

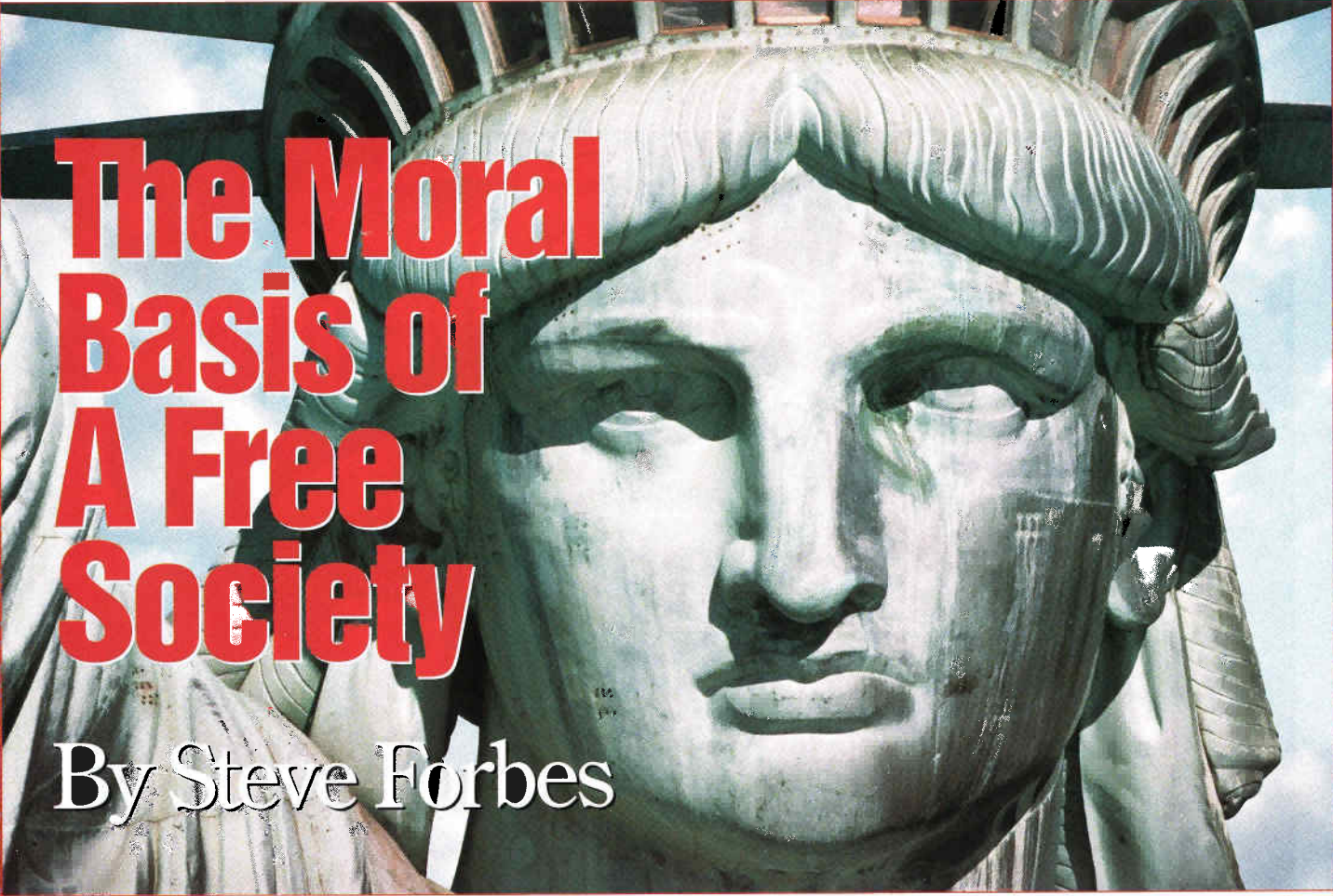
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## The Moral Basis of A Free Society

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*The*  
**Moral Basis**  
*Of a* **Free Society**

*By Steve Forbes*



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**W**hen the government of China tells people they can read state-run newspapers but not print and distribute Bibles, imprisoning and torturing dissenters; or have one child but not two, forcing women to have abortions; or watch state-run television but not listen to Radio Free Asia, jamming broadcast signals and threatening students—that is not freedom.

But the absence of centralized state control is not necessarily freedom, either. The people of Beirut are not free. Neither are the people of Medellin and Cartagena, the drug capitals of Colombia. Freedom is not anarchy, chaos, and mayhem. The freedom to “let soulless forces operate,” as the great classical liberal economist Ludwig von Mises termed it, is actually tyranny in another guise.

So what is freedom? How can a widely pluralistic society sustain

*Capitalism and democracy are not enough  
to sustain a healthy society. A self-governing nation must  
consist of self-governing individuals.*

freedom without degenerating into chaos? What is the moral basis of a free society? Today the citizens and leaders of every nation are looking to America for answers to these questions. From Mexico City to Moscow, from Johannesburg to Jerusalem, from Bombay to Beijing, people have an eye on America as they struggle to make the exciting but difficult transition to free markets, free elections, free speech, and free worship.

