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Losing Mum and Pup: A Memoir

By Christopher Buckley

(Twelve, 251 pages, \$24.99)

Right Time, Right Place: Coming of Age with William F. Buckley Jr. and the Conservative Movement

By Richard Brookhiser

(Basic Books, 243 pages, \$27.50)

Reviewed by Wlady Pleszczynski

As long as I've known of him, Christopher Buckley has struck me as an odd piece of work. In early 1981, shortly after I joined this magazine, Bob Tyrrell received a letter from him. Christopher was very upset. Much as he had liked The American Spectator, he would no longer be able to recommend it to friends or purchase gift subscriptions. Bob's sin? He'd apparently made light of former Beatle John Lennon's death ("historic expiration" were, I believe, the offending words).

Some time later I came across Buckley's first (and most memorable) book, *Steaming to Bamboola*, about the post-college year he spent working on a tramp freighter. (Imagine if Somali pirates had tried to kidnap him!) It was during this adventure that he had had "FUCK YOU" tattooed onto his saluting hand. It wasn't intended for Gore Vidal, and as such it greatly irritated Christopher's father, who begged and begged him to have it removed. It would be years before he grudgingly did so.

In early 2001 he served as a master of ceremonies at the Media Research Center's farewell to the Clinton era. He gave a command performance: suave, eloquent, and bitingly funny and even partisan. It was a rare occasion that Christopher ever displayed his conservative bona fides. Indeed, the open suspicion was that he'd made his literary career by mocking his own side—including someone he'd worked for, Vice President Bush—for liberal consumption. His coming out for Barack Obama last fall was simply a return to form. Now, with the highly publicized release of *Losing Mum and Pup*, his memoir of his famous and glamorous parents' deaths and life, the controversy and mischief he has enjoyed

engendering reach new heights.

Who knows why individuals act the way they do. By all accounts, Christopher Buckley is as wonderfully-regally-polite, kind, generous, and warm as those Buckleys I have met over the years, not just his father, Bill, but also his uncle Reid and aunts Priscilla and Trish. Yet he seems insecure enough in his princeliness to blurt out, about his parents, "They had-how to put it?-class." But having class means never having to talk about it. Sadly, there is much in this memoir that isn't classy at all.

For most of the book, Buckley plays up having been orphaned, a conceit planted in his mind by his "old pal" Leon Wieseltier. But an orphan is a child that loses its parents, not a 55-year-old adult. Late in the game Buckley suddenly concedes his "prattling" on this score has been "pathetic," compared to the "sense of orphaning" that the young children who lost parents on 9/11 must feel. This is characteristic of Buckley's having it both ways.

As he gets set to describe what reviewers are calling his parents' "flaws," "warts and all," he lets on, "my sins are manifold and blushful," though he hopes "callousness and arrogance" aren't among them. (Not to worry, they are.) Or in recalling another of his countless contretemps with his father, he begins, "But being a devious little shit, I..." So that's all the cover he needs? But the topper comes when he informs us that in bidding farewell to his comatose mother, he whispered to her, "I forgive you." It reminded me of a recent CBS interview with Patti Davis in which she was asked if she had "forgiven" her mother, Nancy Reagan. It wasn't clear for what, though one can imagine. Being raised by the mother who married her no-goodnik father must have been endlessly traumatic. But that can't be Buckley's excuse.

Having introduced his own mother to readers on her deathbed, at her most defenseless, he subsequently explains her monstrous side. She told whoppers.

She embarrassed Buckley's daughter and humiliated her best friend, a Kennedy (yes, of those Kennedys). He remembered a huge lie from when he only six years old ("my introduction to a lifetime of mendacity"). She never finished college. She didn't read books. A third of the time she wasn't on speaking terms with her husband. Some of the time she and son weren't speaking either. Once you know all that, Buckley for all intents will say, Never mind! Or in his words: "Thinking back on it now, I'm filled with a sort of perverse pride in her." A good many purring anecdotes ensue.

