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The Conservative Consensus: Frank Meyer, Barry Goldwater, and the Politics of Fusionism

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Conservatives have always been a disputatious lot. Their disputes are passionate and often personal precisely because they revolve around the most important thing in politics—ideas. Far from being signs of a crackup or a breakdown, intense uninhibited debate among conservatives is an unmistakable sign of intellectual vigor in a national movement whose influence and longevity continue to surprise many in the political and academic worlds.

The dispute between traditionalists and libertarians has been among the fiercest and most protracted in American conservatism. Like the generational conflicts of the Hatfields and the McCoys, the philosophical feuding between these two branches of conservatism has been going on for some 50 years.

When Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* became a best-seller in the late 1950s and began attracting young conservatives, Whittaker Chambers responded with perhaps the most famous and scathing book review in the history of *National Review.* The novel's plot, Chambers wrote, was "preposterous," its characterization "primitive," its overall effect "sophomoric." For all her opposition to the State, he said, Rand really wanted a society controlled by a "technocratic elite." Arrogant, dogmatic, and intolerant of any opposition to its Message, Chambers argued, a voice could be heard on almost every page of the novel, "To a gas chamber—go!"

Rand did not immediately retaliate but later declared that *National Review* was "the worst and most dangerous magazine in America." Its mixture of capitalism and religion, she said imperiously, sullied the rational with the mystical.

One of the fiercest rhetorical battles in the early days of the conservative movement was waged between Frank Meyer, a young communist turned radical libertarian, and Russell Kirk, a deeply rooted traditionalist. Meyer was not impressed with Kirk's seminal work, *The Conservative Mind*, saying that Kirk and like-minded conservatives had no grounding in any "clear and distinct principle." Indeed, Meyer charged, Kirk did not comprehend the ideas and institutions of a free society.

Kirk retorted that "individualism" (the term then used for libertarianism) was "social atomism" and even anti-Christian. The political result of individualism, he said, was inevitably anarchy. Custom, tradition, and the wisdom of our ancestors, Kirk declared, constituted the firm foundation upon which a society should be built. "A vast gulf," stated the conservative historian George H. Nash, lay between Meyer's appeal to universal truths like "the freedom of the individual" and Kirk's critique of such "abstractions" in the name of history and concrete circumstances.

The debate was joined by the free-market economist (and future Nobel laureate) F. A. Hayek. Responding to Kirk's charge that he and other "modern liberals"

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were guilty of superficial and false assumptions about the nature of man, Hayek wrote an essay trenchantly titled "Why I Am Not a Conservative." The trouble with conservatism, Hayek wrote, is practically everything. It distrusts the new, uses "the powers of government to prevent change," and does not understand economic forces. Since the conservative is "essentially opportunist" and lacks political principles, his main hope with regard to government is that "the wise and the good will rule" by authority given to them and enforced by them.

Furthermore, said Hayek, an acknowledged agnostic, the conservative recognizes "no limit" to the use of coercion in the furtherance of moral and religious ideals. And he is prone to a "strident nationalism" which can provide a bridge from conservatism to collectivism.

Hayek doubted whether "there can be such a thing as a conservative political philosophy." Conservatism, he concluded, may be a useful political maxim, but it does not give us "any guiding principles which can influence long-range developments." Hayek wrote those dismissive words in 1960.

Conservatives openly conceded their intellectual disarray. "The conservative movement in America has got to put its theoretical house in order," William F. Buckley Jr. wrote in frustration. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, a conservative European and frequent contributor to *National Review,* lamented that the movement had no coherent "ideology."

While there were points of agreement between traditionalists and libertarians—a belief in the free market, dismay at the increasing size of the governmental colossus, concern about the Soviet Union's belligerent foreign policy—there were as many areas of dissent. What was the proper balance between liberty and order? What was the appropriate response to the threat of communism? Could devout Christians and secular economists find common ground on the role of morality in the polity? What did libertarians and traditionalists really have in common?

