

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

Yearning to do good and obsessed by the power of the state to do it, relieved by this power of their age-old feeling of futility, they are destroying in the name of social welfare the foundations of freedom. Arthur Koestler warned us some years ago against the “men of good will with strong frustrations and feeble brains, the wishful thinkers and the idealistic cowards, the fellow-travelers on the death train.” We have accepted his warning. At least we have learned the meaning of the word fellow traveler, and are no longer falling in droves for these unlovely accomplices of the tyrant. We must arm our minds now against the less obvious, the more strong and plausible and patriotic enemies of freedom, the advocates of a state-planned economy. They are not on the train and have no thought of getting on, but they are laying the tracks along which another death train will travel.

Max Eastman, *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*, 1955.

WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US.

If Jean-Jacque Rousseau is the patron saint of American liberals, which we have asserted many times in these pages, then we would argue that the stoic philosopher/slave Epictetus is the patron saint of American conservatives, for it was said by Celsus, according to Origen, that Epictetus once stoically told his master, Epaphroditus, who was twisting his leg, that if he, the master, kept it up, the leg would break. And sure enough, it did.

So why, you ask, should Epictetus be considered the patron saint of American conservatives? Well, because conservatives have done a masterful job from the mid-1940s to the present day stoically explaining to liberals that if they keep doing what they are doing, they will do irreparable damage to the nation that Lincoln once described as “the last, best hope of earth.” Yet, like Epictetus, they have failed miserably to make their point, despite the fact that the liberals, unlike Epaphroditus, who had to rely on Epictetus’ word alone, have had the additional benefit of being able to witness, time and time again, in real circumstances, in real nations, the terrible human and economic damage that inevitably occurs when Jacobins and socialists appropriate to themselves vast, unchecked powers under the noble claim of rescuing the nation from some disaster.

F.A. Hayek described this phenomenon as follows in his brilliant and justly famous little book, *The Road to Serfdom*, which is particularly interesting today in light of the massive, collectivist measures that the federal establishment and their friends in corporate world and the Wall Street community are currently contemplating in response to the problems at Freddie and Fannie and within the nation’s banking system. As with so much that Hayek wrote, these words are arguable even more relevant now than they were when he wrote them in 1944.

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Subscriptions are available by contacting:

The Political Forum LLC 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842
Phone 540.477.9762 Fax 540.477.3359 melcher@thepoliticalforum.com www.thepoliticalforum.com

The principle that the end justifies the means is in individualist ethics regarded as the denial of all morals. In collectivist ethics it becomes necessarily the supreme rule; there is literally nothing which the consistent collectivist must not be prepared to do if it serves “the good of the whole,” because the “good of the whole” is to him the only criterion of what ought to be done. The *raison d’etat*, in which collective ethics has found its most explicit formulation, knows no other limit than that set by expediency – the suitability of the particular act for the end in view . . .

To say that in a planned society the Rule of Law cannot hold is, therefore, not to say that the actions of the government will not be legal or that such a society will necessarily be lawless. It means only that the use of the government’s coercive powers will no longer be limited and determined by pre-established rules. The law can, and to make a central direction of economics possible must, legalize to what all intents and purposes remains arbitrary action. If the law says that such a board or authority may do what it pleases, anything that board or authority does is legal - but its actions are certainly not subject to the Rule of Law. By giving the government unlimited powers, the most arbitrary rule can be made legal; and in this way a democracy may set up the most complete despotism imaginable.

If, however, the law is to enable authorities to direct economic life, it must give them powers to make and enforce decisions in circumstances which cannot be foreseen and on principles which cannot be stated in generic form. The consequence is that, as planning extends, the delegation of legislative powers to diverse Boards and Authorities [editor’s note: say, for example, the Federal Reserve Board and the Department of the Treasury] becomes increasingly common.

It is important to keep in mind when reading these words that Hayek was not prone to abstract, theoretical observations. These thoughts represent a very real warning from a serious and brilliant man that political power once collectivized will eventually be arbitrarily administered under the claim that the collective is responsible not just for the “greater good” of the community but for actually defining “the greater good” for the community. Moreover, Hayek notes that those who will make this determination will increasingly favor their own personal interests and in the process of doing so will trample on the principles of justice that distinguish a free nation from a totalitarian one. He put it this way.

