secure against the scourge of unlimited totalitarianism?

It's unthinkable that in 1998 the U.S. government will engage in Nazi-style beastliness. But it's not at all unthinkable that such brutal displays will become commonplace in America sometime in the future. Totalitarianism is inevitable if enough people come to believe that government's proper role is to solve all problems. A people who demand that their government engineer them into a state of collective holiness will in fact end up in an earthly hell.

Consider the powers that are today exercised in America by the national government. In the name of water conservation, Washington specifies the amount of water that our toilet tanks can hold. In the name of ecology, Washington micromanages private use of privately owned lands. In the name of fairness to the handicapped, Washington intrudes itself into the building-design business. In the name of child safety, Washington vetoes parents' choices of which toys to buy for their children. In the name of adult safety, Washington dictates which pharmaceuticals we may and may not use. In the name of energy conservation, Washington specifies the fuel efficiency of our automobiles. And as I write these words, Congress is considering federal legislation to override state statutes that permit people to carry concealed handguns. Fewer and fewer aspects of our lives are off-limits to Washington.

Why do we tolerate such intrusiveness from strangers—intrusiveness that none of us tolerate even from members of our own family? The reason is that Americans generally believe not only that government means well, but also that it possesses unique powers to right all wrongs. In short, too many Americans believe government to be godlike.

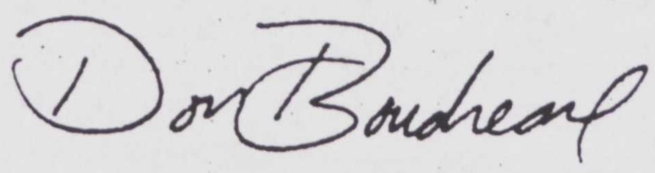
Thus the danger: that which we deify we trust without question. But government is an institution of mortals, not of gods or quasi-gods. When anyone treats another person as being more-than-mortal, he who is ludicrously elevated in this way suffers an inflated ego. And he who treats others as more-than-mortal suffers a correspondingly deflated sense of self-respect and loses his independence of mind. The initial sentiment of those who are elevated might be a warm paternalism toward those who do the elevation. But if not removed from their perch, the elevated inevitably come to regard all others as clay to be beaten, molded, and baked into whatever shapes the elevated happen to fancy.

Modern totalitarianism grows from the dangerously wrongheaded belief that those who wield government power are somehow greater than, wiser than, and more trustworthy than ordinary men and women. And it is fertilized by the childish wish that every inconvenience no matter how minor, every affront no matter how innocent, and every possible danger (except that of the state itself!) no matter how remote be prevented by government.

People who are ceded the power necessary to engineer society eventually become monsters.

This eventuality is what I fear as I look at my little son. He is safe today. But if I reflect upon all the power that government wields now that it did not wield when I was born 40 years ago, and then consider the real possibility that government's power will grow at the same pace over the next 40 years, I tremble with fright. A government with such power would assuredly treat Thomas and his children, not as humans, but as cattle or clay. And if Thomas should resist by asserting his individuality, the government would summarily slaughter him along with all the rest of those truly heroic people who refuse to be babied or bullied by the state.

No calling for me is higher than warning against the awful dangers of statism. Nothing less than my son's life depends upon reversing the modern trend of deifying government.



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