

Ma Vie en Jade

By Jade Wolfe



"Nobody controls my mind...tells me what to think..." as we Americans are fond of saying. Democracy protects its citizens from mind control and other forms of oppression. In theory. Theory is that pristine image which often lulls us into complacency. Because the theoretical is striven for, the actual can fall short and be accepted. After all, we are all too busy to make very many individual decisions.

Last month's letter to the Editor calling attention to the now Catholic controlled psychiatric treatment facility combined with Pat Robinson's article kept mixing into my 'last chance to comment on the holidays' notes for this month. I re-read both the letter and Pat's article several times. Individual decisions have been taken away from the patients seeking psychiatric care and

perspective try Howard Zinn's, *People's History of the United States*). Once here, and having survived the worst of a winter with the help of a savage race, these pilgrims deemed it their responsibility to 'save the savages from their heathen ways'. How kind they were to trouble themselves so. At best, they were saying 'we were persecuted for religious differences, and you are definitely different from us...so...now it's our turn to tell someone they have no rights.'

But that was a while ago, and my how we have evolved. Instead of summarily wiping out a large contingency of people judged 'heathen', economics replaces open violence and oppression. Religious representatives can and do control political focuses and treatment of individuals in need of help. Notice I use the words 'religious representatives'.

these words: "Those two men came to my front door, pounding on it...the kids started crying and ran to hide...they thought it was their Daddy comin' to beat me up some more...and when I looked out the peephole, I saw who it was...they wanted to talk, they said...afraid I couldn't hear the doorbell...and then they started asking me why I had called you about them...didn't I get fed, and didn't the kids have a place to sleep down at their shelter...that I was sinning against God by complaining and should take back what I reported about them...then they left".

"Those two men were the two ministers who ran the only shelter in the county. They were Salvation Army funded (among others) and ran a mission providing food, clothing and shelter. Perhaps printing costs prohibited the mentioning of the 'way the food, clothing and shelter' was provided. Anyone who needed to stay overnight was forced to listen to a lengthy lecture on 'why they were in the mess they were in with many out of context scriptures thrown in for free. The meal was contingent on reciting a standard prayer. Before being given an assigned sleeping area, a two hour service had to be attended. No exceptions and no considerations for someone who has been assaulted and has four tired, traumatized children in hand. As an advocate I did not rely solely on second-hand reports from stressed out clients.

An ally of mine volunteered to 'go undercover' and experience the 'mission' for himself. Well...he went, he saw and he came away thoroughly outraged. And, of course, the tape recording of the entire 'adventure' did not exist.

Later that same year and in front of the State-wide council for a major funder, the Rev. in charge of the mission did not take kindly to my insistence and gave a incredibly over the top performance...about two inches from my face...exhausting his lungs. I was so complimented by his hysterics that a spiritual peace came over me. The angrier he became, the calmer I felt. If confession is

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the psychiatric care givers.

Several reactions spontaneously combusted out of me. Personally, I am remembering quite a few negative experiences with 'religious' organizations as they 'ministered' to the communities I worked in. (Yes, I end sentences in prepositions, rebellious as it may seem). As a writer trying to painstakingly address treatment of individual patients in America, the present issues add to my motivation. And after a year of preliminary work, my long term project needs all the 'juice' it can get. Finally, as a resident of Vermont the perpetuation of sanctioned narrow-mindedness is unacceptable.

Ironically, in both the New Testament and implied in our governmental documents is the separation of 'church and state'. And, considering the basis for 'other than Native American people' invading, over-taking and now controlling this country perhaps this 'viral' condition is inevitable. However, it is no more acceptable in it's present form than it was in the past. And what of the past? People have a right to be free of persecution. The pilgrims came all the way over here to avoid oppression under British rule. In general, textbooks tend to agree it was for 'religious freedom'. For now, let's leave it at that...vague as it is (for an in-depth historical

Because these words are not meant to obviously condemn religion. Religion 'in theory' has much merit. There are countless individuals I have known and know who are truly spiritual and do credit to their affiliations.

Rather it is the lack in personal attitudes. I am open to being proved wrong in this estimation. A reversal in my opinion would be welcome in my heart and nurturing to my spirit. Until that time, here are my concerns. When mental health treatment is 'couched' within a religious focus, as with patients in a psychiatric facility, automatic gaps in care appear. Judgment of individual lifestyles replaces clinical observation of relevant factors. The choices open to both care giver and recipient are further limited. This can, unfortunately, be extended to include all social service type activity.

Honestly, there is an image in my mind so vivid as I write these words. A woman in her late twenties sits surrounded by four small children. Her eyes are puffy from crying and she is clearly frightened. When I make eye contact with each of the children, there is a haunted look staring back at me, no matter how brave the smile. Afraid to come to the point, she absent-mindedly caresses the hair of the nearest child. With a deep intake of air and in a moment of resolve, she speaks

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