

Spirit of paranoia

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By Lenny Cacchio

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—Doris Kearnes Goodwin in her book *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* makes the following observation about the Johnson White House:

"What is clear is that this continual concentration on conspiracy squandered a large amount of energy. The worse the situation in Vietnam became, the more Johnson intruded his suspicions and fears unto every aspect of his daily work. Conversations with Cabinet members would begin with the question, 'why aren't you out there fighting against my enemies? Don't you realize that if they destroy me, they'll destroy you as well?' Discussions on legislation would be interrupted by diatribes against 'the critics.' Private luncheons and dinners would be dominated by complaints about 'traitors' " (page 317).

Mr. Johnson's was not the only presidency infused with a spirit of paranoia. Richard Nixon had his famous Enemies List, and, while Nixon and Johnson both had real enemies, so has every presidency going back as far as Washington. The presidencies of Johnson and Nixon gave our country almost 12 consecutive years of uninterrupted national paranoia emanating from the highest levels of government, and it was completely unnecessary.

The same spirit that helped bring down the presidencies of Johnson and Nixon contributed to the downfall of the first king of Israel, whose obsessions with conspiracies drove him to the brink of insanity. Despite repeated assurances from both his own son Jonathan and from David himself, who promised not to raise his hand against "God's anointed," Saul's worries grew worse and worse, finally destroying him and his family and greatly wounding the nation.

That spirit of paranoia is still troubling us, afflicting even the people of God. Today's world gives us abundant fodder for obsession, what with real threats to financial, national and personal security.

People have understandable concerns about the powers that be whose purpose is to control more and more of our lives by restricting more and more of our freedoms, while attempting to hijack our culture and values.

The people of God must naturally be concerned with such things and have as much right as anyone—indeed we have an obligation—to speak out about them.

Having said that, I must point out that Jesus reminds us that His Kingdom is not of this world, and that in this world we will have a measure of tribulation.

He tells us that not to discourage us from lighting the world to the extent that God gives us the ability, but as a simple acknowledgment of reality as it is on this side of His return. He does not want us to be paralyzed by fear or provoked to foolishness by the same spirit that troubled King Saul.

The spirit of fascism may be dressing in new garb these days, but that doesn't mean a fascist is hiding under every bridge. In fact, it looks a lot to me like God is busy calling a people to Himself. There are untold millions—likely tens of millions—of Americans praying for the state of the country, and tens of millions more who are finally stirring from their slumber.

These are good things, and those of us who fancy ourselves God's people should take a clue from David, who, when Saul pursued him as a common criminal, did what he needed to do to avoid Saul's sword while continuing to fight the real enemies of his nation.

While David continued to do the job God had given him, more and more of the people awakened to the rightness of David's cause. Together they prepared for the time when God would give him the kingdom.

Plenty of things are going on that should rightly concern us, but the Spirit of God is working too. He's calling a people to Himself, and that's good stuff for us.