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Creative Handling of Fear Challenge

A READER suggests that epidemic fear is a national peril and that fear is "the principal product delivered by the mass media."

Viewing with alarm is a traditional posture of preachers, politicians, statesmen, economists, and editorial writers. Just as pain is useful in warning us that we have incurred a disease or had an accident, so fear drives men to do their duty, keeps them from doing evil, and moves many toward religious faith.

Those who don't fear the future may not be motivated to prepare for it. Fear of God might be taken to mean fear of judgment day, although some claim to have no fear of God, the devil, their fellow men or bureaucrats in Washington. This could be boasting, foolishness, or lack of awareness of the facts of life.

Fear also may become a disease, an ailment which destroys self-confidence that might succeed without it. Such fear generates worry and turns ordinary problems into catastrophes.

An old German adage says, "Fear makes the wolf bigger than it is." Shakespeare had a character in one of his plays assert that "the fear's as bad as falling." Napoleon told his army, "He who fears being conquered is sure of defeat."

Daily life is fraught with fearsome possibilities. Name your own fears, whatever they may be. Recognition of these threats to our well-being, happiness and prosperity is the first step toward avoiding their worst implications. We can't expect to escape all of the unfavorable potentialities, but resignation to them would be disastrous.

Regarding communications media as purveyors of fear, it is their responsibility to report what is happening, has happened, or might hap-

pen. To varying degrees, they also may interpret the news. How they do these things may help people to deal with the problems, or methods might "make the wolves bigger than they are."

When that occurs, facts may be converted into fear, fear into worry, and worry into panic that paralyzes our capabilities. There is no escape from life and the sordid, troublesome events that transpire, so each person must devise a system for dealing with fear.

Someone has said that print media are communications of the intellect and that electronic media are communications of the emotions. This may be oversimplification, but it suggests a problem.

When reading, it is possible for us to turn pages, skim over or skip entirely those items which do not interest us, or which may be objectiona-

ble, boring or saddening. When listening, escape might not be so easy, because selection of items presented is made elsewhere.

The printed page allows readers to establish their own crescendo of emotions, while a combination of voice and pictures can stimulate sensibilities beyond listeners' control.

Journalists and broadcasters too often feel that they have not succeeded unless they have exposed something that will startle, surprise, embarrass or horrify. The degrading use of profanity and obscenities is an evidence of this childish attitude.

We cannot evade entirely the threats of war, poor health, poverty, politics, or weather, and they are things to be feared. We may hate what we fear, but if we learn to control our fears, we may be able to use them as steps to prepare for a better future.