

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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OUR LONG NATIONAL NIGHTMARE IS OVER

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Well, he's gone. Or at least he's gone from the White House, and that's certainly worth celebrating. As I said in these pages several weeks ago, I don't think he will ever really "go away." But as I also said in that piece, he no longer oversees any law enforcement agencies, which is a good thing for the nation and crucial for his critics. It could also turn out to be a very bad thing for him.

More importantly, this great nation survived, its legal system, its culture, and its standing abroad damaged by the experience, but not beyond repair. I took a few lumps myself during Bill's tenure, but I think I gave as good as I got, as they say, and I have no regrets. In fact, for the most part, I had a wonderful time.

I used to say in speeches that I feel about Bill like the British satirist John Wolcot felt about George III, who was the principal target of Wolcot's biting verse. As the story goes, Wolcot was asked by an elderly woman if he did not think that he was "a very bad subject of our most pious King George." Wolcot replied, "I do not know anything about that, Madam, but I do know the king has been a devilish good subject for me." I am not going to write a "legacy" piece about Bill. I did that several months ago. The following are excerpts from that article, which I think sums up my view of his legacy fairly well.

Bill will have no true legacy whatsoever, if by legacy one means something handed down, or bequeathed, to his successor that he himself created, formed, nurtured and defended; if by legacy one means something that sprung from his personal convictions, view of the world, and the place of the United States within it; if by legacy, one means something akin to the following recent examples.

O One of President Bush's legacies to Bill was a strong, proud, and victorious military, along with worldwide respect for this nation's judicious, decisive and honorable use of this power in the Gulf war. President Bush made the decision to enter that war based on his own convictions and his own view of the world, and he assembled the coalition of

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nations that made an honorable victory possible by utilizing his personal diplomatic skills and energy.

O One of President Reagan's many legacies to President Bush was victory in the cold war, which he achieved via his own determination, his unerring assessment of the weakness of the Russian communist state, and his conviction that it could be done. This conviction, it should be noted, was contrary to the views of a host of "experts," including Bill's hapless Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, who maintained as late as 1981 that "though some second-echelon hardliners in the Reagan Administration . . . espouse the early fifties goal of rolling back Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, the U.S. simply does not have the military or political power to do that."

O One of President Carter's legacies to President Reagan was the concept that consideration for human rights should be an integral part of American foreign policy. This initiative was President Carter's own, and was based on his strong religious convictions and personal decency. For the life of me, I can come up with no significant Clinton initiative of this type; no action or policy that resulted directly from his personal beliefs, insight, or political courage. He only came close to such a thing twice, as far as I can tell. One was his quixotic military attempt to "restore" a Democracy in Haiti that had never existed there in the first place. The other was when he approved Mrs. Clinton's attempt to pass a national health insurance scheme, which, of course, failed.

Indeed, I think one would be hard pressed to find a president whose policies were dictated less by conviction and ideology and more by polls, external events, political expediency, and personal appetites. Even his choice of sex partners was, by all accounts, more often than not entirely opportunistic, made up as they appear to have been of women he met at political events, or just happened to be in the vicinity when Mrs. Clinton wasn't paying attention.

I didn't go to any of the Bush inaugural festivities. I don't know any of the Bush people, and am not likely to meet any. I am not and have never been much of a Washington insider. Once I was accused by an irate reader of being a pawn for, of all people, New York Senator Alfonse D'Amato. I didn't customarily respond to such complaints, because I loathed the idea of acquiring a liberal pen pal, but I was asked to respond to this one by one of my bosses, so I explained to this guy that I had never met D'Amato, nor had I ever spent more than a few moments with any U.S. Senator, or member of the House, for that matter.

I explained to him that I have always felt that the advice given to Mathew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy" was similarly good advise for me when it came to hobnobbing with politicians.

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
 For strong the infection of our mental strife,
 Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
 And we should win thee from they own fair life,
 Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
 Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
 Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,

And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made:
 And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
 Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.
 Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!

I did, however, watch a great deal of the inaugural on television, and I must say that I enjoyed it immensely. I thought President Bush's speech was excellent. I thought it was wonderful not to have to sit through another sanctimonious listing of all the people Bill would help and all the ways he would do it with someone else's money. I used to call these Bill's "Abbe Bonawita Blank moments." Abbe Blank was a character mentioned in *Das Kapital*. Marx described him this way.

[Abbe Blank] operated on magpies and starlings in such a way that, though they were free to fly about as they pleased, they would always come back to him again. He cut off the lower part of their beaks so that they were not able to get their food themselves and so were obliged to eat from his hand. The good little bourgeois who looked on from a distance and saw the birds perched on the shoulders of the good priest and apparently dining with him in a friendly fashion, admired his culture and his science. His biographer says that the birds loved him as their benefactor.

And isn't normal terrific? As I said in a piece about the GOP convention last summer, there is, for me at least, something wonderful about seeing lots of people, from all over the United States, celebrating the importance of individual responsibility, limited government, the work ethic, respect for the law, patriotism, traditional religious and family values, and traditional American customs and mores.

