

"AID AND COMFORT TO THE ENEMY"

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It set a lot of us to cluckclucking when U.S. legislator Alan Simpson accused CNN's Peter Arnett of giving "aid and comfort to the enemy" in his reports from Saddam's Baghdad--even though every report is accompanied by the warning that it's passed Iraqi censorship. The fourth estate must fight the censors on both sides. On our side, eg, efforts to present smart bombs as stunningly accurate were confounded by reportorial digging that revealed they hit the target only 60% of the time. In my classes, 60% was not a passing grade. Face it, folks: those bombs are dumb, & we'd better believe there's much more "collateral damage" than the Coalition will officially admit....Indeed, the shoe can be put on the other foot. When our side withholds information essential to the press' making informed judgments, & then worsens the situation by diversionary & distorted information ("disinformation," what the British call "black propaganda"), that may time & again give aid & comfort to the enemy....But the Gulf War is not what got me into this Thinksheet, though Simpson's unfair remark ticked me off into getting into it....(Lexical note: "Disinformation" entered English 1965-7 from Latin through French through Russian. But the reality has been with us, as an element in the malignant art of conning, since the Eden snake.)

"The enemy" I'm after in this Thinksheet is (1) who-/what-ever in our society wants aid & comfort & (2) shouldn't get it unless society cares more about giving it than about upholding the **standards** that would be eroded were it given.

1 In a newspaper today I read one more dismal breast-beating, America-bashing editorial on how far down we are on the list of nations vis-a-vis infant mortality. The unexamined assumption is that society should do everything it can to keep neonates alive--no matter how tough it may be on the neonate, the family, or society! This is mindless "medical" vitalism, one of a fistful of energy-idols to which neopagans attribute "ultimate value," sacred untouchability. (The same neopagan sacrality appears at the other end of life: old folks maintained in the flesh, what's left of it, whether or not they want "life support systems.")....Yes, vitalism is a primary enemy to which aid and comfort should not be given. And when vitalism keeps alive those who'd not survive without the vitalistic impulse, those survivors are secondary enemies of society even without being able to intend to be so (in the case of neonates) & without intending to be so (in the case of elderly who'd prefer not to be kept in the land of the living). What are the dimensions of this enmity? One is triage: who gets what medical services as the costs of medical goods & services far outrun society's ability/willingness to pay? The choosing will get tougher as the goal of "the best medical services for everybody" recedes even further into unreality....The case of abortion is complex. In some antiabortionists, ancient life-protecting tabus merge with modern neopagan vitalism to form a mighty force. But the unwanted unborn, & the unborn wanted for unworthy reasons, fall into the category of secondary enemies of society. (An instance of an unworthy reason? Junior high girls racing to see who can be first to have a baby, then turning the baby over to a relative or to society.)

2 Behind & within vitalism is the romantic-permissive doctrine of the sovereignty of feeling. Our current culture proclaims--to students, counselees, everybody--"You've a right to your feelings, don't repress them." The balancing truth is that you've a right to your reason, the power that enables you to arrive at sound (etmyl., "healthy") judgment, "Don't repress it." But seldom is heard that liberating word. (Irony: The notion that feelings are good is not an aspect of Freud's "psychological man" but is a hypertrophied form of the biblical doctrine of the goodness of creation. Returning to that root could cure souls of "therapy," which has sickened multitudes.) The sovereignty of feeling is one more enemy we must not give aid & comfort to.