No nation, after all, has ever enjoyed the status that America does today. The greatest empires of history were but regional affairs. Today, America is truly the world’s only superpower. Yet our strength comes not just from the might of our economy or the brilliant capabilities of the men and women in our armed forces. It comes also from the example we set for the rest of the world of how a free people can adapt to and advance in changing times and circumstances.

While others look to us, however, Americans themselves are

seeking answers to some painful and bitter questions. Can a free society survive the collapse of the two-parent family, where one-third of children are born into homes without fathers? Can a free society long endure a culture in which newborn babies have been thrown into trash dumpsters and young people have doubled their rate of heroin use in a single year?

As the 20th century comes to an end, the world is learning from America that the economic and political freedoms that come from capitalism and democracy are the most powerful and productive way to organize society. At the same time, we in America are discovering that capitalism and democracy alone are not enough to sustain a healthy, vibrant society. We are learning the hard way that a self-governing nation must consist of self-governing individuals. A breakdown in the moral fabric of society has dire consequences. An explosion of violence, crime, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and out-of-wedlock births undermines the blessings of liberty and prosperity.

The stakes, therefore, are enormous. If America makes the economic, political, and moral changes necessary to move forward in the years ahead, then the rest of the world has a chance of getting it right. But if America drifts off course, then the rest of the world will be in trouble as well.

### A Free Society

Americans have always defined true freedom as an environment in which one may resist evil and do what is right, noble, and good without fear of reprisal. It is the presence of justice tempered with mercy. It is a rule of law based on fundamental moral truths that are easily understood and fairly and effectively administered. It offers individuals and families equal opportunity to better their lives morally, spiritually, intellectually, and economically.

Freedom, in other words, is neither a commodity for dictators to distribute and deny at will nor a moral, spiritual, or political vacuum in which anything goes. Freedom is a priceless treasure that the state is supposed to safeguard. Why? Because human beings have an intrinsic right to be free, a right that comes not from the state but from God. To the Founding Fathers, this was a "self-evident" truth. It is the essence of the American experiment in self-government.

The Founders, even those most suspicious of organized religion, believed that man's place in the universe was no accident—that man himself and the world in which he lived were created and sustained by a just and loving God. "It is impossible to account for the creation of the universe without the agency of a Supreme Being," wrote George Washington, "and it is impossible to govern the universe without the aid of a Supreme Being." James Madison put it this way: "The belief in a God

All Powerful, wise and good, is so essential to the moral order of the World and to the happiness of man, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from too many sources."

To navigate the oceans without consulting fixed stars, Americans knew, is to risk being turned around by waves and wind, circling aimlessly with dwindling stores of food and water. To believe in the randomness of man's appearance on the earth, the Founders likewise intuitively understood, would be to deny the existence of fixed moral truths, established outside of man's own personal whims and predilections. In such a world, no one could judge with authority what is right or wrong because everyone would be entitled to his own personal system of values. Hence there could be no equality before the law, because the law would consist of whatever people in power declared it to be. That would elevate jungle law—what Darwin would later term "survival of the fittest"—over the rule of natural law. And that, in turn, would legitimize both the centralized European regimes of the Founders' day and the anarchic Beiruts of our day, where the powerful rule over the weak, use force to obtain wealth, and use wealth to reinforce their power.

Instead, the Founding Fathers staked the future of the country on the principle that human beings are created by God, and therefore have certain intrinsic, absolute, nonnegotiable rights. "[A]ll men are created equal," reads the Declaration of Independence, and are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights . . . among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Government's role in society, then, is to "secure" these rights, not create or dispense them. This is the moral basis of a free society.

The order of these rights—first life, then freedom, and then the equal opportunity to pursue one's own happiness—was written with great care and precision, not haphazardly. The Founders understood the need to balance man's right to be free with man's responsibility to be honest, just, and fair. For example, if it makes you happy to shoot and kill someone while you rob a bank—well, the law says you're out of luck. A person's right to live supersedes your "freedom" to steal and mur-



**J**ames Madison wrote, "The belief in a God All Powerful, wise and good, is so essential to the moral order of the world and to the happiness of man, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from too many sources."

der. This may seem obvious, but it is profound. It is also the linchpin of Western civilization. Switch the order of these fundamental human rights—putting happiness before liberty, or liberty before life—and you end up with moral chaos and social anarchy. Deny the God-given nature of these rights and you open the door to tyranny.

“Can the liberties of a nation be sure when we remove their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people, that these liberties are the gift of God?” asked Thomas Jefferson. Or, as John Adams put it, “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

The people of the former Soviet Union are discovering this the hard way, in a tragic drama we have been tracking with great interest and concern at *Forbes* magazine. Communism destroyed not only material progress there, but also the moral and spiritual foundations of the country. Trust between strangers, the fundamental moral component of a free-market economy, barely exists. Without trust, how do you sign or enforce business contracts? How do you operate a system of credit? How do you maintain a basic sense of order? The people of the former Soviet Union are discovering that a free, self-governing society is nearly impossible without a moral foundation. Theft is rampant. Their murder rate is several times higher than our own. Mafias are moving into the vacuum left by the fall of communism to seize control of vast sectors of economic activity. A Hobbesian world has emerged, where life is “nasty, brutish, and short.”

