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THEY SAID IT

About halfway through the speech, my wife, watching me mutter darkly at the television screen, said: "Why are you so upset? He hasn't said anything." And that pretty much sums it up.

I know the speech was supposed to be upbeat and not for policy wonks.

But I'm worried that it's not just a matter of what he chooses to put in speeches, but what he knows. It looks very much as if the president is oblivious to everything we've learned about social programs and educational reforms in the last 40 years – and by "we" I include policy analysts on the left as well as right. The guy never indicates that he is aware that we've tried a whole bunch of the same stuff he wants to try and evaluated it repeatedly and – read my lips – it doesn't work.

He makes a great candidate, though.

Charles Murray, *National Review Online's* "The Corner," February 25, 2009.

OBAMA AND THE GIPPER.

It's not often that we're surprised by one of Washington's big shots. We've been doing this long enough so that it takes a something quite special – something especially stupid, or especially bold, or, more often than not, especially perverse – to raise our proverbial eyebrows.

Which is why we are still a little startled at how badly we misjudged Barack Obama. We figured that he was just playing the standard campaign games this past year, when he declared, for example, that the seas would obey his commands or when he derided his monstrously popular Democratic predecessor, Bill Clinton, and instead compared himself favorably to Ronald Reagan, arguably the most successful politician in this country, if not the entire Western world, in the last four-plus decades. Not only did we not take his braggadocio seriously, we didn't think that he did.

We figured that he would be smart, cautious. We figured he'd set himself up as the advocate of "the people," a man with no identifiable constituency who would therefore profess to represent the entire nation. We figured he'd be a thoughtful, paternal figure, rebuffing not just the newly conservative Republicans but the leftist insurrectionaries in his own party as well. We figured he'd continue to charm his supporters, all the while charming his former adversaries, convincing them not only that he could be trusted, but that he was their best hope – their ONLY hope – of warding off the "progressive" Armageddon being pushed by Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid and the rest of the Congressional radicals.

In this Issue

Obama and the Gipper.

A SpeechNot Given.

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We figured wrong.

Of course, for those of you scoring at home, we were nowhere near as wrong as the so-called “Obamacons,” the self-described “conservatives” who nonetheless supported Obama, foolishly believing that “bipartisanship” means something other than “I won so do as I say.” But we still feel pretty stupid for having overlooked the enormous ego this guy carries around with him.

The word “confident” doesn’t begin to describe it. Despite his incredibly thin resume and a host of massively daunting challenges, he nevertheless seems firmly to believe that he is qualified and, in fact, that he has been “called upon” not simply to address the short-term problems facing the nation and to staunch the immediate bleeding of a country *in extremis*, but to remake the national corpus in its entirety, to pursue the comprehensive, long-term amelioration of the conditions that caused the problems in the first place. What he seeks – nay, what he *demand*s – is nothing short of an economic, social, and political transformation.

Not that we shouldn’t have seen this coming. Indeed, it was just over a year ago, when then-Senator Obama was only beginning his ascent to the White House, that he openly and unapologetically declared President Reagan to be his model. Not that he admired Reagan’s policy positions, mind you. Rather, he favored the Gipper’s effect on the country, the way in which he had changed the debate and the impact he had had on the prevailing political currents. Over a year ago, in January 2008, after Obama had won the Iowa caucuses but lost the New Hampshire primary, he told the *Reno Gazette Journal* the following:

I don’t want to present myself as some sort of singular figure. I think part of what’s different are the times. I do think that, for example, the 1980 election was different. I think Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that you know Richard Nixon did not, and in a way that Bill Clinton

did not. He put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it.

Whatever else we have learned in the six weeks since Obama has been president, we now know for certain that he meant what he said that day. When the guy talks about himself and the sweeping effect he intends to have, he is deadly serious, no matter how absurd it all may sound to normally adjusted people. Obama does not believe himself to be an ordinary politician. He sees himself as a transformational figure, and he intends to pursue that transformation with great vigor.