Where the precise effects of government policy on particular people are known, where the government aims directly at such particular effects, it cannot help knowing these effects, and therefore it cannot be impartial. It must, of necessity, take sides, impose its valuations upon people and, instead of assisting them in the advancement of their own ends, choose the ends for them.

As we have said numerous times in these pages for more than a decade now, this is, in our opinion, the single greatest threat to the freedom and liberty that the nation’s founding fathers long ago guaranteed to Americans – with qualifications, of course.

“Qualifications?” you say. Yes indeed, qualified by none other than Benjamin Franklin at the close of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia on September 18, 1787, when he was asked by a lady as he was leaving Independence Hall, “Well Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” and Franklin responded, “A republic *if you can keep it.*” (emphasis added)

Needless to say, the jury is still out as to whether Americans will be able to “keep it,” or perhaps it would be better to say, if they will be able to keep what’s left of it. But it is crucial to understand that the loss, if it occurs, or if it has already occurred,

will not be recognized immediately. Like Sandburg's fog, it will come in on little cat feet. One thinks of Malcolm Muggeridge's observation in a speech entitled "Farewell to Freedom?" published in the winter 1954-1955 *Queen's Quarterly*.

A recurrent nightmare, with me is that in our inimitable English way we are allowing a servile State to come to pass of itself without our noticing it; that one morning I shall wake up and find that, with the Monarchy still extant, Honourable and right Honourable Members still meeting in Westminster, the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the *New Statesman* and the *Spectator* and *Punch* still regularly appearing, the cricket still being played at Lords, and the B.B.C. still providing its daily offering from 'Bright and Early' to 'Good-night, everyone, goodnight', we have nevertheless become a totalitarian society.

In the nightmare it seems clear that all the faceless men, the men without opinions, have been posted in key positions for a bloodless take-over, and that no one is prepared to join a Resistance Movement in defense of freedom because no one remembers what freedom means. The walls of Jericho fell down, not because the trumpet blast was strong, but because the walls themselves were crumbling. People, that is to say, are never enslaved unless they have become slaves already. They swim into the Great Leviathan's mouth. He does not need to chase them.

Those who are paying attention will, of course, see signs along the way that the "bloodless takeover" is occurring, one of which will almost certainly be an increasing chorus of cries from among the nation's ruling elite that the federal government has a "moral" obligation to assume responsibility for any and all large incidents of woe, whether created by natural forces, such as hurricanes and floods, or by corruption and stupidity, such as the current problems within the financial services industry.

Now reasonable people can argue endlessly over the extent to which a modern day government has such an obligation, but anyone whose job is dependent on healthy and honest financial markets needs to understand that as the nation becomes increasingly collectivized, the nation's financial markets will become ever more subject to the whims and personal fortunes of government elites and those within the private sector who curry the favor of these elites. Or, to be a little more blunt about it, the financial markets will become ever more corrupt and ever more unreliable.

To understand this one need only consider the cesspool of sleaze artists that are as much a part of the Washington scene today as the Capitol building itself, political hacks like James A. Johnson and Franklin Raines, come to mind, along with ethically challenged Congressional and Executive Branch elites like Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, Rep. Barney Frank, and Senators Chris Dodd, and Chuck Schumer, and their "best friends" from the upper floors of the big Wall Street firms like Goldman-Sachs and Lehman Brothers, whose "suits" suck around Washington like ticks on a deer. Robert Novak discussed this crowd as some length in his nationally syndicated column last week, which included the following:

Testifying before the Senate Banking Committee Tuesday, [Treasury Secretary Henry] Paulson stressed there would be a federal purchase of assets only if necessary. But relying on investment bankers could be awkward for Paulson because of indiscreet jubilation from his old company [Goldman Sachs]. "This is our bailout," a senior Goldman Sachs official told a Wall Street colleague this week, suggesting the firm will be cherry-picking for mortgage bargains . . .

Paulson is a Republican, but as head of the Goldman Sachs investment bank, he had close ties with Democratic-dominated Fannie Mae. After prominent Democrat James A. Johnson left Fannie after eight years as chairman and CEO and joined the ZymoGenetics

biopharmaceutical firm, he was named head of Goldman Sachs' compensation committee, helping set Paulson's abundant salary there.