### **America’s Moral Crisis**

In America today, however, not everyone regards these basic moral truths as “self-evident.” Modern liberalism, which rejects absolute moral standards, has abandoned the proper ordering of man’s fundamental rights. As a result, modern liberalism has undermined a long-held American principle: that the law should protect the weakest among us, not just the strong, the healthy, and the rich. Abortion and euthanasia violate this principle by removing the protection of the law from society’s most vulnerable members.

There is no need here to catalog in detail the lamentable results since the 1960s of liberalism’s passions. The effort to legitimate all moral claims, to give personal freedom an utterly free hand—to “define deviancy down”—has given us the following: horrific increases in violent crime, out-of-wedlock births, family breakups, and substance abuse; dramatic declines in educational and cultural stan-

dards; a proliferation of increasingly bizarre lawsuits; a blizzard of regulations that defy common sense and assault our rights to property and due process; a growing corruption of the tax code; and a judiciary that often acts like an imperial aristocracy hurtling decrees down upon the rest of us.

Modern liberalism has adopted a view of liberty that is at the same time too broad and too narrow. Liberalism wrongly insists, for example, on a parent’s freedom to choose an abortion while simultaneously denying parents’ freedom to choose the schools their children may attend.

Ideas have consequences. Liberalism’s moral confusion over the sanctity of human life and the vital importance of the traditional family has reshaped American law and society. The statistics are grim enough. But the anecdotal evidence hits home: An 18-year-old girl attending her senior prom in New Jersey last spring allegedly delivered her baby in a rest room, disposed of it in a plastic bag where it suffocated to death, cleaned herself up, and went back to the dance floor, where she asked the DJ to play a favorite song. A teenage couple in Delaware has been charged with giving birth to a baby boy in a motel room and then tossing him into a trash dumpster, where he died a cold, horrifying death. A 15-year-old boy in Detroit who disappeared for six months had reportedly been sold by his mother to a drug dealer to cover a \$1,000 cocaine debt. Meanwhile, “Doctor” Jack Kevorkian now claims to have “assisted” in more than 100 “suicides.”

Certainly crime is not new. But Americans have rarely been so confused about right and wrong, about what is acceptable and what is to be forcefully condemned.

So we must be clear: A free society cannot survive the collapse of the two-parent family or the absence of fathers, love, and discipline in the lives of so many children. A free society cannot survive an unchecked explosion in violent crime. Nor can a free society survive a generation of crack babies and teenagers whose minds and bodies have been destroyed by illegal drugs.

Like millions of people, my wife and I are deeply concerned about the moral condition of our nation. We are raising five daughters in a society whose wheels, it often seems, are coming off. It is difficult enough in any era to raise young girls to be wise and virtuous young women. But it is particularly difficult today. Movies, television, music, and the Internet bombard young people with cultural messages of sexual revolution and self-ab-

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sorbed materialism that tempt them away from good moral character rather than appealing to the better angels of their natures. Affluence does not protect children from temptation; sometimes it makes temptation more accessible.

The good news is that this is not the first time we have faced such dark times and turned things around. America has seen several periods of renewal and reform, most notably the Second Great Awakening and the Progressive Era. Both periods marked a return to America's founding ideals; both offer guidance as to how we might strengthen our moral commitments while preserving freedom.

### The Second Great Awakening

Following the Revolutionary War, America experienced a period of moral decline. The chaos of battle, the pain of death and separation, the anxiety of wartime inflation, the excitement of subsequent political change, and the all-consuming nature of building a new nation drained people's time and energy. Fewer and fewer people attended church. Spiritual devotion waned and social problems proliferated. From the late 1770s until the late 1820s, per-capita consumption of alcohol in America rose dramatically, to about four to five times per person what it is today. Everybody took a swig from the jug—teachers, preachers, children. They called it “hard cider,” but it was nothing like the cider we buy at the grocery store today. In those days, it seemed everyone was in a haze by noontime. The social consequences were predictable.

“Illegitimate births were rampant” during the early 1800s, wrote Tom Phillips in his book *Revival Signs*. “Alcohol, the drug of the day, was destroying families and wrecking futures. Thomas Paine was proclaiming that Christianity was dead—and certainly the body of faith appeared to be in a coma. Yet even as church rolls were shrinking and greed, sensuality and family breakdown were becoming more widespread, America was about to experience a great spiritual revival.”

Slowly at first, then building over the next several decades, one wave of spiritual renewal and religious rededication after another swept the country in what historians now call America's “Second Great Awakening.” In one community after another, people began to wake up from their moral and spiritual slumber as though saying, “If we're going to have a self-governing nation, it must be occupied by self-governing citizens.”