Besides, he has a bigger fish to fry. That would be Pup. Why such lingering grievances? Religion and maybe sex, for starters. Pup simply could not accept that Christopher was agnostic ("his inner Savonarola was released at the merest hint of...impiety") and non-practicing. When Christopher was in boarding school, in response to one of his pranks, Pup asked the headmaster to inquire whether Christopher was involved in "an amorous dalliance" with another boy. But a larger cause seems to have been nothing more than a precocious Boomer's resentment of a father who supposedly hadn't offered him enough time and affection during those critical formative years. Amid his account of his father's difficult, illness-racked final year, he observes, "It is contra naturam (to use a WFB term) to say no to someone who has raised you, clothed you, fed you from day one-well, even if, in Pup's case, these duties were elaborately subcontracted." You'd think he was turned over to gypsies to be raised.

To his everlasting credit, Buckley did spend a great deal of the 10 months that separated his parents' deaths caring for his father. And though he provides more grisly detail than decency requires- and not once expresses gratitude to his parents for anything, or asks their forgiveness for, say, bringing an out-of-wedlock child into the world (not that readers

are told about the boy either, a strange omission in "an honest book," as he has called it)-by mid-book he is calling off the dogs and displaying a filial affection toward his father that can only be described as genuine and moving. This allows him to grapple with the real source of his permanent frustrations: his father's greatness, brilliance, and individuality, with which he never could quite compete, as if anyone else could. But as the only son of a giant, he might have been too close to the man to understand that, however much he also wanted to distance himself from him.

If the reader will carry one lasting good feeling from the book-and whatever else might be said about it, the writing is splendid-it is when Christopher recounts moments he now treasures, usually involving just him and his father

together, at sea, in Mexico, over a meal. And he doesn't even complain there were too few of them. But in the end, how could there not be?

OONE WILL NOTICE THAT in the New York Times Magazine's splashy excerpt from *Losing Mum and Pup*, the words "National Review" do not appear. They hardly appear in the book itself. Clearly, as some of Christopher's friends might put it, the flagship magazine of the conservative movement has never been where his head is at.

That can't be said about Richard Brookhiser, a longtime National Review editor and writer once assumed to be heir apparent to William F. Buckley at the magazine. Then for some reason, by the early 1990s, although he continued to write for NR, he drifted away to become an independent (and respected ) author and contributor to mainstream publications.

One assumed the decision was his. But we learn it wasn't. In a sense, Rick (he used to write for us a lot) is another Buckley son taking advantage of Bill's death to settle a long-standing score with him. Yet despite everything, his heart was and remains forever National Review's. How can that be? As he recounts in *Right Time, Right Place*, Rick was NR's famous prodigy-prominently published by the magazine while still in high school and brought on full-time after his graduation from Yale.

When he was 23, Bill Buckley made him a secret offer he couldn't refuse. He would be Bill's successor as editor in chief; in the meantime, he'd become senior editor and eventually managing editor. Eight years later, Buckley withdrew the offer, coldly, in a letter left on Rick's desk in an envelope marked "confidential," while Buckley himself was out of the country. He praised Rick's writing but said he lacked "executive flair." Nothing in this memoir suggests Buckley's assessment was unfair. The mistake was extending the offer to Rick in the first place, whether to keep him from going on to Yale Law School, where he'd been accepted, or to treat him as a surrogate for Christopher, who clearly was not disposed ever to succeed his father at the helm of National Review.

If any good came from this devastating blow it was Rick's being reminded of the decency and goodness of his own father, who, in case he wanted to pursue them now, offered to pay for his law school studies. "[H]e was a better man than the idol I had put in his place," Rick notes. Throughout the rest of his book, though friendly enough toward Buckley (Rick is never that outwardly friendly to begin with, as he'd be the first to admit, calling himself "consumed with snobbery" and a "know-it-all"), he persists in taking snipes at him, or at bringing him down a peg if he can, and taking great satisfaction when in later years Bill did ask him for editorial help only he could provide.