3 And actionism--"It's busted, let's fix it."--is another. "Don't just stand there, do something!" needs the balancing word "Don't just do something, stand there & prayerfully think!" I'll illustrate with a regressive series of statements which can be taken either as invitations to reflection-toward-action or as calls to inferred actions. In the present context, the latter orientation is an enemy of sound judgment &

therefore of truly human action. (1) Excessive human population is degrading the environment, irreversibly in some areas. (2) At the many appropriate levels of decision-making and action, this tragedy urgently needs addressing. (3) Appropriate action will require public & private reeducation. (4) The individual, male as well as female, has responsibility for the whole range of behavior in "family planning." I intend all these statements as invitations to reflection-toward-action, but actionists may read-hear them (& often do, both for & against me!) as calls to inferred actions--as though this were the series: (1) In some areas of the earth, infant mortality is too low for the good of ecology, & decreasing infant mortality would give aid & comfort to the enemy, which is the already excessive tonnage of human flesh. (2) Since abortion decreases the tonnage, encouraging abortion is pro-earth. (3) But since both infant mortality & abortion are unnecessary human tragedies, a better pro-earth policy is to decrease conceptions. (4) Since excess of conceptions correlates with excess of genital freedom, it's in the interest of the good earth (which we used to call "man's home") to decrease genital freedom by (a) external social controls & (b) internal self-control. (5) In this complex of controls, the hypertrophied doctrine of the Western "individual" must be treated as a enemy to which society, including the legislatures & the courts, should cease giving aid & comfort. (6) Different strokes for different areas: the controls must be more severe in areas where the ecology is more threatened. (Eg, with its low birth-rate, Sweden is not giving aid & comfort to the enemy by providing universal health care from pregnancy to death: universal health care encourages population growth. But could sound judgment preach universal health care in areas where burgeoning populations are fast making the environment unlivable, the birth rate too high & the death rate too low? In those areas, the universal-health-care proposal is an enemy to which aid & comfort should not be given--& ideological actionists give it....My point: I agree with all the above statements in both sets. But I believe both in dialog (& so push the first set) & preaching (& so push the second set). Coming to dialog with one's agenda (Latin, proposals for "action") is not wrong. Indeed, coming to dialog without action-ideas is either ignorant or dilettante. What is wrong, & oppressive, is pretending to dialog when one's interest is only in dogmatizing. When everybody's doing it, all are wolves in sheep's clothing. And the higher the temperature of an encounter, the less probable is dialog. Which returns us to §2 of this Thinksheet.

4 I heard Ralph Nader's mother say that he was given no toys as a child: "Children should create their own toys out of their imagination." A store-bought toy is commercial entertainment, which is another enemy we should give no aid & comfort to. The Super Bowl? A commercial toy for the eyeballs. Movies? Picking our pockets with the basest appeals to the lowest within humanity, they are--says PBS film critic Michael Medved--the heart & drive of popular culture's "war against **standards**" (IMPRIMIS, Feb/91). Yet the unregenerate appetite for degeneracy is so huge that filmmakers believe--falsely, he says--that the corrupter the film the bigger the take. (In "Hollywood vs. Religion" [Dec/89 issue] he says that producers' central motive is not money but the lust to be fouler, more corrupt, than thou the competitor.) "One of the symptoms of the corruption and collapse of our national culture is the insistence that we examine only the surface of any work of art. The politically correct, properly liberal notion that we should never dig deeper--to consider whether a given work is true, or good, or spiritually nourishing--or to evaluate its impact on society at large." Against the public interest, almost all the film critics support the anti-standards code of the producers, loving "unrelieved ugliness, horror and depravity." A critic who asks about redeeming social value is put down as "judgmental," for those in power in the entertainment industry are aging but morally underdeveloped leftovers from the '60s adolescent revolution. (1) Ugliness is glorified in smaller-than-life characters from the slimey side of the street. (2) The family could not be more assaulted. Kids know best. A permanent partnership between a man & a woman never even appears. So, divorce & out-of-wedlock births. (3) "A war against standards leads logically and inevitably to hostility to religion," the "basis for all standards." God, who is "judgmental," is rejected as oppressive & evil.

5 One more enemy we should give no aid or comfort to: addictive love, which is lust for sexual excitement & therefore serial (a new partner needed when the ecstasy of the old cools). Pop music & media mate this with addictive violence.