

Chapter V

“Hands Have No Tears to Flow”

When Carter appeared on the national horizon, he promised to heal the nation’s wounds and to restore trust by providing honest, decent, open, fair, compassionate and competent government. Barbara Walters, in her pre-Inaugural interview with Carter, in a quiet, almost pleading voice, asked him to “be wise with us ... be good to us.” The plea was in tune with the fantasy that Carter was a protecting, benevolent savior who would never lie and never betray our trust. Carter reinforces this image by suggestive allusions. In the national call-in program Ask President Carter on March 5, 1978 he repeatedly used words such as: protected, assurance, not be hurt, reinforce, personally care about, concerned, security, not suffer, supported, strengthening, interest, concern, sincere, encourage, support.

There emerges a princely, stern, and at the same time caring father-figure, who is feared but whose protection is longed for— Freud’s Great Man:

Why the great man should rise to significance at all we have no doubt whatsoever. We know that the great majority of people have a strong need for authority which they can admire, to which they can submit, and which dominates and sometimes even if it treats them.

In Freud's definition, the great man influences his contemporaries in one of two ways:

through his personality and through the idea for which he stands. Sometimes — and this is surely the more primitive effect— the personality alone exerts its influence, and the idea plays a decidedly subordinate part.

Carter's personality and not his ideas inspire interest. lie said that in 1972 McGovern "should never have made the Vietnam War an issue." When it was suggested that the war might have been the issue that gave birth to McGovern's candidacy, Carter blankly stared back and said: "That's not how it works." His 1978 campaign had no issues, no philosophy and no ideas. As one article put it, "Carter's friends and enemies agree that, if one thing characterizes Jimmy Carter, it is his obsession with Jimmy Carter."

A self-proclaimed "outsiders" stranger to the Democratic Party Machine, Carter by his own willpower and effort captured it and went on to win the Presidency. How can one not admire and trust him? Also, as Freud said about the great man, "one cannot help also being afraid of him."

"What drives you?" asked Bill Moyers in his interview with Carter. A long silence followed, and then Carter said,

I don't know..., exactly how to express it... I feel I have only one life to live. I feel that God wants me to do the best I can with it. And that's quite often my major prayer. Let me live my life so that it will be meaningful.

On the surface, this statement might appear as nothing extraordinary. Who, after all, does not want to live a meaningful life! But for a man running for the Presidency, such a statement is nothing short of remarkable. Presidents usually advocate some “meaningful” goals which they want to accomplish to give meaning to their Presidencies, not to their lives. There has actually been only one issue of all-encompassing meaning for Carter—to win and to hold on to the Presidency. Carter had no choice but to “win” and thus to survive psychologically— otherwise, he might “bust.” Defeat for him is a shattering experience.

Although Carter had told his sister Ruth, before he was “born again” in May 1967, that he would rather have Christ in his life than be President he did not really mean that. He still wanted to be “the most powerful man in the world.” Very early in life Carter began to think about his role in history. Napoleon attracted his attention after a schoolteacher advised him to read Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. “Well, I went to the library and checked it out, and it was 1,415 pages thick;.. He discovered that in Tolstoy’s view,

the course of human events, even the greatest historical events, are not determined by the leaders of a nation or a state, like presidents or governors or senators. They are controlled by the combined wisdom, and courage, and commitment, and discernment, and unselfishness, and compassion, and love, and idealism, of the common ordinary people.

Carter claimed to agree with Tolstoy, but in the same passage he concluded that Napoleon’s decisions changed “the course of history” and “probably affected our own lives.” Why did Carter want so much to become President if he really thought the role of leaders in history was trivial?

“History is not always determined by events, by the balance of power and trade,” wrote James Reston in his article on Carter. “Sometimes, but not often, it is influenced by leaders....” Then Reston quoted Carter~ “There can be no international system until somebody finds a way of relieving pressure and beginsthe task of creating confidence.” Carter’s key words here are relieving pressure” and “creating confidence.” The great men in history have invariably striven to relieve the pressure of their personal emotional problems by projecting them on the outside world, thus instigating a crisis~ through which they sought to achieve their “task of creating confidence” in themselves. Garter’s mentionng of “presidents, or governors, or [state] senators” indicates an unmistakable self-reference. He identifies his emotional problems with the troubled state of the “international system.” He believes that at exceptional periods in history, “but not often,” certain “leaders” determine the course of events.

