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**Chronicles**  
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## On 'Middle American Revolution'

*Quo vadis* Middle American anger? Several of Sam Francis' most recent *Chronicles* contributions have alluded to a "Middle American Revolution." In his January "Principalities & Powers," Francis was kind enough to directly cite my book, *The Radical Center*, which was based on extensive research into the significant social roots of the George Wallace candidacy and his rise to national prominence in the late 1960's and early 70's. A central conclusion of that volume was the identification of "Middle American Radicals" (MARs) as a potent, yet seemingly unpredictable force in American politics whose capture—first in the Carter campaign of 1976 and then by the Reagan-Bush dynasty—has given notice of the disintegration of the New Deal base of the Democratic Party.

Francis speaks of the need for any would-be leader of MARs to formulate "a comprehensive myth" that could "raise this proletariat from a passive state of disgruntlement to being an active force of social and political power." He notes that this cannot be in the form of any existing orthodoxy, whether "paleoconservative, traditionalist or libertarian," but must be "new." The old order has been riven asunder.

Will the grip of George Bush's New World Order be capable of retaining MAR loyalty for 1992? While I dare not prophesy, my analysis of the forces now emerging in America in the early 1990's is one that must eschew both paleo- and neoconservative labels and, instead, adopt the populist base which I feel is so very well embodied in the ideals and goals of *Chronicles* itself. I see in the writings of Tom Fleming and in the refreshing iconoclastic "radicalism" of such contributors as Francis, Chilton Williamson, Jr. and John Shelton Reed a break from an intellectual elitism whose very promulgation is the basis of MAR anger. There will be no MAR revolution until there is a fundamental shift in the definition of

American politics away from "left" or "right." So long as establishment political science persists in retaining a totally obsolete and outmoded scale of political reckoning—an unidimensional marker barely suitable for the beginning of the 20th century, let alone the dawn of the 21st—we shall misread the signposts of the time.

What is crucial to a grasp of American political identity today is the same schism that is to be found in every "advanced industrial," "emerging," or "Third World" nation: the breakdown of allegiance to any national political elite. This disintegration, now so evident in Eastern Europe and emerging as well in Western Europe (and certainly in North America) is the merging of individualism with economic aspirations (or actual gains) with a deep distrust of central government.

While I do not claim to know the exact course this trend shall follow, it is my guess as a student of the MAR phenomenon that, to be successful, it must be a force that creates a "third way" by means of a charismatic leader possessing effective organizational skills and who has the full trust of urban Catholics, rural Protestants, and those with a traditional religious commitment of any form. What unites these otherwise disparate elements of American society is their opposition to the concepts of pluralism, class struggle, and the belief that they have become the most victimized "minority group" of all.

—Donald Warren  
Ann Arbor, MI

## On 'Christopher Lasch'

Llewellyn Rockwell's review (August 1991) of *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* by Christopher Lasch contains much that's worth saying, both pro and con, about Professor Lasch and his opus. However, the critique falls apart at the end, when the reviewer attempts to distill his observations upon the fires of theology.

In all of Christianity there may be no doctrine more misrepresented than

that of the total depravity of human nature. To equate this with a belief in the impossibility of progress is mistaken. The only point the doctrine makes against "works" is that they do not avail toward salvation. Good works are not, therefore, impossible. They become inevitable, indeed abundant, as the overflow of gratitude for a salvation already freely given to the believer by the grace of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. This forms the *genuine* context in which our works ought to take place, in which works can truly be good.

Mr. Rockwell is free to believe in the alternative to total depravity—call it something-less-than-total depravity—but the point is that the former is no gloomy doctrine. It is, rather, a deep recognition that we must confront the bad news if we are to embrace the good. In this, we are given no brief to take perverse satisfaction over the corrupt motivations of others, as our own sinfulness remains clearly in focus. At root, total depravity should not engender pessimism but, quite the contrary, affirm the sovereignty of God. Progress is possible. If it comes, it is God's hand that sets it in motion, and He would graciously have us participate in it. Whether all that's done in the name of progress glorifies God is quite another thing.

If Professor Lasch's opposition to progress is properly grounded in Calvinism, as you suggest—and we certainly shouldn't preclude other explanations—it would stem from this point. Does that which we label progress glorify God or glorify man? Total depravity helps us ask the question, rather than dictating the answer beforehand.