The “experts” have spent the last several days trying to decipher and decode both the new President’s first address to a joint session of Congress and his first budget proposal. But the message is the same for both, and it is the same as the message he gave to that newspaper in Reno just over a year ago: it’s time for change, and I’m the guy to do it. And it’s gonna be big change. And there’s nothing you can do to stop me. As the inimitable Mark Steyn noted:

The President in his address to Congress finally spilled the beans and unveiled our new hero in his final form: the Incredible Bulk, Statezilla, Governmentuan, a colossus bestriding the land like a, er, colossus. What superpowers does he have? All of them! He can save the economy, he can reform health care, he can prevent foreclosures, he can federalize daycare, he can cap the salary of his archenemies the sinister Fat Cats who “pad their pay checks and buy fancy drapes.” No longer will the citizenry cower in fear of fancy drapes: Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain! With one solar panel on the roof of his underground headquarters, Governmentuan can transform the American energy sector and power his amazing Governmentmobile, the new environmentally friendly supercar that soon we’ll all be driving because we’ll be

given government car loans to buy the government cars! He'll have hundreds of thousands of boy sidekicks, none of whom will ever be allowed to drop out of high school because (in the words of his famous catchphrase) "that's no longer an option!" "Gee, thanks, Governmentuan!" says Diplomaboy the Boy Wonder, as he goes off to college to study Gender As A Social Construct until he's 34.

And our hero can do this all without raising taxes on any family earning under \$250,000!

Now, on a practical level, anyone who isn't brain dead knows that this is nonsense, that there is no chance whatsoever that this is going to "work." The budget is not just bloated, but contains "bloated baselines," an old budgeting trick whereby spending that wasn't going to happen is nonetheless "cut" in order to make the spending binge look less irresponsible. Additionally, it relies on hopelessly optimistic economic forecasts and dismisses everything that we know about human nature.

In terms of politics, though, there is reason to believe that this is not nonsense, that Obama will, indeed, have some success. It is important to remember, as Obama embarks upon his Reagan-esque mission, that he is hardly breaking new ground or proposing anything particularly radical. Reagan was a radical, but Obama is a conformist.

In fact, Ronald Reagan was a political anomaly. That his presidency happened to overlap the equally anomalous tenures of Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II, confuses matters greatly by giving the impression of a change in the course of political and social currents. But that is merely an illusion, a fortuitous, if not inspired, coincidence, to be sure, but hardly the sea change many believe it to have been. Reagan (like Thatcher and John Paul) had the courage and the sense to "stand athwart history yelling stop" at a particularly opportune moment, and for

that, conservatives, Americans, indeed, all Westerners, should be incredibly grateful. But that doesn't mean that he permanently altered the progression of post-industrial democracy. He merely slowed it down.

Obama, by direct contrast, proposes merely to speed it up. As we have argued in these pages countless times, the inevitable "end of history" toward which all Western democracies appear to be traveling is not the "liberal democracy" foreseen by Francis Fukuyama, but "the Bureaucratic State": a state in which "experts" make all the important decisions; in which all of the social, political, and economic pronouncements are centrally and "scientifically" planned; and in which the populace sacrifices liberty for convenience and bureaucratic efficiency. Obama simply wants to skip a few steps in the progression and to get us to this "end" a little sooner.

The consensus on the political right is that Obama wants to push the United States further along in the direction of Europe. Obama consistently denies that he favors "bigger government," but his actions clearly speak louder than his words. As countless observers have noted, the three themes that emerged from his budget and his address last week are: the need for government-run healthcare; the need for a government-run, government-funded, "green" energy sector; and the idea that government can and should be more deeply involved in education, up to and including the post-secondary level, what Charles Krauthammer terms "cradle-to-cubicle education." Krauthammer continues:

In the European Union, government spending has declined slightly, from 48 percent to 47 percent of GDP during the last 10 years. In the U.S., it has shot up from 34 percent to 40 percent. Part of this explosive growth in U.S. government spending reflects the emergency private-sector interventions of a Republican administration. But the clear intent was to make the massive intrusion into the private sector temporary and to retreat as quickly as possible. Obama has radically different ambitions.

The spread between Europe and America in government-controlled GDP has already shrunk from 14 percent to 7 percent. Two terms of Obamaism and the difference will be zero.

Conservatives take a dim view of the regulation-bound, economically sclerotic, socially stagnant, nanny state that is the European Union. Nonetheless, Obama is ascendant and has the personal mandate to take the country where he wishes. He has laid out boldly the Brussels-bound path he wants to take.

Obama figures that because he won he should have both the right and the support to make this transformation. He figures that the fact that his party controls Congress means that he should be able to do as he pleases and do it quickly. He figures that he can charm enough of the people, enough of the time to make this transformation a reality.

But he figures wrong.

