimately, the needs of the world must come first, then next in priority are the needs of the nation. If these needs are met, then the needs of the state will be met, and the needs of the individuals will be fulfilled.

In the panel discussion, Dr. Judd spoke of the need to weigh "right versus nearer right" in decision-making. Even if expediency makes this so, there still must be some criteria for judging which side to stand on. Let this be the standard then: What is good for the whole?

And let us apply this same standard in our personal lives as well. Instead of just waiting for solutions, on an individual, family, community, state, or federal level, why don't we ask ourselves, what can I do? What is my responsibility?

America needs a new breed of leaders and a new ideology to inflame this country with righteousness, to turn the tide of immorality, to turn selfishness into selflessness from the individual level to the national level. Ultimately, America must learn to serve the world, for this is God's purpose for her, and our leaders must take us in that direction.