“You have ohly one life,” wrote Carter, “and I began to wonder if I should spend mine engaged in war, even if I could rationalize it as the prevention of war.” He wondered about Napoleon’s role in history. He decided to spend his life “engaged in war.” “Even before I started in the first grade of school, I had already d~ cided that I wanted to go to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, and my father agreed completely with this decision.” His mother’s brother, Tom, an enlisted Navy man, was his “distant hero.” Usually children strongly identify with their fathers. “Who else but the father should in childhood have been the great man?” wrote Freud. But Carter felt unjustly punished by his father and deeply resented the whippings. Such resentments often produce “a common peculiarity” in some children, a conviction that they are “guiltless,” that they

have “suffered enough” and will “submit no longer” to anyone “for they are exceptions and intend to remain so too.” In his autobiography, Carter quoted Kierkegaard’s observation that “every man is an exception,” which suggests that this self-evident truth attracted Carter’s attention only because of its deep personal significance for him. After all, as Norman Mailer noted, “Carter was not necessarily one of America’s leading authorities on Kierkegaard,” so why would Carter quote only this particular observation?

Even when he was a little boy, he had “that drive to win and that dread of losing that had fired him all his life.” He wanted to be the first, or, in his words, “the best.” Old residents of Plains recall that “Jimmy cried because he didn’t catch the biggest fish.” The presumption was that “Jimmy was going somewhere and that it wouldn’t be Plains – not forever.” They remember that “when that ol’ boy was readin’, us didn’t know what he was readin’ up on. But he was on this truck then, ‘cause he was different from other children.” During his service in the Navy Carter was “cool and controlled almost to the point of hauteur.” He was “the indigenous leader... who, no matter what he does, ends up being the boss.” He was “remote,” and “a pretty driven guy... withdrawn into himself and his own ambition.” He has been described most often as “different,” “driven,” “ruthless,” “remote,” “withdrawn,” “aloof,” and “princely.” These perceptions reflect the uncanny impression his magnified self-image leaves on people.

Carter also magnified his “distant heroes,” the father substitutes. Thus, his identification with God has a pre-history. After Uncle Tom, Carter’s admiration shifted to Admiral Rickover, whom Carter described as “my iconoclastic Navy figure,” and whom he “feared and respected” and “strove to please.” Carter wrote

that I do not remember him ever saying a complementary word to me.” After hearing over and over again about Rickover’s momentous role in Carter’s life, one gets the impression that he and Carter were personally very close. It turns out, according to Carter’s own admission, that there had not been a “personal interrelationship” between him and the Admiral. Rickover’s aides said that Carter “made too much of his Rickover’s connection.” Francis J. Callahan, Rickover’s staff officer, put it bluntly: “They simply weren’t that close. Carter was just another engineer.” As Carter admitted in his autobiography, Rickover “may not have cared or known it, certainly not at the time, but Admiral Rickover had profound effect on my life – perhaps more than anyone except my parents.”

Carter ascribed to Rickover the same qualities that earlier he had attributed to his “Daddy” – a demanding disciplinarian, hard-driving, stern father-figure. During Carter’s navy career, he had only one personal encounter with Rickover. Rickover received Carter’s application for a nuclear submarine program and called him for an interview. “He always looked right into my eyes and he never smiled. I was saturated with cold sweat.” Carter answered poorly a number of questions. “Did you do your best?” inquired Rickover. Carter “started to say ‘Yes Sir’, but... finally gulped and said ‘No Sir, I didn’t always do my best.’” “Why not?” asked Rickover, and “turned his chair around to end the interview.” This question Carter “has never been able to forget – or to answer. I sat there for a while, shaken, and then slowly left the room.”

During his service in the Navy, he didn’t want to be President – “the only thing I wanted to be was Chief of Naval Operations.” Even then, he wanted to surpass his idol. Soon after the inauguration Carter invited

Rickover to accompany him on a nuclear submarine cruise. Reports described Carter wearing the Commander-in-Chief cap and “manning the diving controls.” After the cruise Rickover quipped to reporters, “this proves that every sailor and officer can be President.” When a newspaper publisher called Rickover and asked what he thought of Carter, Rickover avoided giving any answer. But on another occasion he had to say a few words on this subject.

On June 9, 1980 Carter, in a White House South Lawn ceremony, placed the Medal of Freedom around Rickover’s neck and delivered a speech in which he said:

I have said many times to a close circle of friends that with the exception of my father, no other person has had such a profound impact on my life.... This is one of the few times that Admiral Rickover has walked toward me that I did not tremble.