Whereas Reagan had to swim against the proverbial tide of history, Obama is going to find himself swimming against the tide of the American spirit. There is a reason that courses in American government and American policy stress the “incremental” nature of the policy processes. Americans are, like it or not, more temperamentally conservative than are their Western brethren. “Change” is fine. And Americans can deal with it. But it has to be slow, careful, and at least marginally reasoned. The same people who would pass and sign an \$800 billion “stimulus” bill that no one, anywhere had read in its entirety are going to find that Americans, in general, think that such haste is foolish at best.

Now, we won't pretend that this is the same America that embraced Reagan and embraced his desire to slow the pace of change. Heck, we won't even pretend that this is the same America that listened politely to the

Clintons plans to “transform” the health care sector and then, just as politely, told Bill and Hill to shove it.

Changes in demography, education, moral character, and, indeed, incremental changes in policy have decidedly altered the make up of this nation. Nevertheless, Obama's transformation will not take place without a spirited debate. As we noted last week, the public anger at the new President's stimulus and mortgage proposals was already palpable. Add to it the tax-and-spend provisions he outlined over the course of the last few days, and it will be surprising, to say the least, if this anger doesn't grow significantly.

Does this mean that Obama's plans will be dashed, or that the GOP will rally itself politically as it did in 1994? Not necessarily. It is not inconceivable that Republicans could successfully exploit public displeasure with the pace of Obama's change to rebuild their own political base. After all, the bursts of anger with the administration's various plans do indeed cross partisan lines and extend beyond the GOP's normal geographic comfort zone. But in order for such a renewal to take place, leadership and eloquence will be required. And thus far, we've seen little evidence that either commodity exists in the GOP in sufficient quality. We'll know more, of course, in the next year, when candidate recruitment begins in earnest.

Until then, it strikes us that the most likely outcome of all of this is uncertainty, both political and financial. The Republicans and the Blue Dog Democrats will put up enough of a fight to ensure that this process is longer and far more frustrating than Obama would like, which is to say that the process will take most of the year and will be highly contentious. From a political perspective that's a good thing. But from the perspective of the financial markets it could be disastrous.

One final thought before dropping the Obama-Reagan comparison: Obama himself noted that one of the things that made Reagan so likeable and formidable politically was his optimism, his belief in the greatness

of the nation and his ability to rekindle a similar belief in the people. But what neither Obama nor his supporters seem to understand is that a reasonable fraction of that optimism stemmed from the fact that Reagan actively and consistently advocated an assertive foreign policy. It's hard to make people feel proud of their country when it's being pushed around the globe, not just by its rival superpower, but by every two-bit, tinhorn dictator as well.

Reagan understood that. Obama does not. Which means that he is setting a rather low ceiling on his public support. He promises to be bold in Afghanistan, but one can be forgiven for questioning his overall dedication to American assertiveness. And any flinching in the face of a challenge will hurt him precipitously, given the burden he bears as a Democrat and a professed dove.

All things considered then, there can be little question where Obama intends to take the country. What is still open for debate is whether his good fortune, both in terms of political opposition and global opposition, will remain intact long enough for him to do so.

To be honest, we don't know the answer to that question. We do know, however, that it's going to be a bumpy ride either way.

Last week, the Conservative Political Action Conference held its 37th annual convention for conservative activists in Washington, D.C., which featured speeches from all but a few of the movement's leading spokespersons, including Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich, Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, and Joe the Plumber. A record crowd of 9,000 attended. We were not among them. As conservative Americans, we very much appreciate and respect these people and the work they do. We applaud the event and its purpose, and we have many friends who look forward to attending each year. But we're country boys. We do our thing and the conservative activists do theirs. For what it is worth, the following is the contribution we would have made to the discussion if we had been asked to participate. Much of it will be familiar to our readers, but we hope you won't mind reading it one more time.

A SPEECH NOT GIVEN.

The greatest mistake that conservatives have made over the years in their epic battle against "the left" in America is the failure to fully recognize that Washington is not the principal front in this war and that politics is not the principal weapon.

Every day since that occasion in 1948 when, as Russell Kirk put it, Richard Weaver fired the first shot in the intellectual rebellion against ritualistic liberalism in his classic book *Ideas Have Consequences*, conservatives have risen from their beds, donned their arms, joined the daily fray, hacking and hewing 'mid dust, and groans, and limbs lopp'd off, and blood, like Matthew Arnold's Norse heroes in his epic poem *Balder Dead*, enthusiastically and bravely confronting their liberal adversaries on the political battlefield, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, but always fighting well, occasionally even nobly.