—Joel S. Parshall  
Pittsburgh, PA

While Lew Rockwell's review was interesting, his theological conclusion was, if not inaccurate, at least in need of some evidence. Perhaps Rockwell believes that Calvinism's pessimism has been dominant in history despite its other doctrines. Well, that may be true, but I would certainly like to read his argument to that effect. Given the existence of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and the visible difference in standard of living between North America

and South America, I don't think I am asking too much to expect Rockwell to justify his position instead of merely asserting it. John Calvin, after all, was a committed follower of Saint Augustine—whom Rockwell quotes favorably on progress—and subscribed to his view of history. Rockwell's quoting of Augustine is almost as ironic as his mention of the "Founders' vision." Though the Founding Fathers were hardly Puritans, does Rockwell believe that it was Catholic theology that dominated the colonies during the previous century?

Rockwell's reference to John Paul II's latest encyclical hardly justifies his claims. He himself admits in his newsletter that Pope Leo XIII "adopted the then-fashionable Marxist framework" in 1891. I find it questionable that in *Chronicles* Rockwell says the recent encyclical "makes clear" the connection between free-markets and "conservative culture" without mentioning this quasi-Marxian tradition in the Church that has helped keep the connection unclear for at least a century. If anyone thinks I am being too harsh, he should read Rockwell's analysis of *Centesimus Annus*, where he states that it "effectively repudiates such nonsense" as the "socialist libel of the industrial revolution," which Pope Leo XIII had accepted. If he were to admit in his book review as he does in his newsletter that *Centesimus Annus* was a break with Catholic tradition, then his case for Catholicism's relationship to human progress would appear a lot less credible.

I do not mean to imply that Calvinism has been the source of all progress and freedom. It hasn't. Nor do I mean to imply that the Catholic Church has not been a cause of progress and increased freedom throughout the world. She has. I do hope, however, that future endorsements of Roman Catholic theology and culture will be well-argued and well-supported with evidence, not simply thrown at Protestants as insults.

—Mark A. Horne  
Oakland Park, FL

### Mr. Rockwell Replies:

How is stating and then disagreeing with a tenet of another religion an

insult? Have conservatives, too, gone soft in the ecumenical mush? If one regards man's nature as totally depraved, so that good works apart from God are impossible, how could one *not* take a dark view of the possibility of human progress?

Calvinists have also taken a dim view of human culture, which—in Weber's words—they saw as being of "no use toward salvation" and tending to "promote sentimental illusion and idolatrous superstitions." Whether progress occurs under Calvinist social regimes is another matter, but Calvinists cannot take much comfort in Weber's thesis about capitalism and their faith.

Weber saw Calvinists' striving for economic success as "the necessity of proving one's faith in worldly activity." This led, he thought, to a radically works-based salvation in practice, if not formal theology: "The God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system." (In contrast, Weber called Catholicism a "very human" system that embraced the "cycle of sin, repentance, atonement, release, followed by renewed sin.")

To Weber, the attempt to demonstrate one's salvific status led, unintendedly, to savings, investment, and entrepreneurship. Since this attempt contradicted official teachings, however, Calvinist societies have tended to apologize for their economic progress. Calvin himself believed that grace was entirely unmerited, and while election was self-evident to the believer, no one could distinguish election in others using works or any other criterion, nor should one try to do so.

Note: *Centesimus Annus* does represent a break from *Rerum Novarum*, but not from traditional Church teaching. Many of the scholastics, for example, held radically free-market views. It is this century that is the anomaly.

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**THE BOTCHED COUP** in the Soviet Union should have been an occasion for somber reflections. For a few days it appeared that U.S. foreign policy, built almost entirely around the person of Mikhail Gorbachev, might be in ruins. The failure of the plot, while it has temporarily restored Mr. Gorbachev's fortunes, could not disguise the pitiable condition into which a great empire had fallen. Here it was, the great state apparatus which, a decade ago, had made the world tremble, now reduced to impotence in the face of a blustering demagogue with a drinking problem. It was more like a minor episode in the history of Montenegro than a major chapter in an imperial chronicle. The American press, which never gets anything right, could only stir up paranoia over who had his hand on the big button.