In response to reporters’ subsequent inquiry into his “impact” on Carter’s life, Rickover said, “I think that’s sad. He could have done better.” Then, for reasons he did not explain, Rickover, a Jew, drew a parallel between Carter and Jesus Christ:

When the Lord Jesus Christ was alive, not everyone agreed with his policies then. I don’t think President Carter is capable of doing more than Jesus Christ. He tries though. Every human being should try to do the best they can. If he does that, then in his own mind and in God’s, he is great.

Judy Carter, the President’s daughter-in-law, told a reporter, “This is the thrill of Jimmy Carter’s life to give this thing to Admiral Rickover.”

Before Carter began “trembling” before Presidents, he submitted himself to his father, that is, he revived his identification with Mr. Earl who was dying of cancer in 1953. That year Carter was approaching his thirtieth birthday. He said he had no “alternative” but to come home. He had not seen his father for almost eleven years. His sister Ruth said that she “saw Jimmy cry.... He said, ‘I want to be a man like my father.’” Carter wrote that those who attended his father’s funeral wept and “it caused me to compare my perspective of life with his.” He added sadly that no one would cry at his funeral and that his father was “an integral part of the community, and had a wide range of varied but interrelated interests and responsibilities. He was his own boss.” His identification with his father and the desire to take his place was overwhelming. As Freud has pointed out, a neurotic manifests such identification at the time of a father’s death.

Carter became successful as a businessman-farmer, Sunday-school teacher, and even won a seat in the State Senate, which for a brief time his father had held. Carter’s father was “an exuberant man. He had an enjoyable life, like my brother Billy.” But Carter was too tense; he could not enjoy life – there was no limit to his ambition. He still cannot relax, for he is possessed, a driven man. His born again experience did not change his personality—the core of it remained intact, and keeps making its appearance from behind his smiling mask and his display of politeness, humility and all~ embracing love.

“I have always looked on the Presidency of the United States with reverence and awe, and I still do,” wrote Carter in his autobiography, adding that “recently I have begun to realize that the President is just a human being.” Before that moment, Presidents did

not seem “quite human.” For him they were something like gods. But at a certain point Carter, as he put it, lost the “feeling of awe about Presidents.” This happened in 1971 when he first met several “presidential hopefuls.” “I began to realize that the president is just a human being.... I can almost remember when I began to change my mind and form this opinion.” He “silently measured” himself against them, and decided that he was at least as qualified as they were, and perhaps more so. They, he discovered, had a weakness, which struck him—“toward the end of the day, they all looked forward to a couple of drinks.” Carter decided that he had an advantage because, as he put it, “being elected President was more important to me than a drink before dinner.”

There are two ways one can look at the “meaningfulness” of Carter’s Presidency. What it means to him appears to be clear~ it gratifies his perception of himself as a special being and provides him with an opportunity to externalize and to act out his neurosis on the national and world stage and to avoid self-destruction.. For him, to be President is a matter of personal salvation. The outside world, however, must ask itself whether it can afford being used as a prop for the salvation of one man, no matter how great this man might be, and whether his salvation can be achieved without catastrophe.

The problem seems to arise from the conviction of great men that they can solve mankind’s problems, and therefore have the moral right to impose, ruthlessly and self-righteously; their will on ordinary people, who are supposedly blind to their own interests. The tragedy is that great men invariably mistake their own salvation for that of mankind. Ernest Jones has pointed out that the unsolved inner conflict of God-complex

people generates an inherently ambivalent but immensely powerful driving force, which “when either exaggerated or not properly directed by firm moral standards and misguided by a false sense of values... could be enormously destructive.” Norman Mailer put his finger on the problem when he wrote that Carter

would not have a psychology as ordinary people did. ... No, one would not find the thing that made Carter tick, for it was not a thing, but a force that rose from every medium of his experience. Whether it was a spiritual force, or not so moral, might be the precise question.

Carter’s attitude toward God might well be the clue to the question of his attitude toward his fellow man. The belief that Carter is a very religious man is widely shared for an obvious reason in his 1976 campaign, one of the dominant themes was that of his deep religious beliefs, his born again experience, and his closeness to God. This was well publicized by the media. Lately, however, God seems to have disappeared, or almost so, from Carter’s public pronouncements. Could it be that Carter simply ignores God as a no-longer-useful and perhaps bothersome commodity, or has he deposed the Heavenly Father as he deposed all of his “iconoclastic figures” in the past— his Uncle Tom, Admiral Rickover, the Presidents? If he has deposed God, then we are in great trouble, for, as Dostoyevsky discovered long ago, “if there is no God, then everything is permissible.” Carter might have already appointed himself in God’s place or is possibly in the process of doing so without telling us a word about it. Such a turn of events, incredible as it might appear, is a distinct possibility.

