The Generation of the Lie...Thoughts for 9/11

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He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, even they both are an abomination to the Lord. (Proverbs 17:15)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they who indulge it shall eat the fruit thereof. (Proverbs, 18:21)

The United States suffered a horrible and horrifying terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Arab terrorists flew airplanes into the Twin Towers killing thousands of people. Two other airplanes were hijacked leading to the murder of all the passengers. One of the hijacked airplanes was flown into the Pentagon, not only killing the passengers but killing or grievously wounding many individuals in the Pentagon that day. The trauma of that day for the survivors and the families of the victims will never entirely disappear.

Moral clarity prevailed in many circles. The terrorists were murderers, hateful and misguided individuals who believed that they would be rewarded in heaven if they murdered Americans. They were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of inflicting damage on the United States. But, there were those who justified the wicked and who condemned the righteous. They described the murderers as “martyrs.” They rejoiced that America, the great devil, had suffered a serious blow. The same pattern often is evident when acts of terror are committed against Israel. The murderers are described as “militants” or as “martyrs.” The Israeli victims are blamed for their own deaths, and the murderers

are honored by the societies from which they emerged. The United Nations routinely condemns Israel for defending itself against terrorism, and routinely ignores the heinous acts of murder committed against Israel.

We should not be surprised by the massive hypocrisy that justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous. This has been going on for many centuries. Not only does Solomon note this phenomenon in Mishlei, his father David screamed out against it in his Psalms. Psalm 12 has been described by Martin Buber as a prophecy "against the generation of the lie." The Psalmist cries out: "Help, O Lord, for the pious cease to be…They speak falsehood each with his neighbor, with flattering lip, with a double heart they speak." The generation is led by oppressors who say "our tongue will make us mighty," who arrogantly crush the downtrodden. They act sinfully but are confident that their smooth talking propaganda will keep them immune from retribution.

Buber comments: "They speak with a double heart, literally 'with heart and heart'…The duplicity is not just between heart and mouth, but actually between heart and heart. In order that the lie may bear the stamp of truth, the liars as it were manufacture a special heart, an apparatus which functions with the greatest appearance of naturalness, from which lies well up to the 'smooth lips' like spontaneous utterances of experience and insight" (Good and Evil, p. 10). The Psalmist is not merely condemning his "generation of the lie," but future generations that also will be characterized by lying, bullying, oppressing; that will be led by smooth talking and corrupt demagogues. But the Psalmist turns prophet and proclaims that God will arise and protect the victims of the liars. Truth will prevail. "It is You, O Lord, who will guard the poor, You will protect us forever from this generation." Although the Psalmist is confident that God will set things right, meanwhile the ugly fact remains: "But the wicked will strut around when vileness is exalted among humankind." Although God will ultimately redeem the world from the "generation of the lie," this will not happen right away. As long as people submit to the rule of the wicked, the wicked will stay in power. If the wicked are not resisted, they will continue to strut around and feel invincible.

The Nazis understood the power of propaganda. If you tell a big lie often enough and loud enough, people begin to believe it. Even if they do not fully believe it, they will lose the spiritual courage to resist the liars. They will either remain passive or will actively conspire with the wicked. The "generation of the lie" continues to flourish in our day, when tyrannies are viewed favorably and democracies are judged negatively. Every vote that justifies wickedness is an act of complicity with the wicked. Every abstention that refrains from condemning wickedness is also an act of complicity with the wicked. Albert Einstein described the moral decay which he felt was setting into society. "One misses the elementary reaction against injustice and for justice—that reaction which in the

long run represents man’s only protection against a relapse into barbarism. I am firmly convinced that the passionate will for justice and truth has done more to improve man’s condition than calculating political shrewdness which in the long run only breeds general distrust. Who can doubt that Moses was a better leader of humanity than Machiavelli?” (Out of My Later Years, p. 10).