The first public-health movement in America was launched not by the government but by citizen-activists such as Lyman Beecher, the founder of the American Bible Society and a pastor who went on to form the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance in 1826. This enterprise became known as the Temperance Movement—and it worked. Within one generation, alcoholic

consumption in America fell by two-thirds.

Soon pastors and community leaders were opening elementary and secondary schools (this was before “public” education), founding colleges and universities, setting up orphanages and homes for abandoned children, creating shelters for the poor, building hospitals, and exhorting people to stop drinking and spend more time with their families. The Reverend Thomas Gallaudet opened his school for the deaf. William McGuffey wrote his famous “Eclectic Readers,” of which 120 million copies were printed. The first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) opened in Boston, followed shortly by the first Young Women's Christian Association.

It was during this rebuilding of the moral foundations of a free society that French historian Alexis de Tocqueville came to America in 1831. “Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention, and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things,” he wrote. “In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.”

Eventually the religious and moral renewal of the Second Great Awakening gave birth to the abolitionist movement, one of the nation's greatest struggles to reassert a moral order based on man's fundamental rights.

This gets to one of the great strengths of the American democracy. It is not that we do not make mistakes as a people and as a nation. We are, after all, only human. But when we do stumble, we have a record of rediscovering our first principles and resuming the journey toward faith and moral renewal.

### Roosevelt and the Progressive Era

In the early years of the 20th century, Americans were filled with optimism. The nation's rapid industrialization and urbanization created enormous new social, economic, and political problems, but these were confronted by bold, imaginative national leaders and the energetic efforts of people voluntarily working together to promote shared objectives.

The period speaks to us today. The 1890s had been a troubled time. The rise of large corpora-

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tions and massive industrial monopolies seemed to mock the idea of individual entrepreneurship. The rise of big cities with corrupt political machines supplanted the tradition of democratic town meetings. People feared that massive immigration, which was several times greater in proportion to our population than what we are experiencing today, would degrade the American character and culture. How, they asked, could we assimilate so many people from so many different races, nationalities, and religions? These years were also plagued by drug addiction—primarily to opium.

American churches and synagogues responded to the challenge of the new industrial era by combining a message of spiritual renewal with practical, personal care for those in need. Dwight L. Moody, a former shoe salesman, became the most influential American evangelist of the 19th century. He launched a Sunday School movement in Chicago to provide moral instruction for more than 1,500 poor, urban street children. He opened a Bible college to challenge other young people to follow his example of helping destitute and demoralized people turn their lives around. And, in an age without radio or television, he communicated his message of spiritual and moral renewal to millions of people before his death in 1899.

The spiritual and practical needs of America's burgeoning city populations were also addressed by social reformers such as William and Catherine Booth, who founded the Salvation Army in the United States in 1880. Women took a particular interest in the needs of those who found themselves financially and morally bankrupt. By 1913, more than 500 urban rescue missions were operating in the United States and Canada, many of them organized and run by women of faith. Catholic nuns and Jewish and other fraternal societies also labored to help the needy everywhere from little mining towns to urban slums.

At the same time, President Theodore Roosevelt was ushering in an era of political and economic reform known as the Progressive Era. He declared in his Inaugural Address, "Much has been given us, and much will rightfully be expected from us. Our forefathers faced certain perils which we have outgrown. We now face other perils, the very existence of which it was impossible that they should foresee. Modern life is both complex and intense, and the tremendous changes wrought by the extraordinary industrial development of the last half-century are felt in every fiber of our social and political being."

From 1901 to 1909, Roosevelt sought to expand individual opportunity and strengthen individual control over personal, business, and political affairs, as well as to increase America's economic and military influence in the world. He busted up incestuous and anti-competitive trusts

and corporate monopolies, attacked government and political corruption in both major parties, supported the right of workers to organize, expanded U.S. trade with other nations, and built up our armed forces, particularly the navy. He advocated the direct election of U.S. senators, the right of women to vote, the creation of open presidential primaries, and the introduction of citizen initiatives, referenda, and recalls—all of which soon became realities.

Roosevelt reinforced his battle for political and economic reform by publicly, vigorously, and consistently reasserting the notion that there must be a moral foundation to a free society. It was he, after all, who coined the term "bully pulpit." While governor of New York, Roosevelt once declared, "It is absolutely impossible for a Republic long to endure if it becomes either corrupt or cowardly," and he never lost sight of that essential truth. He rightly believed that private, local, character-forming institutions must be left free to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation. The role of religious faith in society must be affirmed, not undermined. He did not believe that government should establish a state religion. But he did not shrink from the right or responsibility of a public official to encourage individuals to attend to their moral and spiritual character.

Eight years after leaving the White House, Roosevelt was still offering Americans his "top 10" list of reasons for going to church. "In this actual world a churchless community where men have abandoned and scoffed at or ignored their religious needs is a community on the rapid downgrade," he wrote in 1917 in *Ladies' Home Journal*. "It is perfectly true that occasional individuals or families may have nothing to do with church or with religious practices and observances and yet maintain the highest standard of spirituality and of ethical obligation. But this does not affect the case in the world as it now is, any more than that exceptional men and women under exceptional conditions have disregarded the marriage tie without moral harm to themselves interferes with the larger fact that such disregard if at all common means the complete moral disintegration of the body politic."