That connection clearly was not enough for Paulson to consider recusing himself from dealing with the crisis threatening Fannie, Freddie and the whole American economy. He structured the bailout and was on the phone last weekend encouraging leading investment bankers to buy Freddie Mac bonds. Financial consultant Lawrence Lindsey, President George W. Bush's former national economic director, told clients Sunday, "Surely things are somewhat amiss when a country's finance minister plays bond salesman for a supposedly privately owned company."

It is possible, of course, that these individuals and others like them know not what they do; that they believe that the consequences of their seedy behavior extends no further than their personal struggle to rationalize it. But you gentle reader should know that these men are peddling collectivism, pure and simple, which has proven time and time again to be poisonous to free societies and to free markets.

FIDES ET RATIO.

Four years ago, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry lost the race for the White House in what most observers considered an upset – a mild upset to be sure, but an upset nonetheless. It had been "Kerry's race to lose," according to most of the prominent names in the political forecasting business. And lose it he did.

When the exit poll results showed that the reason for this mildly surprising loss was the impact of so-called "values voters," Kerry's fellow Democrats decided then and there that they had to "get religion," if for no other reason than to mitigate the impact of religious voters in determining the outcome of national elections. Accordingly, they have done everything within their power to reassure religiously inclined voters that they share their values, their beliefs, and their faith. In the end, the purportedly-God-crazy

GOP will, this year, nominate a man whose religious beliefs and practices remain largely personal and private, while the Democrats wound up choosing between two apparent religious zealots, each of whom did his and her best to appear more pious, more faithful, and more Christ-like than even Christ himself.

The upshot of this is that many Democrats now believe that their presumptive nominee has a very good shot at stealing some religious votes from the presumptive Republican nominee. Indeed, to hear the Obama camp tell it, not only are more and more religious voters willing to consider the Democratic nominee, but a "seismic shift" is supposedly taking place among a "new generation" of younger evangelicals, who are, in a sense, rebelling against their parents' generation, expanding their list of critical issues, and, as a result, becoming much more open to Democratic entreaties.

We should note that current poll numbers tend to throw cold water on this optimistic outlook for the Democratic Party's general religious outreach. But even if this were not the case, we don't think that it would matter a great deal. If the Democrats peel off a few religious voters here or there, they might win an election here or there. And if they don't, they won't. Meanwhile, the parties will still battle only on the margins of the religious issues that are facing the nation, and the hard work of reforming, rescuing, and preserving America's Judeo-Christian culture and the principles of Western civilization will be taking place elsewhere, often in the most ironic of places.

Consider, for example, what took place this past May at the 2008 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. Now, for the record, the United Methodists have generally been one of the most liberal of the nation's mainline-Protestant Churches. As political scientist Paul Kengor recently noted, there is a reason that Hillary Clinton proudly and openly proclaims that she is "comfortable in this church." The UMC has adhered to the progressive/liberal political line almost unflinchingly, including, most notably, the liberal position on abortion, which the UMC has wholeheartedly supported. Until now.

Kengor notes that the 2008 General Conference made some changes in its doctrinal pronouncements on abortion, changes that may make Hillary “begin to feel less comfortable” in her Church. Kengor wrote:

Among the steps taken was a statement encouraging the church to “assist the ministry of crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers that compassionately help women find feasible alternatives to abortion.” The conference made some important changes in language, deleting a previous assertion that advocating legalized abortion was “in continuity with past Christian teaching,” and even adding a sentence informing Methodists that they are “bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and unborn child.” . . .

Another impressive change at the recent conference is that even feminist Methodists found a form of abortion they are willing to denounce: gender-selective abortions. Aborting a baby because a would-be mother simply does not want it is one thing, but to abort because the unborn baby is, say, a girl . . . well, that’s just unacceptable.

The one major disappointment was the decision to remain a part of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. This victory was hard-fought by the liberals and through lobbying efforts by representatives of the RCRC. According to John Lomperis of National Right to Life, a key to victory was a decision to schedule the RCRC vote when the 100-plus African delegates were not present. The African delegates are more conservative than the Americans, which is true for many American Protestant leaderships that have moved to the left.

This apparent disenfranchisement of the Africans gave the liberals the victory they needed.

It’s a shame that the RCRC vote failed, but it was also surprisingly (and refreshingly) close. Mark Tooley told me that this was “the closest margin ever.” He said if not for the missing 100 African delegates, the resolution to leave RCRC “would have passed.” He says confidently, “We’ll win next time.”