Before his election, Carter was asked whether he

had a vision of God “as not clearly omnipotent” and possibly living “in wrath and horror.” His response was not certain.” He was not “as devout and as prayerful as the Press had perhaps made him out to be.” Carter looked “a little concerned,” and asked whether the interview would appear in the *New York Times*. Such uncertainty about what he proclaimed to be his fundamental faith suggests the basic weakness of his convictions. His attitude toward God seems to reflect the same ambivalence that had been manifest in his attitude toward his father and toward his father substitutes. Ms. Lillian said that “Jimmy isn’t at all pious—you know, a long-faced Christian. He is as much fun as anybody.” This is not to say that at the time he was born again Carter did not have a vision of God as clearly omnipotent. Perhaps at “that instance, that instant,” he had a revelation of God as an enormously magnified, merciful and protecting Father. But then this vision might have begun to fade, and his image of God might have undergone a reduction in size.

“As a rule,” wrote Ernest Jones, people with a pronounced God-complex “are atheists, and naturally so because they cannot suffer the existence of any other God.” Yet the subject of “*religion* is usually one of the ~greatest interest to such men ... this sometimes degenerates into an interest in mysticism.” Barbara Walters announced that Carter “is one of the people who actually saw the UFO.” Carter indeed said on May 11, 1975, at a Washington press conference, that he had seen such a mysterious object and this vision had a profound impact on at least one of his political decisions:

I don’t laugh at people anymore when they say they’ve seen U.F.O.’s, because I have seen one myself.... One

night I was getting ready to speak to a Lion’s Club in Southwest Georgia in 1973 and twenty or so members and myself were standing outside when there was a light in the western sky that got brighter and brighter and then disappeared.... I think it was the light beckoning me to enter the California primary.

In his interview with Carter, Mailer suggested the possibility that “Satanism is loose in the 20th century,” and mentioned as examples the phenomena of “embodiment” and “incarnation.” This subject is familiar to Carter, since he feels that he represents the “embodiment of national will.” At some point in his conversation with Mailer, “Carter’s smile showed real amazement, as if he knew something others might not necessarily know. Of course, whether he was smiling to the left or right of this issue was another matter.” Mailer was tempted to ask Carter whether he “thought much about the hegemony of Satan,” and “this unasked question was silently answered by Carter’s eyes; yes, Carter’s concern was not with Satan but with Christ.” Leaving aside the problem of reliability of eye communications, one must ask the question why Mailer, a Carter sympathizer, would discuss with him such an eerie subject as Satanism? Mailer also mentioned prominently the Devil, Gurdjieff, and Rasputin. Were such subjects accidental and due only to Mailer’s own fascination with them, or to the uncertainty in Mailer’s own mind as to what Carter actually was? Mailer wondered about the “ambiguGus fiber” of Carter’s “ever oncoming smile” and whether Carter was “an artist of the first Satanic rank.”

It is quite conceivable that, given Carter’s tendency to “go to the people and stir up sentiment,” he may succeed in arousing the people’s support for one of his

foreign policy blunders which might involve us in nuclear conflict. Lloyd deMause, the Director of the Institute of Psychohistory, hopes that Carter is “able to tap some deep source of human warmth in his heart when the chips are down and decline to plunge us into another hellish birth.”

Dylan Thomas’ lines from the third epigraph selected by Carter for his autobiography have a direct bearing on the question of whether Carter has human warmth to tap when the chips are down.

A hand rules pity as hand rules heaven
Hands have no tears to flow.

“To me it meant,” Carter said,

that quite often the strength of a powerful person in his thrust on a city or a nation or a world can be insensitive.

Sometimes the separation between power and people is unrecognized by the strong leaders. And the insensitivity that’s inherent in power, that ought to be a warning to us.

This is exactly the point. The trouble is that Carter cannot recognize the self-reference in his warning. Carter perceives God as holding dominion over man by a “scribbled name.” This particular God, as Mailer correctly suspected, lives in “wrath and horror.” Carter’s God is stern, demanding, implacable and merciless. But all of Carter’s idols betray a remarkable likeness to their prototype, Carter’s image of Mr. Earl, which little Jimmy quite early in his childhood had formed in his memory, the image of a despotic, irascible and brutal man. Not unlike the “hands” in this image, Carter’s own hands have no tears to flow.