Buckley had sought to patch over the philosophical divisions when he founded *National Review* in 1955 by inviting traditionalists, libertarians, and anti-communists to join the magazine and debate the great issues of the day. But the more they wrote and argued, the more it seemed that the differences between the branches of conservatism were not peripheral but fundamental.

BRIDGING THE GAP: FRANK S. MEYER

One conservative, however, became convinced that beneath the conflicting positions and heated rhetoric lay a consensus of opinion and principle. Frank Meyer, who had accentuated the gulf between traditionalists and libertarians a few years before, now dedicated himself to reconciling the differences that, George Nash wrote, "threatened to sunder the conservative movement."

As a staunch individualist, Meyer had argued that "freedom of the person" was the primary end of political action. The State had only three strictly limited functions: national defense, the preservation of domestic order, and the administration of justice between individuals. The achievement of virtue, Meyer insisted, was not the State's business; individuals should be left alone to work out their own salvation.

But Meyer, who had been an extremely effective organizer for the Communist Party in his youth, was a political realist as well as political philosopher who understood that the conservative movement needed both traditionalists and individualists or libertarians to be politically successful.

In his important 1962 book, *In Defense of Freedom*, Meyer writes that "the Christian understanding of the nature and destiny of man" is what conservatives are trying to preserve. Both traditionalists and individualists should therefore acknowledge the true heritage of the West: "reason operating within tradition." This theory was later dubbed "fusionism," which Meyer said was based on the conservative consensus already forged by the Founders at the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

M. Stanton Evans, who as a young conservative worked closely with Frank Meyer and is himself a "fusionist," has pointed out that the great problem con-

fronting the Founders in Philadelphia was to set up a system of government that provided both order and freedom. The challenge was to diffuse and balance governmental power so that "each source of authority would limit and restrain the others" while having sufficient strength to perform the tasks appropriate to it.

In fact, Evans says, neither the "authoritarian" ideas of Hamilton nor the "libertarian" ideas of Jefferson dominated the Constitutional Convention. It was rather the "fusionist" ideas of Madison. The father of the Constitution writes in *The Federalist* that in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, "the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself." The Founders' answer was to create a system of checks and balances, administrative and electoral, that prevented any branch of the federal government from dominating the other.

While far from perfect, and whatever its current condition, Evans argues, the U.S. Constitution has proved that conservatism, beginning from "a profound mistrust of man and of men panoplied as the state, can well serve the ends of freedom."

Another eloquent fusionist was the German economist Wilhelm Roepke, author of *A Humane Economy*, who stressed the importance of family, church, and community as the indispensable underpinning of a free society. Individuals can "breathe the air of freedom," he writes, only if they are willing to accept moral responsibility for their actions.

To demonstrate that the fusionist synthesis was not a fantasy, Meyer assembled a diverse group of conservative intellectuals and in 1964 published their answers to the basic question, "What is conservatism?" Despite real differences, Meyer writes, the contributors, ranging from Hayek to Kirk to Buckley, agree on several fundamentals:

- They accept "an objective moral order" of "immutable standards by which human conduct should be judged."
- Whether they emphasize human rights and freedoms or duties and responsibilities, they unanimously value "the human person" as the center of political and social thought.
- They oppose liberal attempts to use the State "to enforce ideological patterns on human beings."
- They reject the centralized power and direction necessary to the "planning" of society.
- They join in defense of the Constitution "as originally conceived."
- They are devoted to Western civilization and acknowledge the need to defend it against the "messianic" intentions of Communism.

Meyer points out that the most libertarian of the contributors "agree upon the necessity of the maintenance of a high moral tone in society" while the most traditionalist "respect the moral liberty of the individual person and reject the centralizing state." Therefore, despite sharp differences of emphasis, Meyer says, there does exist among conservatives a "consensus among divergence" equal to that which united those who created the Constitution and the Republic.

However, traditionalists as well as libertarians quickly attacked Meyer's reasoned case for fusionism. L. Brent Bozell, a conservative Catholic and brother-in-law of William F. Buckley Jr., complained that libertarians and so-called fusionists overly stressed free choice in the pursuit of virtue. The purpose of politics, he insisted, was not the promotion of freedom but the promotion of virtue and the building of "a Christian civilization." The story of how the free society has come to take priority over the good society, Bozell said, "is the story of the decline of the West."