The lighter side of the coup was provided by President Bush, who kept on insisting that Mr. Gorbachev's overthrow was "unconstitutional." All these years, Republicans had been insisting that the Soviet government was a despotism or, more recently, an evil empire. Mr. Bush himself had even signed up as an advocate of democratic globalism, a crusade based on the Wilsonian premise that the only legitimate regimes are those that have been democratically elected. We must have been dozing when Gorbachev won an election, because it is our recollection that he gained his power the old-fashioned way: he seized it. Like Stalin and Brezhnev and Andropov, Gorbachev owed his position not to the will of the people but to the decision of a few hard-eyed men who pulled the strings. Some of those men, not so hard-eyed as their predecessors, had evidently decided that what the Politburo gives, the Politburo can also take away.

It is hard not to feel some sympathy for the plotters. The restoration of a hard-line regime would put an end to plans for a Western bail-out of the Soviet economy. During the period when the coup's success seemed likely, *Il Sabato* interviewed Gianfranco Miglio, the hard-boiled political scientist at the Catholic University of Milan.

Professor Miglio was frank enough to say what many of us were thinking: "Why should we tear our clothes? The West would have had to furnish Gorbachev with unlimited assistance. A blood-letting with disastrous economic results."

Even American optimists realize that the same President who taught us lip-reading is now saying that we won't, repeat won't provide direct financial assistance, but to save his old friend Mr. Gorbachev and his new friend Mr. Yeltsin, George Bush will find it impossible not to be generous with other people's money. If only those bunglers had succeeded!

Actually, the Washington politicians of the jointly ruling party in power should have appreciated the position in which their Communist counterparts had found themselves. All that talk of reform was fine, so long as it promised greater efficiency and Western trade credits, but this business of autonomy for the republics was too much. Under the proposed unity agreement, the republics would have reassumed a large measure of control over their own taxes. But with the collapse of the coup (if that is the proper name for what looks more to be an attempt to blackmail Gorbachev), the rate of imperial disintegration was hastened.

Revolutions, even if they are stage-managed in the beginning, take on a life of their own. The French Revolution began as a coup by the upper classes who wanted to wrest power away from the king and torpedo his reforms. They quickly lost control. What defines a revolution (even a peaceful one) is not the aims of the architects but a hidden agenda that only reveals itself in the unfolding of events. When Gorbachev was only talking about reform and openness, the ethnic minorities of the U.S.S.R. went on a rampage, and when an attempt was made to curb Gorbachev's democratic reforms, the really important response has been the declarations of independence issued by republic after republic. As of late August, Yeltsin was already getting nervous. Wait until the autonomous regions of his own federa-

tion begin to get restive. Yeltsin the democrat will be replaced by Yeltsin the nationalist, just as Stalin the Communist turned into the defender of Holy Mother Russia.

Americans, meanwhile, rejoiced at the discomfiture of the hard-liners, without stopping to wonder why we can't have the same deal over here. Autonomy and local government are nothing less than justice in Estonia, but what about South Dakota or Alabama? We call them states, after all, and the federal "Republic" agreed to by our ancestors accorded all the states something like sovereignty within their borders. If even the evil empire is willing to concede some measure of local autonomy to its constituent republics, why can't the good empire do the same? Ah, but there is a vital difference between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Over there, some of the citizens at least want their freedom, and they want it so badly that they are willing to stand up to tanks. We, on the other hand, prefer the cozy comforts of servitude, and confine our rebellion to letters to the editor or the endless stream of little reports issued by think tanks.

Perhaps the obvious parallelism between their "captive republics" and ours explains the reluctance of George Bush and so many "conservatives" to recognize the independence of the Baltic states. Political liberty has a way of spreading. Today Vilnius, tomorrow — Raleigh?

—Thomas Fleming

**TITLE X FUNDS** to "family planning" clinics that dispense abortion counseling were prohibited last summer as a result of the *Rust v. Sullivan* U.S. Supreme Court decision, which single-issue organizations indignantly denounced. It is ironic that the very people who claim that government should stay out of abortion decisions are the very same people who want government to *pay* for them. Their outcry prompted Congress to overturn the ruling and fund such clinics. As President Bush contemplates a veto, multi-issue taxpayers would like to in-