He provides memorable portraits of various NR writers, not all of them (D. Keith Mano) my cup of tea, or figures he properly appreciates (John Simon), though surely he is on target recalling the wondrous Joe Sobran:

He loved the great actors, and was an excellent mimic. He could begin some soliloquy-"Now is the winter of our discontent"-as Olivier; I would call out Gielgud, Burton, and he would change voices like gears.

Less defensible are the friendly words he has for figures who on Buckley's death criticized or even savaged him in print. He is kind toward Bob Tyrrell and our magazine, though he does give a hint as to why he stopped writing for us in the mid-1990s: he found the jokey shots taken at the newly elected Clintons at our 25th anniversary dinner unbecoming and had absolutely no use for any of the subsequent political wars, finding the 1990s "high pitched and frantic." He does spare a best friend, however, praising him as someone who made his mark in those years publishing "hard-hitting" books. What he doesn't tell you is that they were anti-Clinton books. It could also be, regarding *The American Spectator*, that the National Review-firster in Rick didn't like the higher profile we acquired at the time. I don't take it personally. You should see how dismissive he is of the *Weekly Standard*-even though by book's end his expression of support for the Iraq War could have been dictated by Bill Kristol.

Years ago, at a dinner honoring Buckley not long after he'd stepping down as NR editor, Rick offered a toast to Bill. Buckley liked it so much he asked for a copy. But Rick hadn't spoken from prepared text, and never did follow up, in part because there still were "wounds...too fresh to be bandaged over." He now reproduces those words at the close of

his book, too late for Buckley to read. Call it another Pyrrhic victory for a surviving son.

Wlady Pleszczynski is editorial director of The American Spectator.

Parallel Empires: The Vatican and the United States-Two Centuries of Alliance and Conflict

By Massimo Franco

(Doubleday, 221 pages, \$26)

Against the Grain: Christianity and Democracy, War and Peace

By George Weigel

(Crossroad, 339 pages, \$24.95)

Reviewed by Rev. Michael P. Orsi

Two recent books attempt to explain the relationship between the Vatican and the United States. Each has a different agenda, and thus they reach opposite conclusions. Common to both, however, is a primary focus on the debate over the legitimacy of America's war in Iraq.

Parallel Empires: The Vatican and the United States-Two Centuries of Alliance and Conflict, by Italian journalist Massimo Franco, portrays the Vatican as an independent actor on the world stage, guiding and guarding the flock of Christ. The other work, Against the Grain: Christianity and Democracy, War and Peace, a collection of essays by American Catholic commentator and papal biographer George Weigel, sees a strong relationship between the Vatican and the U.S. based on a mutual concern for saving Western civilization and promoting democratic government around the world.

Franco, who writes for Corriere della Sera, Italy's leading newspaper, makes no effort to disguise his dislike for any attempt to elide Vatican and U.S. policy. In contrast, Weigel, a Distinguished Fellow at Washington's conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center (and often described as a "theocon"), sees the union of Roman Catholicism and American democracy as part of the divine plan for advancing human rights. The Franco book begins with a history of U.S.-Vatican relations. From the early days of the Republic, according to Franco, Rome was considered a threat to the American constitutional principle of church-state separation. Franco highlights the diplomatic fits and starts of the past 230 years, beginning with the first high-level contact, an unofficial visit to the U.S. by Archbishop Gaetano Bedini, a Vatican diplomat, in 1853. That initial outreach effort was unsuccessful because of both Protestant suspicion of "papism," and the split that existed between liberal American Catholics who sought more autonomy from Rome and conservatives who wanted to maintain a tight relationship.

The Vatican's initial diplomatic breakthrough came with the appointment of Archbishop Francesco Satolli as apostolic delegate to the U.S. (1893-96). Speaking at an American Catholic Congress, he encouraged his audience to go forth "in one hand carrying the book of Christian faith, and the other the Constitution of the United States." He maintained that the U.S. was protected from papal interference "by the spirit of the Constitution, and the loyalty of those who guard it."