In the grand scheme of things, we suppose this a rather small and doctrinally minor change. Still, it serves as evidence that this nation’s active religious community does not necessarily move in concert with it’s politico-religious brethren. In this case, while one moved left, the other was moving right.

More to the point, the change at the UMC may well serve as a leading indicator of change elsewhere. Indeed, while the change among the Methodists may be minor, there are some very real, some very large, and some potentially major changes taking place elsewhere in Christendom, many of which have the potential to alter the socio-religious calculus in Western society.

Now, as we try to expound upon this idea, we ask for a bit of indulgence. The phenomena we have in mind here don’t necessarily involve change *per se*, at least not on the part of the most relevant religious actor. But they do involve a potential sea change in the religious dynamics in Western society. Confused? Bear with us a minute.

As we write, the global Anglican Communion has gathered in Canterbury to discuss the faith and to “express the mind of the communion” on matters of faith and morals. The meeting, called the Lambeth Conference, is a decennial celebration that has united the communion for over 140 years now. Only this year, the talk is more about division than unity.

As you may know, for a number of years now, the American contingent to the Anglican Communion has caused some problems for the Archbishop of Canterbury and other church leaders. The American Episcopal Church (the Episcopal Church of the United States of America; ECUSA) has taken a far more liberal stance on homosexuality, gay unions, and the ordination of women priests than have most other participants in the Communion and has thus been the subject of much controversy and much confusion.

We have neither the time nor the specific knowledge of Anglican doctrine to deal with this subject in any great detail. But for our purposes today, the specific details aren't all that crucial. What matters is that many in the Anglican Church have been pushing it leftward for decades, and over the last several years, a handful of traditionalists have been pushing back. Many of the traditionalists decided to boycott this year's Lambeth Conference, because of the attendance of the more liberal American Episcopalians, and held their own conference in Jerusalem. The result, then, is an Anglican Communion that meets amid great turmoil. As the BBC recently put it, "Rarely can the Anglican Communion have been in so much need of healing, and rarely can its once-a-decade summit of bishops in Canterbury have presented so little prospect of providing it."

What is most interesting about all of this, in our opinion, is that the most important player in this year's Anglican conference may well be a man who is not only not Anglican, but represents the very antithesis of the Anglican identity.

Naturally, we are referring here to Pope Benedict XVI.

As we note above, the Pope is not actually "changing" anything or actually doing much of anything at all. But he is providing leadership, offering guidance, and, in so doing, providing a means for those who are unhappy with the direction of the Anglican Communion to find consolation. What follows are excerpts from a couple of recent posts from Damian Thompson, the journalist who writes the "Holy Smoke" religious blog for the *Telegraph* of London:

More evidence this morning that Catholic liberals are panicking at the prospect of an influx of conservative Anglicans. They want us to believe that Pope Benedict is "shunning defectors" in an attempt to shore up the position of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Not true . . .

The Pope is supporting moves by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to construct a model whereby a group of rebel conservative Anglicans, the Traditional Anglican Communion, can be received en masse and occupy their own structures inside the Roman Catholic Church. This model – which is being constructed in secret – could serve as a blueprint for mainstream Anglicans wanting to convert as a group . . .

And:

The Catholic Church will expand its provision of "Anglican Use" parishes in the United States in order to allow whole communities of traditionalist Anglicans into the Roman fold, a senior Catholic archbishop has announced. The Most Rev John J Myers, Archbishop of Newark and Ecclesiastical Delegate for the Pastoral Provision, told a conference of ex-Anglicans on Friday that "we are working on expanding the mandate of the Pastoral Provision [of Catholic parishes using Anglican-inspired services] to include those clergy and faithful of 'continuing Anglican communities'.

"We are striving to increase awareness of our apostolate to Anglican Christians who desire to be reconciled with the Holy See. We have experienced the wonder of several Episcopal bishops entering into full communion with the

Catholic Church and we continue to receive requests from priests and laity about the Pastoral Provision.”

Now, there are, undoubtedly, some who will be upset by this, believing that the Pope is unduly meddling in the affairs of another church. And that certainly is an understandable sentiment. At the same time, the Pope’s defenders would note that, in fact, this is all part of a broader and exceptionally complicated effort at ecumenism that has been underway for years and which precedes this Pope. The more Christians who can be reconciled under one set of core beliefs, the better, they would say.

