

What, then, is Conservatism?

Written by Dr. Sam Clovis
Wednesday, 03 March 2010 21:17

Conservatism, to me, is a cast of intellect, a type of character, but mostly, a set of principles upon which to build and lead a life based on contribution, accountability and responsibility. Borrowing heavily from Russell Kirk, I view Conservatism as:

- A view of humanity as it is, not as it ought to be.
- Holding to a pattern of life.
- Resisting damage to the social order.
- Resisting human striving focused on material production and consumption.

Conservatives have an abhorrence for:

- Ideologues and Oligarchs. These individuals consider power the primary organizing principle and believe in a political elite ruling the people. This notion is contrary to popular sovereignty.
- Dogma or zealotry.
- Political religion. This can be taken to be the many branches of progressive thinking that seek social justice through redistribution of wealth and the suppression of individual freedom.
- Perfecting human nature. In today's America, we have a government that seeks to use the coercive nature of government to influence the behavior of its citizens.
- Any form of tyranny. Tyranny resides where power is allowed to concentrate. Today, that tyranny is being established in the national government.
- Concentration of power anywhere but in the "community of souls." The community of souls refers to those living and those that have lived. The tradition and enduring values of the community must be prudently protected by those upon which the community has bestowed the honor to govern.
- Any form of egalitarianism. Seeking equal outcomes rather than equal opportunities suppresses individual freedom and devalues individual exceptionality.

The Canons of Conservatism are:

- A belief in the transcendent order or body of natural laws that rule society.
- An affection for proliferating the variety and mystery of human existence.
- A conviction that society requires order and the elevation of people to their potential.
- That freedom and property are closely linked.
- That faith in prescription is a check on anarchic impulses and the opportunist's lust for power.

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- That recognition of change is necessary but must be approached with prudence.

Conservatism is threatened by:

- The pursuit of the perfectability of man.
- A contempt for tradition.
- The pursuit of political leveling.
- The pursuit of economic leveling.
- A contempt for the community of souls.

Thus, after all is said and done, we have four pillars of Conservatism upon which we build our belief in principles as the key organizing features of our just and free society. Those pillars are:

- Institutional Conservatism. These institutions are such the structure of government found in the Constitution, checks and balances, enumerated powers and separation of powers.
- Economic or Fiscal Conservatism. Balanced budgets, reduced government spending, equal opportunity to achieve according to ability, and free markets.
- Social Conservatism. Protection of the nuclear family, marriage, life from conception to death and the sacrament of marriage.
- Security Conservatism. A strong national defense to serve as a deterrent to adventurism on the part of those that are enemies of American national interests.

This is a good start concerning conservatism in America.