Finally, I particularly loved the religious nature of Bush's speech and the ceremony itself. I hope he publicly stresses his commitment to his faith over and over and over. It is a desperately needed response to the growing effort by radical elements within the liberal establishment to ban religion from the public square and to question whether people with strong religious beliefs are fit to hold public office.

I call this phenomenon fidesphobia, derived (by me) from the Latin word for faith, fides, and defined (by me) as the irrational fear of people who believe in God. It is a relatively new phobia for Democrats, or for any large group of Americans, for that matter. But it has been in full bloom within the far left establishment for at least a couple decades now, and has quietly become so accepted by the mainstream leftist establishment that people like Ted Turner feel perfectly comfortable describing Christianity as a "religion for losers," and the *Washington Post* can generalize in print about conservative Christians being generally "poor, uneducated and easily led."

This fidesphobia took an interesting twist during the campaign when Joseph Lieberman's fellow liberals began to question whether his regular references to his faith might not be threatening to their agenda. The Anti-Defamation League became so distressed by it all that they publicly warned Lieberman of their belief that "there is a point at which an emphasis on religion in a political campaign becomes inappropriate and even unsettling in a religiously diverse society such as ours."

Lieberman ignored the obvious response to this missive, which was to explain to the ADL that if voters are “unsettled” by his public affirmations of faith, then they shouldn’t vote for him, and that those who wouldn’t vote for him for that reason should be happy to be informed of his commitment to his religion before they went to the polls.

But this fear of the God-fearing reached a new level of absurdity during the Ashcroft hearings, when various liberal groups began to publicly question whether his Christian faith would interfere with his ability and willingness to enforce the laws of this nation. And no Democrat, to my knowledge at least, took offense at such a declaration.

This phenomenon is of fairly recent origin. It was clearly not apparent during the 1960s, when religious leaders and their flocks, from all persuasions, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, were in the forefront of both the civil rights and the anti-war movement. In fact, I think a good case could be made that the civil rights campaign was first and foremost a religious action, as was the abolitionist movement before it. Nor was devout religiosity a problem for Democrats in the 1970’s, given their support for Jimmy Carter, whose self-proclaimed, deep devotion to his religious beliefs were, to my recollection at least, never an issue.

But fidesphobia is definitely with us now and it isn’t going away. And while the mainstream media either actively supports it or ignores it, I believe it is an extremely dangerous trend, because I believe that the continued success of the American experiment in self government is dependent on the United States continuing to honor God.

I believe John Adams was correct when he said in 1789 that “Our Constitution was designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”

I believe Washington was correct when, in his Farewell Address, he said that “of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Mortality are indispensable supports.”

And I think it is important to understand when contemplating these words that Adams and Washington did not mean them as abstract, theological theories. They were, instead, expressions of their support for Burke’s eloquent explanation of the trade-off between freedom and order.

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites; in proportion as their love of justice is above their rapacity; in proportion as the soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumptions; in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.

In short, I believe that Adams and Washington were offering quite practical observations about the conditions necessary for a people to enjoy the maximum amount of individual freedom with

the minimum amount of legal restraint. And it is, indeed, such practical considerations that lead me to believe that, as I indicated above, the on-going liberal attack on religion may well be the most consequential domestic threat facing the U.S. Republic in the 21st century.

My concerns go somewhat beyond those of Adams and Washington, however. I think a case can be made that America's long history as "a nation with the soul of a church" (as Chesterton put it) has kept America's brand of liberalism from degenerating into full blown socialism, Marxism, or worse. This is, I know, a controversial observation, but I think anyone who studies the history of the left quickly realizes that neither socialism nor Marxism can flourish in a truly religious society, since both are progenies of a hatred for Christendom.

In his classic study, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, Karl Lowith explains that Marx's rebellion against the existing order was not motivated by mere "desire for change," but "has its roots in a Promethean rebellion against the Christian order of creation." Or, as he further put it, "The destruction of the Christian religion is the prerequisite for the construction of a world in which man is his own master."

It is worth noting that Marxism's success in 19th century Europe was largely due to the fact that the intellectual soil there had been prepared by an atheistic assault of astounding virulence, spearheaded by the writings of Marx's fellow neo-Hegalians, David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner. In contrast, Marxism could gain no foothold whatsoever in the United States at the same time, largely because America had just gone through what historians call the "Second Great Awakening," and, in the words of Tocqueville, held religion "to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions."

I said I know of no one else who has developed, or even stated this theory. But I should note that the great French diplomat Metternich came close when, early in the 19th century, he recognized the threat that atheistic socialism posed to a state that was founded on the age-old tenets of Christianity.

In Sidney Hook's classic study, *From Hegel to Marx*, Hook noted that "it is not coincidence that Metternich met the first attempt at higher criticism of the Bible with political prosecution. For he believed that the challenge to the principle of authority, when generalized, involved the collapse not only of the sacredness of the church and the absolutism of the state – but what was more dangerous – the sacredness of property rights as well."

But enough of that. In the words of Gerald Ford, "Our long national nightmare is over," and we should, I believe, all thank God that it is, and go to work to see that the ideals and plans set forth by President George Bush in his fine inaugural address are honored.

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