Ronald Hamowy, a student of Hayek, reiterated the radical libertarian position that conservatism was the "polar opposite" of libertarianism—hostile to freedom, anti-capitalistic, suspicious of reason, and willing (citing Bozell) to impose its values on its opponents. As for fusionism, Hamowy wrote, "it is no solution to contend…that reason must operate *within* reason when the crucial problem to be answered involves the choice of *which* tradition to follow."

And yet by the mid-sixties, the tumult between the disputants had nearly subsided, and fusionism had

become, by a process Meyer called "osmosis," a fait accompli. Nash says that most conservatives adopted fusionism because "they wanted to"—that is, they *wanted* to believe they had found a common basis of understanding. They were tired of feuding, of endlessly debating how many traditionalists and libertarians can dance on the head of a pin.

Fusionism was immensely assisted, Nash points out, by "the cement of anti-communism." Almost all conservatives of whatever philosophical disposition were bound together by the reality of a common deadly enemy: the Soviet Union.

Fusionism was not a rhetorical trick but a recognition that conservatism was "a house of many mansions," in the words of traditionalist Raymond English. Fusionism—ecumenism if you will—was a logical as well as a prudent resolution of a seemingly intractable problem.

MEETING THE "OVERRIDING POLITICAL CHALLENGE"

But all of this was so much armchair philosophizing by tweedy intellectuals. Fusionism had to be tested in the real world of politics, or it would have little impact on the development of conservatism as a significant political movement in America.

As it happened, there was a rising politician in the West—part libertarian, part traditionalist in his thinking—who would come to embody fusionism by writing one of the most popular political manifestos in the 20th century and running for President of the United States on a platform that might have been drafted by Frank Meyer.

Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona was an outspoken conservative Republican who attracted national attention in the late fifties by calling the Eisenhower Administration's excessive spending a "betrayal" of the public trust and for exposing trade union corruption in widely televised congressional hearings. There was increasing talk about running him for President in 1960. As part of the campaign, a group of prominent conservatives led by Clarence Manion, a former dean of the Notre Dame Law School, approached Goldwater about writing a "pamphlet" on "Americanism."

The end result was *The Conscience of a Conservative*, which sold 3.5 million copies and became the most widely read political manifesto of the 20th century, rivaled in American political history, perhaps, only by Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Goldwater's ghostwriter was Brent Bozell, who had already written speeches for the Senator as well as for the late Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin.

Goldwater and Bozell were incongruous collaborators: Goldwater the college dropout and Jewish Episcopalian, Bozell the Yale law graduate and Roman Catholic convert. But they shared a Jeffersonian conviction that that government is best which governs least. They looked to the Constitution as their political North Star. They were convinced that communism was a clear danger and an abiding evil.

Published in April 1960, *The Conscience of a Conservative* transformed American politics by proclaiming a major new factor in Republican and national politics—conservatism. The *Chicago Tribune* reviewer declared there was "more harsh fact and hard sense in this slight book than will emerge from all of the chatter of this year's session of Congress [and] this year's campaign for the presidency."

Time magazine wrote that *The Conscience of a Conservative* served notice that "the Old Guard has new blood, that a hard-working successful politico has put up his stand on the right of the road and intends to shout for all he is worth." Columnist Westbrook Pegler asserted that "Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona certainly is now the successor to Senator Taft of Ohio as defender of the Constitution and freedom." *Barron's* said that Goldwater had "raised an [inspiring] standard to which the wise and honest may repair." Even the Soviet Union's *Pravda* had its say, writing ominously that the Senator's hard-line anti-communism was "a dangerous, unwise affair…a sortie against peace.… [H]e will end up in a pine box."

What had Goldwater (and Bozell) wrought? A remarkable fusion of the three major strains of conservatism: traditionalism, classical liberalism or libertarianism, and anti-communism.