Not all of Roosevelt's policies were wise. (He argued vigorously for a graduated income tax, for

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example.) Some of his policies, such as trust-busting, made sense for his time but should be adapted in our day to such causes as breaking up government education and entitlement monopolies in favor of individual and parental choice and control. Still, Roosevelt lived during the historic transition from the Age of Agriculture to the Age of Industry; his vigorous spirit of renewal and reform on behalf of individuals and families should inspire us today as we make the transition from the Age of Industry to the Age of Information.

### Renewal and the 21st Century

As we prepare to enter the 21st century, the American experiment is again being severely tested. The stakes are greater than they were in Teddy Roosevelt's time. It is not only our own future that is at stake, but ultimately the world's. Can we renew the moral and spiritual foundations of our free society, and make the economic and political changes necessary to enable all Americans to have a chance to pursue their dreams and fulfill our destiny as a positive, inspiring example to ourselves and to other nations?

The answer is: yes. The reasons derive from three great events that are already transforming our society—the end of the Cold War, the dawn of the Information Age, and encouraging signs of another moral and spiritual awakening.

We take the end of the Cold War for granted, but it has enormous implications for our system of self-government and for others'. To understand why, just ask yourself: How did America—the most pro-individual, anti-statist nation ever invented—come to permit its government to assume the size and scope it has today? The answer is war—the great shaper of this century. Throughout history, warfare fostered government centralization. You cannot face a major external threat unless you have a strong government to marshal the resources necessary to meet that threat. For most of the last 80 years, America has faced a major external

threat of one sort or another—first World War I, then World War II, and finally the Cold War.

These conflicts have been cited to justify government expansion in every direction. How did we justify federal aid to education? The initial rationale was national security. Federal aid for research and development and the space program? National security. Even the interstate highway program begun in the 1950s was partially justified on na-

tional security grounds. It seemed natural to some that if government could mobilize resources to fight external enemies, it could solve an array of domestic problems as well. Hence the "War on Poverty."

It has taken us 30 years to learn, very painfully, the limitations of Big Government. Now that the Cold War is over, we no longer need such a massive, centralized federal government. We now have the opportunity to downsize Washington and shift money, power, and control back to individuals, families, and local communities.

Just as Teddy Roosevelt started the new century by attacking government corruption at its source and busting up anti-competitive monopolies, it is time to start the next century by shrinking Big Government. That means junking the current federal tax code—the biggest source of political pollution and corruption in this country—and replacing it with a simple, honest, and fair flat tax that also lowers everyone's tax bill. That means creating a new Social Security system for young people, expanding medical savings accounts for all Medicare recipients, and creating educational savings accounts and vouchers to give parents more control over where their children go to school and what values they are being taught. After all, it is the moral right of the parents—not bureaucrats, politicians, or union officials—to decide what is best for their children. Financially, the taxpayer, not the government, has the right to decide where and how his education dollars should be spent.

The dawn of the Information Age means a fundamental transformation in the way we live and the way we work. This new era is symbolized by the microchip, which is extending the reach of the human brain the way machines extended the reach of human muscle in the 19th century.

Step back and think about it. At one time, if you learned to drive a tractor, you could do more work in a day than 100 Herculean plowmen. Today, if you learn to use a personal computer, you can do more research, analysis, writing, and communication from your basement or den than entire companies could do 50 years ago with a whole division of secretaries and staff assistants.

The Machine Age was all about bigness—big factories, big companies, big unions, big cities, and big government. The Microchip Age is almost Jeffersonian in its dynamic—anti-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian, anti-centralization. It gives us more control and more choices in our lives. This puts further pressure on big corporations who must constantly fight to stay nimble and innovative in a highly competitive national and global economy. It also puts tremendous pressure on Washington to make the tax, regulatory, and legal reforms necessary to let small business owners and entrepreneurs compete and win in the Microchip Age.

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the great shaper  
of the century.**



## Signs of Spiritual Revival

At the same time, there are encouraging signs of moral and spiritual renewal in this country. Consider, for example, the tone of the welfare debate last year, which focused not on the fact that billions of dollars are being spent but on the fact that welfare is destroying the lives of the very people it was created to help. With less federal interference, many governors and mayors have been making dramatic reforms to help people move from welfare to

work. They are urging churches, civic groups, and local businesses to help educate and employ welfare recipients—and Americans are rising to the challenge. Welfare rolls nationwide have fallen by 25 percent since 1996.

At the same time, millions of baby boomers are returning to churches and synagogues for the first time in years, some to meet their own spiritual needs and some to build strong moral foundations within their children. Willow Creek Community Church outside of Chicago, for example, attracts more than 15,000 people every weekend. Millions of high-school students are also meeting for prayer and Bible study in small groups all over the country. James Dobson's Focus on the Family radio ministry, heard on more than 1,500 stations, is having remarkable success teaching couples to build strong, successful marriages and raise morally healthy children. William Bennett's

*Book of Virtues*, an 800-page compilation of old poems, songs, and stories written to develop character, rocketed to the top of the bestseller list not long ago. His wife, Elayne, runs a successful sexual abstinence program for teenage girls in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, Wade Horn's National Fatherhood Initiative and Charles Ballard's Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization encourage young men to take parenthood seriously. And these are just a few of many examples.

