



A CONSERVATIVE BETRAYED

BY LESLIE MILLER

I was raised in a very conservative family. The values I was taught are a far cry from what is being practiced by the Republican Party today. They are not in observance of traditional philosophy but appear to be extreme in their ideology. The difference between a philosopher and an ideologue, is that a philosopher may believe in conservatism, but is willing to listen to divergent thoughts and change his/her mind if an argument answers an apparent need. An ideologue operates from a fixed viewpoint and all the answers are listed in a predetermined book. If the problem is not in that book, it simply does not exist. There is no argument and no dialogue. If you bring up something outside of the accepted party line, you are stereotyped and belittled. "You are either with us or against us."

The founding fathers were deists, not Christian fundamentalists. They believed in a higher power, but that each person has the right to choose what that higher power is. The establishment clause in the Constitution prohibits the creation of a state religion. Church and state are to be kept separate in order to guarantee this most personal of freedoms.

Benjamin Franklin said that a people who are willing to sacrifice liberty for the sake of security deserve neither. George Washington warned against the establishment of a large standing army and to beware of foreign entanglements. Dwight D. Eisenhower more recently warned about an emerging military-industrial-congressional complex (I add the word 'congressional' as it was part of the President's original draft of his farewell address). These are all traditional conservative thoughts.

These statements apply to today's world just as well. True conservatives believe that government is like a council fire where all views are listened to. This demands dialogue. Each person has the right and obligation to express opinion and dissent about government programs and policies, especially when lives are at risk. The loyal opposition's viewpoint is to be listened to and respected in order to make informed decisions and to avoid alienation of the minority.

Small government is better than a large bureaucratic establishment. Each person has the right to vote and is to be treated equally under the law. These rights are not to be diminished. A person may not be arrested, nor may his/her property or vehicle be searched or seized without a warrant sworn before an impartial judge. We have the right to do anything we wish in the privacy of our own homes as long as we cause no harm to others.

The Constitution was created for the benefit of all human beings and these rights do not necessarily accrue only to U.S. citizens. All people aspire to these values however little they may be practiced by foreign governments. To the extent that government exists, it is for the protection of the individual rights of all.

Diplomacy and trade are less expensive and more productive and practical than fighting, regardless of how much patience and time it takes to obtain an agreement or treaty. It is not our policy to attack first, but if someone starts a war with us, we are likely to finish it. Only Congress has the power to declare and fund war (as in the First and Second World Wars, the last "legal" wars that were formally declared rather than made by Congressional resolution). The President is extremely limited in using military force, except for sending rescue missions of short duration to save people's lives at sea or abroad.

The Constitution may be amended only by a two-thirds majority of Congress. The judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government were created in order to balance the application of power. The Constitutional framework is intended to keep each branch in check. The founders wanted to keep tyranny from taking control in any one of these divisions. Their world was full of dictators with their own armies, empires, state churches, and whose every whim was law. They wished for our country to avoid that fate.

The 14th and 15th amendments were to guarantee that each person has a vote that counts just as much as any other, and that all people are equal under the law. The rights of the individual exceed those of institutions such as the state, church, corporation, or any other bureaucracy. Local government exceeds the state, and the state exceeds the federal in authority. At the risk of repetition, to the extent that government exists, its primary reason is to preserve individual rights above everything else.

A balanced budget is one of the ultimate goals of conservatism. Both military and social programs are to be equally limited. This thriftiness is not supposed to be limited to the bottom line, but always saving resources for the future. If a natural resource is totally exhausted, it is no longer of benefit to anyone. These ideologues who call themselves conservatives seem unwilling to conserve anything, including the national treasury. I applauded Ronald Reagan's promise to strip down government, but now these false Republicans have inflicted the greatest deficit in U.S. history (not at all conservative).

We are signatory to the Geneva Conventions, and we should treat prisoners accordingly, whether they signed on to the program or not. The issue is about what we are as Americans, not about how inhumane our enemies are. If we torture or treat our prisoners harshly, we are no better than they are. The Japanese military during the Second World War were not signatory to the conventions and they treated our soldiers in a barbaric and despicable manner; however, we treated them with kindness once they were captured. That made all the difference between us and it is something to be proud of as Americans. It is a practical consideration as well. A person being tortured will tell



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his captor anything he wants to hear just to get the pain to stop. This makes for poor intelligence which cannot be applied to the war, so torture cannot be rationalized to obtain information. Interrogators who spoke to Japanese prisoners in their language understood their culture, were generous and kind to them, and received quality intelligence that was accurate and applicable.

The Geneva Conventions are not so complicated as to make it hard to get information. To hear President Bush, you would think observing the conventions make intelligence gathering impossible, but the fact is that he has broken the law. Why isn't he being charged with this crime and sent to prison rather than Congress allowing him to lobby them to change the law instead? He should be censured by Congress (he does not speak for the U.S. government for the remainder of his last term), and impeached now. We cannot afford to have him or Cheney in office for another two years, and I would like to see him sent to the Hague pending trial as a war criminal (in a cell right next to that old ally of the Reagan administration, Saddam Hussein).

If one of the goals of conservatism is to get big government off the little person's back, then this regime has failed miserably. The military and law enforcement agencies have become bloated while social programs have been cut remorselessly. Our government has become bigger and worse. I love my country, but my government scares me. The founders debated long and hard about a standing army because its existence tempts politicians and generals to start an empire and perform a military *coup de etat*. Presently, the threat of terrorism is being used to corrupt the Constitution. We are exhorted to sacrifice our privacy for the sake of security. These are the domestic enemies our founders warned us about.