The Arizona conservative begins by dismissing the notion that conservatism is "out of date," arguing that this is like saying that "the Golden Rule or the Ten Commandments or Aristotle's *Politics* are out of date." The conservative approach, he writes, "is nothing more or less than an attempt to apply the wisdom and experience and the revealed truths of the past to the problems of today." Many have tried and failed to offer a more succinct definition of conservatism's role in politics.

Believing that theory must always precede practice, Goldwater describes what conservatism is and what it is not. Unlike the liberal, he says, the conservative believes that man is not only an economic but a spiritual animal. Conservatism "looks upon the enhancement of man's spiritual nature as the primary concern of political philosophy." Indeed, he states, the first obligation of a political thinker is "to understand the nature of man."

He proceeds to list what the conservative has learned about man from the great minds of the past:

1. Each person is unique and different from every other human being; therefore, provision must be made for the development of the different potentials of each person.
2. The economic and spiritual aspects of man's nature "are inextricably intertwined." Neither can be free unless both are free.
3. Man's spiritual and material development cannot be directed by outside forces; "each man," he declared with all the conviction of his Jeffersonian soul, "is responsible for his own development."

Given this view of the nature of man, Goldwater writes, it is understandable that the conservative "looks upon politics as the art of achieving the maximum amount of freedom for individuals that is consistent with the maintenance of social order." But the delicate balance that ideally exists between freedom and order has long since tipped against freedom "practically everywhere on earth."

Even in America, says Goldwater, the trend against freedom and in favor of order is "well along and gathering momentum." For the American conservative, therefore, there is no difficulty in "identifying the day's overriding political challenge: it is to preserve and extend freedom." Goldwater does not qualify his statement, leaving the clear implication—reinforced in the last one-third of his book, entitled "The Soviet Menace"—that the American conservative has an obligation to preserve and extend freedom not only in America but around the world.

Freedom is in peril in the United States, he writes, because government has been allowed by leaders and members of both political parties to become too powerful. In so acting, they have ignored and misinterpreted the single most important document in American government: the Constitution, an instrument above all "for limiting the functions of government." The inevitable result has been "a Leviathan, a vast national authority out of touch with the people, and out of their control."

While deeply concerned at the tendency to concentrate power in the hands of a few men, Goldwater states his conviction that most Americans want to reverse the trend. The transition will come, he says, when the people entrust their affairs to men "who understand that their first duty as public officials is to divest themselves of the power they have been given."

Having laid the philosophic foundation that "the laws of God, and of nature, have no dateline," Goldwater becomes specific about a broad range of issues, including education, federal subsidies, taxes, states' rights, organized labor, and foreign policy. Echoing the flat tax proposals of the economist and future Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, with whom he was in frequent contact, Goldwater states that "government has a right to claim an equal percentage of each man's wealth, and no more."

Regarding the Cold War, Goldwater identifies the central problem: "the communists seek victories" while the United States and the rest of the free world seek "settlements." The Arizona conservative proposes a seven-point program to achieve victory, including the maintenance of defense alliances like NATO, the achievement of U.S. military superiority, and the encouragement of "the captive peoples" behind the

Iron Curtain "to overthrow their captors." Using words that Ronald Reagan would echo in campaign speeches and then as President some 20 years later, Barry Goldwater asserts that America's objective "is not to wage a struggle against communism, but to win it."

It now remained for Barry Goldwater to test this fusing of traditionalist and libertarian ideas in a political campaign, which he proceeded to do in his 1964 run for the presidency.

"TO SET THE TIDE RUNNING AGAIN"

Before and after he captured the Republican nomination for President, Goldwater addressed the fundamental issues that have dominated much of the political debate in America for the past four decades:

- *Social Security.* It is in actuarial trouble. We should seek to strengthen it by introducing some voluntary option.
- *Government Subsidies*. We should work toward reducing and, where possible, eliminating them, starting with agriculture.
- *Privatization.* We should start selling government-owned properties, like parts of the Tennessee Valley Authority, whose functions can be better carried out by the private sector.
- *Law and Order.* The rights of victims should take precedence over the rights of criminals.
- *Morality in Government.* The President and all in public office must avoid scandal and corruption and set a good example for society.
- *Communism.* Why not victory?