Consider, too, the Promise Keepers movement, an impressive series of rallies held in America's stadiums aimed at helping men make and keep seven promises ranging from racial reconciliation to being a good husband and father. Launched in 1990 by former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney, the first gathering drew 72 men. By 1994, a series of regional conferences were held drawing more than 280,000 men. By 1996, Promise Keepers conferences had attracted more

than 1 million men from all over the country. In October 1997, hundreds of thousands of men attended a single Promise Keepers event in Washington, D.C.—not to call for political change, but to pledge themselves to personal change.

Some Americans are uneasy with such public demonstrations of religious faith. But this is not new to American history, either. "The first time I heard in the United States that a hundred thousand men had bound themselves together publicly to abstain from spirituous liquors," wrote Tocqueville, "it appeared to me more like a joke than a serious engagement." He added, "I did not at once perceive why these temperate citizens could not content themselves with drinking water by their own firesides." But Tocqueville was eager to learn. "I at last understood that these hundred thousand Americans, alarmed by the progress of drunkenness around them, had made up their minds to patronize temperance. They acted just in the same way as a man of high rank who should dress very plainly, in order to inspire the humbler orders with a contempt of luxury."

### What Is Government's Role?

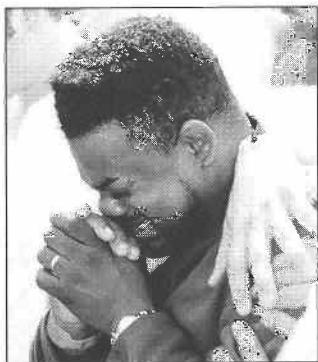
Samuel Johnson once wrote, "How small, of all that human hearts endure/That part which laws or kings can cause or cure!" How true. Personal moral and spiritual renewal must happen in families, churches, and synagogues, as is beginning to happen. But government leaders do have a limited and specific role to play in re-establishing the moral foundation of a free society.

Presidents, senators, and other government officials are not archbishops. They do not have primary responsibility for the life of the spirit. Yet our early presidents and other leading Founders knew well how crucial religion is to the cause of liberty. (To see this, you need only consult Article I of the early constitutions of the commonwealths of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.) The great historian of liberty, Lord Acton, wrote that the history of liberty is in fact, "coincident" with the history of Christianity, sprung from Judaism. In the words of Jefferson, "God who gave us life gave us liberty." To save liberty, our Founders never failed to stress the role of faith.

At a particularly difficult impasse at the constitutional convention in Philadelphia, Ben Franklin proposed a pause for solemn prayer to Providence, just as in *The Federalist Papers*, Madison, Hamilton, and Jay three times noted the interventions of divine Providence in the cause of establishing freedom on this continent. Presidents have declared national days of Thanksgiving to Almighty God. The inaugural speeches of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, to take but three examples, are breathtaking for their moral and religious reach.

In short, our national leaders have sensed a

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duty to express this nation's need of divine guidance and its gratitude for the Creator's manifold acts of assistance. In this country, we do not have an established church. But the foundations of our liberty are dug deep in the voluntary and heartfelt faith of millions.

To root our liberties more firmly in a moral soil, presidents and other officials can also show leadership in word, in deed, and in law. Here are a few examples:

- Appoint judges and Supreme Court justices who respect the moral outlook that produced the Constitution they are interpreting. Such judges will not imagine themselves philosopher-kings who can dispense with centuries of ethical tradition, or single-handedly determine difficult social questions for an entire nation.

- Reinforce the concept that marriage is a legally binding contract. Most Americans still marry in places of worship, acknowledging the sacred nature of the vows they make to one another. To them, of course, marriage is much more than a legal contract, but it is certainly not *less* than one.

- Reform adoption laws to make it easier for loving, married couples to care for abandoned children. This would signal an awareness that all children have a fundamental right to loving parents, a right that supersedes the claims of the state or of special-interest groups.

- Reject racial discrimination in all its guises, including quotas and set-asides. Equality in the eyes of the law is one of the most important ways we affirm the dignity and worth of all people.

- Protect people of all faiths—or of no faith—from encroachments by the state that violate their consciences and most deeply held beliefs. The Founders never intended the separation of church from state to become a separation of religion from public and civic life. There is no reason why a child should be denied the right to hold a Bible study before or after school, or write an essay about a biblical figure during school.