In either case, what we have here – and what fascinates us the most – is the fact that Pope Benedict XVI appears to setting the Catholic Church as a universal cultural bulwark against further liberalization and further radicalization of Western society as a whole. Back before Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict, indeed, before Pope John Paul II had passed, we noted that the establishment of such a bulwark as this would be one of the most challenging and necessary tasks for the next Pope. Back in 2005, we cited Catholic and papal scholar George Wiegel, who argued that one of the three most important challenges facing John Paul’s successor would be “the virtual collapse of Christianity in its historical heartland – Western Europe.”

Pope Benedict made it clear that he took this challenge seriously when he took on the matters of reason and religion in his famous/infamous lecture at Regensburg two years ago. And now he is offering actual, tangible sanctuary for those who seek to escape the influence of post-modern value systems on their religion. In so doing, he is bolstering Christianity and re-dedicating the Catholic Church to “catholicism,” or universality. The Church stands as a shelter against post-modernism, secularism, and nihilism, not just for Catholics but for all Christians and, indeed, for all men.

The irony in this confrontation and of the Pope’s boldness simply cannot be overstated. A half-millennium ago, nearly the entirety of Europe

rebelled against the Catholic Church in successive mutinies. From the Renaissance to the Reformation to the Enlightenment, Europe’s educated, talented, and earnest pushed back against the Church, not necessarily as it existed *canonically*, but as it existed *practically*, at least in many places and at many times. Not to put too fine a point on these three monumental movements in Western civilization, but all three were, in essence, reactions to the distortions of the Middle Ages, to the corruption, darkness, and superstition that had come to represent established order and the institution that most represented that order, the Church.

It is, therefore, no small wonder that the Catholic Church today represents precisely the opposite of what it did five centuries ago. While the likes of Bacon and Descartes, Voltaire and Leibniz would undoubtedly shudder at the idea, today’s Church (and many other traditionalist Christian sects) serves as a repository of Western reason and probity.

In the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, the Enlightenment project was by and large repudiated by the likes of the pragmatists, the Romantics, the socialists, the irrationalists, in short, the post-modernists. Today, post-modernism dominates much of the West, and its peculiarities, prejudices, absurdities, and superstitions have become the canon of the West’s educational, political, and, yes, religious elites. And the traditionalists in the Catholic Church and elsewhere stand as the antidote to this irrationalism.

This week, Pope Paul VI’s historic encyclical *Humane Vitae* will celebrate its 40th birthday. That document, which deals with Catholic teachings on life, love, marriage, and abortion, represents the beginning in earnest of the Church’s push back against post-modernism, the predominant moral force of the last half century. It also represents the implicit acknowledgement that the real moral and spiritual battles of the day will be fought and won outside of the political realm.

The left in this country likes to talk about how the GOP employed the “Southern Strategy” and pure racism to become the majority party and to turn “the

solid South” into a solid Republican zone. Maybe. But we tend to agree with Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, who has argued that the South’s rebellion against the Democratic Party had more to do with religion (and abortion) than with race. It is no coincidence, in other words, that the political reaction to the post-modernism of the 1960s began concurrently with the religious reaction. When the Southern Baptists joined the Catholics in overt, denomination-wide opposition to abortion, the deal was, as they say, sealed.

Today, the Democrats proudly proclaim their religiosity and predict that they will end the GOP’s dominance among religious believers. But we believe that they are missing the point. As we and others have noted many times in the past, and as Pope Paul VI acknowledged as long ago as 1968, Washington is not where the important battles are won, but merely where the score is kept. The post-modern left may think that its appropriation of religious rhetoric will lead it to a permanent majority, but it is just as likely that it will lead instead to greater push-back and reaction to the empty morality of post-modernism, irrespective of its religious camouflage.

Today, our politics-obsessed culture sees and hears the religious professions of Democratic candidates and of the left in general, and marvels at the “authenticity” of this faith and the amalgamation of religion and leftism. Meanwhile, the United Methodists, some sects of the Anglican Communion, and the Catholic Church herself are continuing to move away from emptiness and irrationality of the quasi-religious post-modernism. The left thinks that by appropriating religion it has won the battle, ending the great struggle between conflicting moral codes. But the religious themselves see importance in events unrelated to politics and believes that the battle rages. And while it may not do so now, our guess is that eventually Washington will reflect this and the scoreboard will once gain change.

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