Yet, even in victory there is and always has been a sad, even Pyrrhic aspect to their efforts, reminiscent of the Lakota and Cheyenne at Little Big Horn, who reveled in the slaughter of 263 of their enemy while, just a few hundred miles to the south, a seemingly endless wave of European settlers were moving westward across the prairies in their covered wagons to claim the homeland of the Native Americans as their own.

And so it is with liberals. Each day, they commit a token force to the political fight. But their best and most aggressive legions are engaged elsewhere, burrowing relentlessly into the nation's cultural centers, its universities, its high schools, its grade schools, its giant educational bureaucracies, its news distribution outlets, and its entertainment and advertising hubs, establishing beachheads, then settlements, and finally impenetrable shrines to their false god of collectivism.

Unlike their conservative adversaries, liberals know that Washington is not the principal battlefield in the war over what kind of nation America will be in the 21st century. Liberals recognize that Washington is simply one of the spoils of this war. It is where the results of the various skirmishes and engagements are written into the law books.

When the nation moves to the right, conservatives win more political fights in Washington. When the nation moves leftward, conservatives lose more. Politicians undoubtedly influence this ebb and flow of public opinion. But politicians are not the primary combatants. That role is filled by those individuals in society who fashion and influence the way the public thinks about things, or as Claes Ryn once put it, the way people "process information."

Ryn is one of the few conservative leaders in the nation who fully understands this important reality. Indeed, he has devoted much of his life to this front in the battle for a just and free America. He maintains that what conservatives really need is a "broad intellectual and cultural movement that might in time redirect the moral and political life of civilization." In keeping with this view, Ryn is himself a founder and Chairman of the National Humanities Institute, a Washington-based think tank that promotes social renewal by fighting to revitalize the nation's moral, cultural and intellectual life through the humanities. This is wonderful organization and is, so far as we know, the only think tank around that approaches the nation's problems from outside the Washington mindset.

The real soldiers in this war, Ryn says, are the people who "draw us into their way of experiencing the world," the nation's artists, authors, entertainers, and advertisers. He patiently explains that an individual's view of the world is shaped to an enormous degree by the artistic symbols to which he or she is exposed. Some such symbols strengthen character and imagination, and in doing so promote a keener sense of reality. Others, by contrast, destroy character and weaken an individual's ability to reason.

This, Ryn says, explains why some people seem to cling so tenaciously to economic and social doctrines that have been discredited time and again by both experience and theory. There is, of course, no end to examples of this phenomenon. Common cases in point include insistence by many people on higher and higher taxes, despite overwhelming evidence that nations with moderate tax rates are more prosperous than those with very high rates; resistance to real welfare reform, despite overwhelming evidence that the program has become highly pernicious for many of the very people it was designed to help; and support for educational policies that overwhelming evidence demonstrates are directly responsible for the decay the system has suffered over the past several decades.

This strange behavior isn't necessarily a function of low intelligence, Ryn says. "In this century alone," he adds, "one can point to many individuals of obvious intelligence who have spoken foolishly on some subject. A number of Nobel prize winners come to mind who have combined genius in some field with naiveté in others." And it certainly isn't that the practical arguments in their favor are decisive. The explanation, Ryn says, lies in the framework from which people view things. And this framework is dictated not by politics, but by art, music, literature, television, movies and advertising; by the symbols that inspire and shape the public's imagination and its dreams for the future.

The article in which Ryn set forth these thoughts some 20 years ago, entitled "The Humanities and Moral Reality," does not offer specific examples of

the enormous social, and ultimately political, power of literature and the arts. But such examples abound in world history. Obvious ones include the Old Testament stories of Abraham, Ruth, Esther, Job, Jacob, David, Noah, and of course, Adam and Eve, which have profoundly shaped the very nature of Western society. Erasmus' great satire, *Praise of Folly*, did as much to erode respect for the local hierarchy in medieval church as did Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. Shakespeare and Milton changed the way the world thinks about conflict and love and honor and God. Voltaire and Rousseau can take as much responsibility for the French revolution, which changed the Western world forever, as the actions of Louis XVI or Marie Antoinette.

In more recent times, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also comes to mind. It had as much impact on the debate over slavery, and probably influenced the resort to war, more than all of the debates in Congress combined. Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* had enormous impact on the way millions of Americans viewed both the American labor movement and the early liberal agenda. Leon Uris' *Exodus* affected the attitude of untold Christian Americans toward the new state of Israel. And many of the most vociferous opponents of the death penalty still cite Camus' *Reflections on the Guillotine*, as having changed their lives.