Each of these functions is rooted in the principle that government's role is to "secure" individual rights, not create new rights or dispense existing ones arbitrarily. Thus, the state must "establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty." No individual, family, or private institution can protect life, freedom, and property by apprehending criminals, trying them before a court of law, and incarcerating them. Nor can individuals and institutions, by themselves, enforce contracts, or fight terrorism, or negotiate and sign treaties with foreign governments, and the like. These are responsibilities to which only the state can attend. The Founders wrote the Constitution and the Bill of Rights to define precisely government's limited, specific role in

securing individual rights, and how government should carry out that very important role.

Writing in defense of the Constitution, James Madison noted in *The Federalist* no. 51 that "if men were angels, no government would be necessary." But men are not angels. They are prone to attack, abuse, and impose upon the lives, liberties, and property of others. Therefore, Madison went on to assert, "justice is the end of government," its highest purpose and mission.

Conservatives have been accused of denying any significant role for government in promoting a just and healthy civil society. The accusation is utterly misguided. Government has a profoundly important role in recognizing and defending Americans' fundamental rights. Indeed, when the issue is the right to life—that is, defining the boundaries of the human community—government has no higher calling. And this is not just a matter for the states: The federal government has always had the responsibility, whether it acknowledged it or not, to secure this highest, most cherished of rights. That responsibility is again being severely debated and tested today.

Part of the reason for this social and political tension is that we as a nation seem so unclear about the proper ordering of our fundamental rights—the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a result, there are at least three issues that serve as flash points for this debate: abortion, doctor-assisted suicide, and the battle against illegal drugs. Each is a life issue; each has become embroiled in arguments over the relationship between life and liberty.

**Abortion.** Many Americans are uncomfortable discussing abortion, and understandably so; it is not a pleasant topic. Today, however, there is no doubt—medically, genetically—that individual human life begins at conception and ends with natural death. The starting place for the discussion, then, is the recognition that abortion involves the violent ending of life—the first and foremost of our natural rights, the one that trumps all others. That is why abortions are a moral wrong and a national tragedy. As Lincoln said of slavery 140 years ago, abortion is and must be on the road to extinction.

The real question is: How do we achieve this goal of making abortions disappear? We must recognize that we as a nation lack an overwhelming consensus about the primacy of life over liberty or the pursuit of happiness. We must recover such a consensus, but we cannot do so simply with the

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stroke of a legislative pen or a Supreme Court vote. In a democracy, we cannot impose; we must persuade. Thus, the only way to eliminate abortions in this country is to bring about a change of heart, a change of conscience, a change of attitude. In order to change the law, we must change the culture. To change the culture, we must change the law little by little. I took a lot of heat for this view during the 1996 Republican presidential primaries, but as the political passions of the moment have settled, I think more people are recognizing that this approach makes eminent sense.

We must all acknowledge that there has been a little legislative progress in restricting abortions since 1973, but only a little. Still, that is only part of the story. What is exciting is that change *outside* of Washington is truly visible. The number of abortions performed has declined to its lowest point since 1976. The number of doctors willing to perform abortions has fallen. The number of schools willing to teach abortion is down dramatically.

Why is this? Because since 1973, when the practice of abortion was legalized in all states, the medical knowledge about birth available to doctors and the public has advanced by giant steps. We now have a knowledge of the genetics of the first human cells, we have sonograms, and we have many more lifesaving techniques for infants threatened in the womb.

In this changing moral climate, now is the time to advance the issue legislatively, step by step. We should start by banning partial-birth abortions, a euphemism for infanticide. Support for a ban is growing. We should also ban abortions for the purpose of sex selection, ban fetal tissue research, and end all federal funding for abortion. As the father of five girls, I also support parental notification and consent in the case of minors. We must also work to end abortions in late pregnancy. Our hospitals today are like a house divided. In one room, doctors work heroically to save a premature baby born at 22 or 23 weeks. Most of those babies now survive. Yet in another room, physicians and nurses work to kill a baby at that same stage of pregnancy. This house divided is untenable.

So where there is consensus on limiting abortions, let us codify. From there, let us persuade. Great social change has happened before in American history, and it can happen again.

**Doctor-Assisted Suicide.** At the other end of life, government must protect the elderly as well. Our nation should not be misled. Assisted suicide will lead us down the path to a dreary and dangerous society. At the altar of liberty, the Jack Kevorkians of the world are prepared to sacrifice the inherent value of all human life.

My mother died from lung cancer five years ago. Near the end, the doctors asked her if she wanted a living will. She thought they meant that

they wanted to pull the plug, and she was outraged. She said, "No way—I'm fighting this to the end." My brothers and family and I were inspired by that. Just as we drew strength from her in adversity, she drew strength because we rallied around her in adversity. The medical profession must do more to alleviate physical pain. But the pain, too, can be spiritual and emotional. While science makes progress on the physical side, we must work to provide real relief on the emotional and spiritual side, supporting others when they are in need.

Doctor-assisted suicide is the first step toward euthanasia, which is turning doctors the world over from healers into killers. Doctor-assisted suicide is not about people being on a respirator where technicians can barely find a brain wave. Nor is it about people who voluntarily refuse heroic measures. Rather, this is about what has happened in Holland, where they effectively legalized euthanasia. Since then, thousands of patients have been killed without their permission. With legalized assisted suicide, families will become greedy for their inheritance. The elderly will feel guilty for carrying on. People will say, "You're using up resources that others could use." Someday people may say that to you and me. It is a hideous, barbaric road for society to take. It encourages the elderly to believe they are obstacles, not human beings reflecting God's image. We must fervently fight it every inch of the way.