Satolli's efforts to equate American ideals with the Gospel were an exaggerated attempt to breach the divide that separated Washington and Rome. However, even after these conciliatory words, fear of Protestant backlash at too close an association with Catholicism forced occupants of the White House, including America's first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, to keep the Vatican at arm's length. To fill the diplomatic void, the Vatican continued to appoint apostolic delegates to the U.S., rather than ambassadors, for most of the 20th century.

At certain intervals, a working relationship was deemed valuable for both camps. World War II provided such an

occasion. President Franklin D. Roosevelt realized the importance of the Vatican as an international listening post. He also saw the need for Catholic support of his administration. In 1940, the question of international refugees during the war gave Roosevelt cover to nominate (without Senate approval) Myron C. Taylor as his personal representative to the Holy See. Franco insists that it was ultimately this kind of pragmatism that succeeded in establishing full diplomatic relations. In 1984 Ronald Reagan, realizing John Paul II's potential to help him bring down the Soviet Union, appointed William Wilson as the first U.S. ambassador to the Holy See. Archbishop Pio Laghi (1980-90), then the apostolic delegate, was elevated to be the first papal nuncio (ambassador) to the U.S.

According to Franco, the success of that joint venture provided impetus for theocons like Weigel (and his philosophical brethren, the so-called neocons) to elide Catholicism with American public policy. Reading Weigel, it would seem that the match was made in heaven-and it is here that the two authors make their opposing cases.

Whereas Franco sees a disconnect between Vatican concerns and the American approach to foreign policy, Weigel envisions a joining of forces to make the world safe for democracy. But Weigel goes even further. He sees the U.S. as the world's moral policeman, armed with Catholic ideals drawn directly from the great social encyclicals. He writes, "The first thing that Christian orthodoxy does for democracy has to do with the problem of what we might call 'making room' for democracy." He imagines the idea of American exceptionalism extended beyond our borders, with the U.S. divinely charged to uproot unjust governments that violate human rights so that "mini- Americas" can be established around the world. Regarding Iraq, Franco highlights the contrast between Vatican and U.S. policies (clear to him in the diplomatic exchanges prior to the war), where for Weigel they are of a piece. Franco's descriptions of the encounters between former pro-nuncio Cardinal Laghi and the Bush administration attest to the divide. He states, "The United States was slipping into a unilateralism that the United Nations and the Vatican considered a devastating development in international relations, foreshadowing a deterioration of relations between the West and the Islamic world." He further elaborates, "The United States and the Vatican, the West's two parallel empires, were worlds apart."

Weigel, on the other hand, evokes the just war theory, interpreting it in a light favorable to U.S. interventionism. He claims that preemptive strikes are in order to ensure the "tranquillitas ordinis" (tranquility of order) that, he says, extends beyond our own borders. Weigel justifies his position by arguing that "We are, as Augustine put it, to 'be peaceful...in warring,' that is, to keep the aim of peace first and foremost, and not only 'vanquish those whom you war against' but also 'bring them to the prosperity of peace....'"

Accordingly, Franco maintains, the Vatican's preferred agency for intervention in Iraq is the United Nations. Weigel is ultimately unconvinced of the UN's value in keeping world order and protecting human rights.

THERE IS A STARK DIFFERENCE between the two authors' visions of the "parallel empires." Franco's Vatican is more concerned with the promotion and protection of Catholics throughout the world. At the same time, the goal of the Holy See (the juridical embodiment of the moral office of the papacy) is to fulfill the Dominical command "to announce the Good News" and promote Gospel values. For Weigel, intervention by America, with its Christian natural law foundation in human rights, is the last bastion of hope for preserving the values of Western civilization. He sees those values threatened by a pusillanimous European Union, by a rapidly decreasing European native stock, by moral relativism, and by rising radical Islam on the Continent.