The need for what Goldwater called "morality in government" was a constant campaign motif. In a nationally televised address, he discussed the "terrifying" deterioration of the home, the family, and the community, of law and order, and of good morals and manners and blamed the deterioration on 30 years of modern liberalism. After all, he said, stressing his traditionalist side, "it is the modern 'liberal' who seeks to eliminate religious sentiment from every aspect of modern life."

Goldwater took presidential politics into previously unexplored territory by listing categories of people whose votes he did *not* want: "the lazy, dole-happy people who want to feed on the fruits of somebody else's labor" or those "who are willing to believe that communism can be accommodated." He wanted the votes of people who believed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, who rejected promises of something for nothing, whose votes couldn't be bought. He wanted the votes of those who knew that *"something must be done"* about an America in which the federal government "will tell you what business you can be in," whether your children can pray in school, and what to charge "for the things you sell." "Let's get our country back!" he urged.

In the opening speech of his presidential campaign in Flagstaff, Arizona, Goldwater sounded both libertarian and traditionalist themes. He pledged to stop "the cancerous growth of the federal government" and to let the people "use more of your money for yourselves." At the same time, he promised "not to abandon the needy and the aged" and pledged that "we shall never forsake the helpless."

Regarding morality, he said that "the tone of America" was too often being set "by the standards of the sick joke, the quick slogan, the off-color drama, and the pornographic book." In a clear reference to the indicted Bobby Baker, who had become a millionaire as secretary of the Senate when Lyndon B. Johnson was Senate majority leader, Goldwater said that "the shadow of scandal falls, unlighted yet by full answers, across the White House itself." Public service, he charged, "has become for too many at the highest levels, selfish in motive and manner. Men who preach publicly of sacrifice practice private indulgence."

The central fusionist theme of Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign had been established in his acceptance address at the Republican National Convention. It was "to set the tide running again in the cause of freedom," but a freedom properly understood:

> This party, with its every action, every word, every breath and every heartbeat has but a single resolve, and that is freedom—freedom made

> orderly for the Nation by our constitutional government; freedom under a government limited by the laws of nature and of nature's God; freedom—balanced so that order, lacking liberty, will not become a slave of the prison cell; balanced so that liberty, lacking order, will not become the license of the mob and the jungle.

This eloquent description of "ordered liberty" (drafted by Ohio State professor Harry Jaffa) has not received the attention of historians that it should because of Goldwater's closing words, underlined in the original text:

> I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice!
> And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!

Inside the convention hall, conservatives reveled in the stinging rebuff of the Republican liberals who had long reviled conservatives for being "extremists." But most of the mass media focused on the word "extremism" and ignored the qualifying phrase "in the defense of liberty," reducing Goldwater's carefully calculated sentence to the simplistic slogan "Extremism is no vice!"

In those distant days, there were no spin doctors who immediately mixed with the news media, describing Goldwater's speech as one of the most brilliant in convention history, drawing attention to the Lincolnian and Churchillian accents, placing the extremism line in perspective with references to Aristotle, Tom Paine, and Patrick Henry. (What could be more extreme than Henry's ringing declaration, "Give me liberty or give me death!") In those days, politicians proposed and the media disposed.

On November 2, 1964, Goldwater delivered his last campaign speech in the small mountaintop town of Fredonia, located on the Arizona–Utah border, and talked about the simple virtues of its hard-working people. He praised their courage for raising cattle "where cattle probably shouldn't have been raised" and without government help and for living their lives "as they felt God wanted them to."

The next day, the American people went to the polls and gave President Lyndon Johnson his fondest wish: a landslide victory. Johnson won the presidency by the largest popular margin in history, receiving 43.1 million votes to Goldwater's 27.1 million—61 percent of the vote. Johnson carried 44 states for a total of 486 electoral votes. Goldwater won just six states: the Deep South's Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina and his home state of Arizona.

