

The President's Tragic Choice

By Don Sutherland

It is unfortunate to have to devote a blog entry to Presidential choices. Yet, when a President engages in an almost unprecedented act of drawing false equivalence between groups of demonstrators that implicitly provides cover to individuals proclaiming hateful ideologies, such a time requires a response from all good people. If not, those ideologies could well triumph over the course of time. British Statesman Edmund Burke explained, "When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."

Last Tuesday, President Trump made clear where his heart and sympathies lie when it came to the tragic events and violence that took place at Charlottesville the preceding Friday and Saturday. The consistency of the ever inconsistent Trump's accommodating message toward Alt-Right, which is comprised of elements that include white nationalists, anti-Semites, and neo-Nazis, made abundantly clear his willingness to include the Alt-Right in his political coalition. In his remarks, he said that there were some "very fine people on both sides." In other words, there were some "very fine people" among the Alt-Right, one of the two sides in question.

Today, the United States is at a crossroads of sorts. In the Alt-Right, it faces an internal movement that poses a great threat to its founding principles, constitutional framework, and capacity for self-governance. On Tuesday, President Trump took the fork that leads to a dark abyss characterized by intolerance, division, and moral equivalence between good and evil. Sadly, when uniform condemnation is warranted, there were voices of accommodation, even support, for the President's journey into the amoral darkness that lies ahead on his chosen path.

The choice involved poses a threat to the nation's long-term well being. The Alt-Right should properly be viewed as a cancerous tumor that needs to be eradicated from American society. If not, its malignancy will spread with increasingly bad consequences for the nation's people, constitutional framework, and political institutions.

Its white nationalism would disenfranchise almost a quarter of the nation's citizens. Its anti-Semitism would present a grave threat to the nation's Jewish citizens. Its neo-Nazi ideology would bring a mortal threat upon virtually all of the nation's citizens, sweep its founding principles into the historical past, devastate its constitutional framework, and shatter its capacity for self-governance as a free society. No alternative group or collection of groups poses the kind of basic and sweeping threat to the nation, its institutions, and its people as does the Alt-Right.

An Alt-Right triumph would result in the United States' becoming a radically different place than the land in which independence was declared on the proposition that all people are "created equal" with the same "unalienable rights." Instead, it would have become a place closer to what John Milton described in *Paradise Lost* as a "Dungeon horrible, on all sides round" where "hope never comes that comes to all."

Things have now reached a point where President Trump could reasonably be described by some of the words Oliver Cromwell used in dissolving Great Britain's "Long Parliament" in 1653. Cromwell asked:

Is there a single virtue now remaining amongst you? Is there one vice you do not possess? ...Is there a man amongst you that has the least care for the good of the Commonwealth?

In the wake of President Trump's astonishing and unrepentant moral equivalence, the very same questions can be raised concerning the President in the singular, with "country" substituted for "Commonwealth." The answer today, is almost certainly the same as what it was 364 years ago.

"Ye are grown intolerably odious to the whole nation," Cromwell declared. The growing proof that President Trump has now "grown intolerably odious to the whole nation" is evidenced from the flight of CEOs from his advisory boards, the mass resignation from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, rising criticism from Republican Senators, and growing cancellations of events previously scheduled to be held at the Trump Organization's Mar-a-Lago.

MSNBC Justice and Security Analyst Matthew Miller laid out the stark choice presented by contemporary events. He observed, "If you've ever wondered what you would have done in 1930s Germany or during the civil rights movement, congratulations: you're doing it now." That's exactly the kind of moral question involved.

Such tests as the one now confronting Americans of all backgrounds provide a rare opportunity for one to fundamentally determine the extent of one's own goodness and the depth of one's own character. The choice each person makes will provide the answer. In an [op-ed piece](#) published in *The New York Times*, Yale history professor Timothy Snyder wrote, "Until we have been tested, there is no sense in boasting of our goodness; afterward, there is no need."

There are no ambiguities involved in the issue at hand. There also should be no doubt whatsoever what the right choice should be.