How many Americans, years ago when poetry was in fashion, had their patriotism indelibly stamped onto their souls by reading Whittier's popular poem, "Barbara Frietchie," ("Shoot, if you must this old gray head/ But spare your country's flag, she said"); or Longfellow's "The Building of the Ship," ("Thou, too, sail on, O ship of state!/ Sail on, O Union, strong and great!/ Humanity with all its fears,/ With all the hopes of future years,/ Is hanging breathless on thy fate!); or Scott's "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," ("Breathes there the man with soul so dead/ Who never to himself has said: 'This is my own, my native land?'")?

How many young girls learned that sexual restraint was noble and good from reading Emily Dickinson's "The Charm"? ("A Charm invests a face Imperfectly beheld – The Lady dare not lift her Veil For fear it be

dispelled – But peers beyond her mesh –
And wishes – and denies – Lest Interview – annul
a want that Image – satisfies . . . “) or from reading Dickinson's letters to Otis Lord, ("Oh, my too beloved, save me from the idolatry which would crush us both . . . Don't you know you are happiest while I withhold and not confer--don't you know that 'no' is the wisest word we consign to Language? The 'Stile' is God's – My Sweet One – for your great sake – not mine – I will not let you cross – but it is all yours, and when it is right I will lift the Bars, and lay you in the Moss. . . . It is Anguish I long conceal from you to let you leave me, hungry, but you ask the divine Crust and that would doom the Bread.")?

And, of course, it is not just adults but, even more importantly, it is children whose lives are influenced more by what they read and have read to them than by the politics they hear at the dinner table. The great moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre put this thought this way in his great classic, *After Virtue*.

It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things. Vico was right and so was Joyce. And so too of course is that moral tradition from heroic society to its medieval heirs according to which the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues.

Gilbert Meilaender conveyed this same thought as follows in a review published in the Spring 1999 edition of “The University Bookman” of a book by entitled *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child’s Moral Imagination*, written by Vigen Guroian.

Thus, *Pinocchio* provides the occasion to discuss growing up and becoming truly human – as well as the way virtues such as love, courage, and truthfulness are essential to that process. *The Velveteen Rabbit* and the *Little Mermaid* draw us into what Guroian calls the longing for immortality. *The Wind in the Willows*, *Charlotte’s Web*, and *Bambi* are books about friendship – a subject of great importance in the lives of children. But the last two of these books are about friendships between unequals (Charlotte/Wilbur; the old stag/Bambi); hence, Guroian reads them as finally teaching us about the importance of those who are not only friends but also mentors to children.

Is it any wonder then, that those who would deconstruct American society, who hate its Judeo-Christian morality and its centuries old cultural habits and customs, have focused their attack on the traditional literary canon? As Eliot observed, “the communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.”

In the October 1996 issue of *Commentary* Norman Podhoretz wrote, in a piece entitled “Liberalism and the Culture: A Turning of the Tide?” that the left does not oppose the great books of Western civilization because they are irrelevant. They do it, he says, because they are all too relevant.

In short, while the battles in Washington are important, they are not the decisive ones in the on-going war between “the left” and “the right.” Just as Wellington noted that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the battle for the soul of America will ultimately be won in the humanities classes of the nation’s high schools, colleges and universities.

If Milton and Shakespeare fade in oblivion, just as sure as God made little green apples, so eventually will the conservative cause in Washington.

It should be noted when considering this situation that it did not arise by accident, that the tactical aspects of this movement were modeled on principles set forth by Antonio Gramsci, while in a prison cell in Turi, Italy in 1920s. At his trial, under an emergency statute aimed at the communist critics of the Mussolini government, the prosecutor famously remarked: “For 20 years we must stop this brain from functioning.”

But, of course, prison did not stop Gramsci’s brain from functioning. In fact, he spent much of his time there pondering why the proletariat revolution that Marx had forecast had never occurred. He concluded that the prevailing culture had infected the working class with the belief that its happiness and prosperity were linked directly to the well being of the bourgeoisie. He rightly concluded that Marx and Lenin had never considered the possibility that the workers of the world would become comfortable in a capitalist society. Instead, the two great Communist thinkers erroneously believed that the only thing that kept the masses from full-scale revolt was physical force and economic coercion.

Gramsci described the process by which the proletariat was actually kept in check as “cultural hegemony.” His solution to the problem was to abandon the effort to inform the proletariat about the wrongs they were suffering at the hands of capitalism and to focus on tearing down the Judeo-Christian culture that had blinded them to their “unjust” burden. To achieve this end, he proposed taking control of the institutions of the culture, which included the mass media and the educational establishment. Hence the phrase, “the long march through the institutions.”