The esteemed newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann wrote that the Johnson majority "is indisputable proof that the voters are in the center." Political reporter Tom Wicker argued that Republicans can win only as a "me-too" party. The *New York Times'* James Reston summed up that "Barry Goldwater not only lost the presidential election yesterday but the conservative cause as well."

"TO BEGIN THE WORLD OVER AGAIN"

And yet 16 years later, Ronald Reagan won the presidency running as an unapologetic conservative, and in 1994, Republicans gained a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. Why?

Almost 30 years to the day after Goldwater was roundly defeated, a *USA Today*–CNN–Gallup Poll in November 1994 found that 64 percent of Americans agreed with the Republicans' Contract with America. The people wanted smaller government, lower taxes and spending, tougher anti-crime measures, and less Washington meddling in their lives. Every one of these ideas was first proposed by Barry Goldwater in his 1964 campaign. What had been rejected as extreme was now accepted as mainstream.

Ronald Reagan benefited from the Goldwater candidacy in several critical ways. He became a national political star overnight with his 11th-hour televised address for Goldwater, entitled "A Time for Choosing." It is certain that Reagan would not have been given the opportunity to appear on local radio, let alone national TV, if Nelson Rockefeller or any other Republican liberal had been nominated.

Reagan was approached in 1965 and importuned by influential conservatives to seek the Republican nomination for governor of California because of his TV speech for Goldwater. In June 1966, the day after he was nominated, Reagan called Goldwater's presidential campaign manager to say, "Had it not been for you and Barry I would not have won this nomination." He later wrote Goldwater: "You set the pattern.… I have tried to do the same and have found the people more receptive because they've had a chance to realize there is such a thing as truth."

The "pattern" Reagan was referring to was a fusionist blend of traditionalist and libertarian thought; the "truth" was ordered liberty. As governor of California and then President of the United States, Ronald Reagan demonstrated time and again that he was a master fusionist.

In November 1979, when he formally announced his intention to seek the Republican nomination for President, Reagan addressed the concerns of many Americans who wondered, in the face of President Jimmy Carter's inept handling of the economy and U.S. relations with Iran and other nations, whether America's best days were behind it. He said:

> A troubled and afflicted mankind looks to us, pleading for us to keep our rendezvous with destiny; that we will uphold the principles of self-reliance, self-discipline, morality—and above all—responsible liberty for every individual; that we will become that shining city on a hill.

Phrases such as "the principle of…responsible liberty for every individual" came naturally to Reagan because he embodied the idea of fusionism. He was a liberal Democrat turned conservative Republican. He was the son of a shoe clerk who became a Hollywood film star. He was a union leader who cherished the entrepreneurial spirit. He happily joined every left-wing pro-Soviet organization he could find after World War II but then opposed the attempted communist takeover of the Hollywood trade unions. He loved to quote the Founders, especially Tom Paine, who said during the American Revolution, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again."

But Reagan also honored the Constitution and its many checks and balances, including those directed at him as chief executive. He had a rare ability, present in only a few men of any generation, to understand what was on the minds and in the hearts of the American people and to communicate it in simple but expressive language to the nation and to the world.

In his acceptance address at the Republican National Convention in July 1980, Reagan reflected yet again the traditionalist, libertarian, and anti-communist sensibilities of a true fusionist. He stressed how Americans of every political disposition and in every walk of life are bound together by a "community of shared values of family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom." He urged the delegates before him and every member of "this generation of Americans" to dedicate "ourselves to renewing the American compact."

Specifically, he promised to limit federal spending, cut income tax rates by 30 percent over three years, institute a stable monetary reform, reinforce the military, and negotiate with adversaries when possible but always from a position of strength. He daringly ended his address with a moment of silent prayer for America—placed on earth by Divine Providence, he said, to be an "island of freedom…a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to be free."

Throughout his presidency, Reagan emphasized America's mission as a champion of freedom and challenged those who denied freedom, especially the Soviet Union. In March 1983, he told a group of evangelical ministers that the West should recognize that the Soviets "are the focus of evil in this modern world" and the masters "of an evil empire."