**Drug Legalization.** Finally, there is the issue of illegal drugs, which are still destroying many young people. This, too, is an issue where life supersedes liberty. Illegal drugs imprison drug takers within sometimes violent and murderous obsessions. They are designed to alter our moral sensibilities, to dull our sense of duty and integrity. Addictive drugs are wrong because they enslave and eventually destroy the body. They take away free choice—the hallmark of human dignity. When the world of adults winks at rampant drug abuse, we abandon children to emotional and moral chaos, thus threatening their very lives.

We must not be misled by state initiatives that claim only to legalize drugs for medicinal purposes. Relieving pain and legalization are separate and distinct issues. America must not be made safe for Colombian-style drug cartels. Americans overwhelmingly reject the notion that someone's "freedom" to grow, sell, and use deadly drugs overrides society's right to protect lives. If an illegal drug contains a property that helps people in pain, that property can be extracted, or synthetically manufactured, and given to patients under proper medical supervision. The drug Marinol, for example,

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treats cancer and AIDS patients with a synthetic form of an active ingredient found in marijuana. But it is safe and available legally by prescription, without exposing users to more than 400 other toxic chemicals found in smokable "pot."

Parents must repeatedly emphasize to their children how dangerous drugs can be. But society also has a right to protect itself from mind-altering, life-threatening drugs by the rule of law and its effective enforcement. Government must not use the fight against drug distribution and abuse as a license to deny individuals their constitutional rights. That said, however, the vast majority of Americans want a vigorous, effective fight against drugs. Yet they are not getting it. In his first year, Bill Clinton reduced the staff at the office of the "drug czar" by 83 percent. He has never delivered an Oval Office address on the drug issue. In the first two years of his administration, he gave more than 3,300 presidential statements, interviews, and addresses, yet illegal drugs were only mentioned 24 times. He is now proposing to reduce prison sentences for possession of crack cocaine.

At the Democratic National Convention in 1992, Governor Bill Clinton told the nation that George Bush "hasn't fought a real war on crime and drugs. I will." But as president, Bill Clinton is not keeping his commitment on one of the greatest causes of crime and human destruction.

### The Unfinished Challenge

America's moral and creative energies have always come from the ground up. When Tocqueville visited America 160 years ago, he noticed the enormous energy that comes from people laboring together voluntarily—through churches and synagogues, schools, hospitals, sports, cultural activities, and professional activities—for a shared goal and purpose. That is the great historic strength of America. I believe we are now beginning a Fourth Great Awakening—and none too soon.

From the beginning of our nation's history, Americans have understood that freedom has three vital components: economic, political, and moral. In the 20th century, the argument for economic freedom—that free markets and entrepreneurship are vital to social and economic progress—has largely been won. No one outside of entrenched elites on some of our university faculties argues that centralized control and ownership of a nation's economy will lead to freedom and prosperity. The battle now is to expand economic freedom while shrinking government, both here in America and around the world.

The same is true with the argument for political freedom. In this century, we have witnessed and participated in brutal battles over the right of self-determination. People everywhere understand that they have an intrinsic right to free speech and

free and fair elections. Here at home, people understand that government has gotten too big, promised too much, and delivered too little. More than that, where government has advanced, personal freedom and responsibility have retreated. Our challenge is to reform our political institutions here at home while setting an example for others struggling to determine their own destinies.

Yet the argument that there must be a moral basis undergirding a free society is one of the great unfinished challenges of our time. We have neglected the vital task of teaching our children, reminding ourselves, and communicating to others that man's rights to live free, pursue happiness, and own property come from God and are to be secured by the state. We have failed to assert at home and overseas the fundamental importance of spiritual faith and religious liberty in sustaining both freedom and democracy. Indeed, too often we have averted our eyes from those suffering persecution and even genocide.

As we end this bloody and brutal century, however, we must acknowledge that neglecting the moral basis of freedom has been terribly costly. We must also commit ourselves to a different road as we head into the 21st century.

America today has the potential for the greatest economic boom and spiritual renewal in our history. As we have done numerous times in our history, we can once again brighten economic prospects for everyone, reform our corrupt political institutions, and restore the severely weakened moral foundations of our country. In so doing, we can truly fulfill our national destiny as the leader of a free world. The question is: Will we seize the glittering opportunities that lie before us? Or will this become known as an era of missed opportunities?

I am an optimist. I believe that when historians look back on this era, they will have to conclude that once again the American people confounded the critics, the skeptics, the doubters, the negativists. They will have to conclude once more that the American people rose to the occasion, and that the American nation once again resumed her place—her rightful place—as the leader and inspiration of the world.

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**We have a national destiny as the leader of a free world. Will we seize the glittering opportunities before us? Or will this become known as the era of missed opportunities?**