Needless to say, Gramsci’s blueprint has worked like a charm in the United States. Richard Rorty, who was a professor of comparative literature at Stanford, an icon of the modern intellectual left, and onetime philosopher-in-chief at the Clinton White House before his death in 2007, described this process in action as follows:

The power base of the Left in America is now in the universities, since the trade unions have largely been killed off. The universities have done a lot of good work by setting up, for example, African-American studies programs, Women's Studies programs, and Gay and Lesbian Studies programs. They have created power bases for these movements.

Indeed, if Rorty had chosen to do so, he could have said without too great a risk of exaggeration that the cultural *coup d'etat* he was describing is one of the world's greatest political success stories; that in fact, the end result of this movement is that when the last liberal baby boomers leave the political stage, they will be able to look back and see that they did in fact bring down the establishment that existed before they came upon the scene, and that in doing so, they did in fact change the world.

Conservatives saw it coming as far back as the 1930s, but were powerless against the massive adoption of leftist dogma by the intellectual establishment, led by such authors as Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, Sidney Hook, George Bernard Shaw, and, of course, Lincoln Steffens, who opined, according to historian Paul Johnson, that "all roads in our day lead to Moscow."

There are, of course, many reasons over the years for the failure of traditional conservatism to halt the march of liberalism. One of these worth mentioning here is that the past half century or so has been a time of extraordinary change. Big change. Mega change. Change at the speed of a mouse click; cultural, economic, social, technological, and political change unlike anything anyone who is alive today has ever witnessed; the kind of change that makes the industrial revolution and the great migration from farm to city look like a simple exercise in preference adjustment.

Conservatism generally does well during the early part of such a period. People become concerned about the pace of change and look to their traditions, customs, mores, religious beliefs, and cultural values for a safe port in the storm. People come to the conclusion reached by Gonzalo when the tempest was destroying

the ship he was on: "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground: long heath, broom, furze, anything. The will above be done, but I would fain die a dry death."

But eventually the storm of change becomes exciting, exhilarating, fun, and yes, lucrative. And conservatism wanes in the face of a plethora of sensate and financial opportunities. In fact, one of the ironies of the decline in conservatism, of the loss of reverence for traditional ways and traditional values, of respect for the wisdom of the past, is that it is very often aided and abetted by those who consider themselves the staunchest of conservatives, the capitalists, the businessmen, the captains of industry. You see, like it or not, there's money to be made in change. In fact, change is the lifeblood of capitalism.

Great and enduring works of art may be proof of God's love for man. But except for the tourist trade and maybe a small market in Hallmark Cards, there is not much money to be made from these masterpieces. Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Iktinos and Kallikrates's Parthenon, Michelangelo's David. Yes, these are truly great works of art. But kitsch is the engine of wealth. The giant, energetic, brilliant bear of an anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, was likely correct when he told a friend who was playing the piano for him at his bedside shortly before he died, "Everything will pass and the world will perish, but the Ninth Symphony will remain." But if it does, it will have to compete – and likely lose badly – with the artistic merit of some five and dime rapper's new bit of doggerel describing violent sex between a "ho" and a coke bottle. That's where the money is made.

Conservatism has an uphill fight during times such as these. How could it be otherwise? But the appropriate response by conservatives is not to give up, not to despair, and to get angry, and frustrated. This is not only counterproductive, but it blinds one to the true nature of the battle.

Yes, it is natural for conservatives to feel strongly about who sits in the Oval Office. Yes, it would be a welcome development to have a true conservative in that position. Yes, conservatives should do all they can

to advance the political causes in which they believe. But they should never forget that the battle for the sanctity of life, for a safe and secure nation, for fiscal responsibility, for an educational system that teaches and encourages traditional principles and values, such as civility, justice, trust, chastity and fidelity, and for ethical behavior in the business community will not be won or lost in Washington. Nor will it be won or lost in the various elections, presidential or otherwise, regardless of who runs or who wins. Politics is one front in this war that has been going since the beginning of time and will go on for as long as mankind exists in a state of sin.

As such, it is necessary to understand that the conservative cause and the nation itself would be better served if each conservative concentrated first on the greater fight for the moral health of the nation, the kind that begins at home and in the community. One of liberalism's great conceits is that the world can be made a better place by political action. This isn't true. And conservatives who buy into this idea inevitably get overwrought with politics, to their own detriment and to that of the nation.

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