Many consider Reagan's "evil empire" speech to be the most important of his presidency, a compelling example of what former Czech President Vaclav Havel calls "the power of words to change history." When Reagan visited Poland and East Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall, former dissidents told him that when

he called the Soviet Union an "evil empire," it gave them enormous hope. Finally, they said to each other, America had a leader who "understood the nature of communism."

In his farewell address to the American people in January 1989, President Reagan sounded the same fusionist themes that had given him decisive electoral victories in 1980 and 1984. He protested that he was not so much a "Great Communicator" as a communicator of great things that came from the heart of a great nation—"from our experience, our wisdom, and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two centuries."

He praised the American Revolution, which for the first time in history reversed the course of government with three little words: "We the people." Our Constitution, he said, is a document in which "We the people" tell the government what it is allowed to do. This belief, he said, "has been the underlying basis for everything I've tried to do these past eight years."

FUSIONIST RENEWAL AND THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATISM

Today, in the wake of the 2006 elections and the escalating debate among neoconservatives, paleoconservatives, libertarians, and just plain conservatives about the future of conservatism—with some arguing that it has none—a "new" fusionism has been proposed as a solution. It is time, some say, for Republicans and conservatives to return to their small-government roots and get away from so-called religious extremism. They point to Barry Goldwater as the historical model, claiming that he had little interest in the moral side of the political equation.

As we have seen, this is a serious misreading of Goldwater's fundamental views as best-selling author and presidential candidate. Goldwater consistently offered a blend of traditionalist and libertarian ideas. In 1964, for example, he said that "it is impossible to maintain freedom and order and justice without religious and moral sanctions." A little earlier, he wrote that if the Christian Church doesn't fight totalitarianism, "then who on earth is left to resist this evil which is determined to destroy all virtue, all decency"? Jerry Falwell couldn't have phrased it any better.

Republicans and conservatives must remember, says Dick Armey, House Majority leader from 1995 to 2003 and himself a libertarian, that "the modern conservative movement is a fusion of social and fiscal conservatives united in their belief in limited government. [We] must keep both in the fold."

Frank Meyer, the intellectual father of fusionism, and Barry Goldwater, the first political apostle of fusionism, sought to unite, not divide, all conservatives. Their goal was a national movement guided by constitutional principles of ordered liberty. The solution for the American conservative movement in these challenging times is not a new but a renewed fusionism.

Donald Devine of the American Conservative Union, an old-line fusionist like M. Stanton Evans, has called for "utilizing libertarian means for traditionalist ends"—the ends being the return of political power to states, communities, and the people. His proposal, applauded by traditionalists and libertarians, is a response to the Big Government conservatism of recent vintage. In his latest book, *Getting America Right*, President Ed Feulner of The Heritage Foundation lays out a six-point program to begin rolling back the welfare state and reinforcing traditional American values. As governor of our most populous state and then President for a total of 16 years, Ronald Reagan demonstrated conclusively that fusionism works.

But fusionism requires more than a consensus as to goals: It needs a foe common to all conservatives. Militant communism served as a unifying threat from the late 1940s through the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, without the soothing presence of Ronald Reagan and with the collapse of communism, large fissures appeared in American conservatism. These fissures produced paleoconservatives pining for the isolationist 1930s and neoconservatives resurrecting Wilsonian dreams of a world made safe through democracy.

Leviathan's lengthening shadow across America did not suffice to bring conservatives together until Newt Gingrich and his merry band of congressional

revolutionaries offered America a Contract that was fusionist in spirit and helped them win a majority in the House of Representatives. President Bill Clinton countered with his own brand of Democratic fusionism, proclaiming that the era of Big Government was over and signing a conservative welfare reform bill.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the jihad proclaimed by Islamic fundamentalists temporarily united the nation and the conservative movement, but political partisanship quickly reemerged to make prudential governance and reasoned discourse difficult if not impossible.

The impasse can be broken with a renewed fusionism based on limited government, the free market, individual freedom and responsibility, a balance between liberty and law, and a commitment to moral order and to virtue, both private and public. These are the core beliefs, bounded by the Constitution, on which American conservatism rests and by which its leaders have always sought to govern.

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