These neo-conservatives contend we are a Christian nation, implying that there is no difference between public policies and their fundamentalist dogma. The war on terrorism is a good example (it might as well be called a war on dandruff, for all the term describes). In the Bush lexicon, "terrorist" is a buzz word for an extreme Muslim fundamentalist who is willing to commit suicide with a bomb and murder innocent victims simultaneously. It follows that since the bomber has no respect for human life, he has no rights as a human being, therefore he should be hunted down and killed like a mad dog. We carpet bomb and launch smart-bombs which can kill indiscriminately, so in a sense we are no better than they are. It seems that our extremists are feeding their extremists by the same rationale.

People of more moderate thought inside the three faiths outnumber the extremists within the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. A handful of hardliners within each seem to drive and control the rest. The demagogues in each group seem to be why the Middle East is such a source of heartbreak and violence to the whole world. It appears they are bound to take the rest of us into the Apocalypse against all odds.

Don't exclude the present administration from its role in this volatility. The author of *Revelation* was a paranoid who missed history with Jesus Christ by at least a century. This book should not be taken literally. This psychotic diatribe is part of the Bush program; a self-fulfilling prophecy is the means to a military agenda. Bush mirrors his enemies in the Middle East and will invent enemies in order to maintain belligerence.

Bush needs Osama bin Laden in order to act out his own form of terrorism. Similarly, Bush and his invasion of Iraq make him al-Qaida's best poster boy for new recruits. They are both extremists representing a controlling minority within their particular spheres of influence, grasping to appear as representing their whole nations. They are both dragging humanity toward the horror of Armageddon; a forever war leading to the last great battle from which only a chosen few will emerge. Bush says we have to erode our liberties to be secure. What this means is that as long as the war lasts (the "long war" it is being called), he can apply unconstitutional policies and exert unlimited force. He's the king.

Rather than a council fire, government has become a pyre to burn anyone who dissents. As conservative as I have been, I have been stereotyped and dismissed as a liberal, simply because I disagree. Dialogue is not desired. There can be no loyal opposition. There is only one way to do things, and if the answer isn't in the party dogma, there is nothing else. Decisions are made without listening to facts and divergent opinions. Poor decisions are the predictable outcome.

People now are being arrested and taken to jail without a warrant, vehicles searched and impounded, depending upon an officer's suspicions. The police and prison systems have grown to monstrous proportions. There is no control of defense spending. This is big bad government at its worst. After fighting the totalitarian state of Russia for over fifty years, it seems our government has become more like that of our Cold War foe.

Our courts depend on the appointment of impartial judges. The Republican President appoints ideologues. One person's vote does not count the same as another's when a recount is stopped and when we use touch-screen voting machines that do not provide a paper trail or can be corrupted with a computer program to fix an election.

How about weapons contractors that do not have to bid for contracts, have no field tests of weapons systems, have no limit on spending, and have no quota or deadline? During World War 2, politicians and contractors that bilked the taxpayer like this were heavily fined and sent to prison. That Bush and Cheney have not been impeached, censured, or tried for crimes lends credence to the thought that Democrats in Congress are gutless wonders. They haven't even tried to stand up against these pretenders.

Bush says the war on terrorism is a new kind of war with a new kind of enemy, which justifies his extremism in the application of extraordinary force in policies both here and abroad. That is a fallacy. We have fought the Barbary pirates, with their kidnapping, forced slavery, ransom and murder. We fought the Japanese and won, in spite of their suicidal tactics and inhumane acts. To commit murder/suicide, a person has to be convinced that the world is such a horrible place that life isn't worth living and brain-washed into thinking violence will improve it. This war is not just a war of military action, but a war of ideas. In this the Bushites are sorely lacking. Nothing is being said and done to win the hearts or minds of the Muslim world. Why would it benefit Iran to embrace more moderate thinking? We can destroy the Taliban's weapons and we can kill their bodies, but we can't destroy an idea. Unless we come up with better ideas, we are bound to lose. We are losing now. We might run out of corpses before they do. As the emerging nations develop, albeit crude, versions of our weapons of mass destruction, I fear that the next genocide will include our species. (Earth will go on just fine without *homo sapiens*.)

After Vietnam, the politicians promised we would never send our forces into combat without a plan to get in, achieve the objective, and get out. Never again would we get bogged down in a quagmire for years or decades. The insurgency in Iraq is getting out of control. This conflict has lasted nearly as long as our participation in World War 2, and Bush promises no end in sight. How soon we forget.

My hopes for the future consist of two wishes. Everyone agrees that something is broken. I wish for a candidate (whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent) who can describe what's wrong and offer a plan to fix it. I am tired of voting for the lesser of two evils (or, as LaDonna Harris, Vice Presidential candidate for the People's Party in 1976, called it, "the evil of two lessers"). Unfortunately it takes huge amounts of corporate contributions to run for office. The corporations contribute to both parties. Whoever is elected owes more to the special interests than to their voting constituents. Big businesses make their profits because the political system is compromised. I suspect the necessary reforms are unlikely in the near future. Nonetheless, the power of the corporations and their paid lobbyists must be curtailed or our republic will remain at risk.

I hope that honest conservatives might revolt against the "neos" and reform the Republican Party from within. The charge led by Senator McCain against the torture of prisoners was a good start, but ultimately fell short of its goal. Until President Bush and his regime are toppled, I will remain a conservative betrayed.