Both books are full of information and represent the philosophies of their respective constituencies well. But while Weigel makes many excellent, cogent points and realistic arguments, in the end Franco's presentation carries more weight. His historical depth and clarity regarding the Catholic Church in America and its relationship with the U.S. government is more theologically correct and consistent with the historical context of how the parallel empires have interacted over the years-each often clumsy in its diplomacy and sometimes quick to use the other for its own purposes. The message here is that the Church has to be careful not to marry a political ideology or ally itself too closely with any nation, lest it sacrifice its mission to build God's kingdom-which, of course, is "not of this world."

Reviewed by Rev. Michael P. Orsi

In the Name of Justice: Leading Experts Reexamine the Classic Article "The Aims of the Criminal Law"

Edited by Timothy Lynch

(Cato Institute, 251 pages, \$19.95)

Reviewed by James Srodes

At the start of the one unsatisfactory year I labored at Duke Law School in the early 1960s, our criminal law professor passed out two mimeographed supplements to our regular course casebook. One was a summary of the details of the major categories of sex crimes "to save you the wasted time looking them all up for your amusement."

The other was a bootlegged copy of a note prepared a few years earlier by Harvard Law School's legendary Henry M. Hart, Jr., for his own first-year criminal law students. Law schools in those days (and perhaps even now) had their own samizdat network of pirated cribs from other schools, and the Hart memo had been widely circulated. Our professor held up the casebook in one hand and the Hart memo in the other. "This [the casebook] will tell you what the criminal law is, and this [the memo] will tell you why."

While I was clearly not meant for a career in the law, I found many times during the next 40-odd years that my exposure to the way the law is organized, its special reasoning-in short, the why of it-made me better able to understand the political and economic events I was charged with reporting and translating. That's why this 50th anniversary reexamination of Hart's influential theory of the criminal law should interest both practicing attorney and any layman stupefied by the changes in both law and society going on around us.

To Hart all law is more than a set of arbitrary prohibitions, but criminal law is even more a seminal agent for a community. He wrote:

Man is a social animal, and the function of law is to enable him to realize his potentialities as a human being through the forms and modes of social organization. It is important to consider how the criminal law services this ultimate end....What is crucial in this process is the enlargement of each individual's capacity for effectual and responsible decision. For it is only through personal, self-reliant participation, by trial and error, in the problems of existence, both personal and social, that the capacity to participate effectively can grow. Man learns wisdom in choosing by being confronted with choices and by being made aware that he must abide the consequences of his choice. In the training of a child in the small circle of the family, this principle is familiar enough. It has the same validity in the training of an adult in the larger circle of the community.

Seen in this light, the criminal law has an obviously significant and, indeed, a fundamental role to play in the effort to create a good society. For it is the criminal law which defines the minimum conditions of man's responsibility to his fellows and holds him to that responsibility. The assertion of social responsibility has value in the treatment even of those who have become criminals. It has far greater value as a stimulus to the great bulk of mankind to abide by the law and to take pride in so abiding.

The end result, the enforcement of criminal law, should be clear enough for all society to understand what is going on, Hart concluded. "Punishments should be severe enough to impress not only upon the defendant's mind, but upon the public mind, the gravity of society's condemnation of irresponsible behavior. But the ultimate aim of condemning irresponsibility is training for responsibility." (Emphasis added.) Criminal law to Hart was not just to dissuade and punish malefactors; it also was to bolster the law-abiding citizen in his good behavior. It's a point one rarely hears these days.

While the book is worth its price just for making Hart's long-ago memo accessible to a new generation of readers, its focus is a collection of essays compiled by Timothy Lynch, the director of the Cato Institute's Project on Criminal Justice. The purpose of the reconsideration acknowledges that the theoretical underpinnings of criminal law have



changed so dramatically- alarmingly, even-that some notice should be taken. But when one reads the list of contributors, there is a first impulse to wonder whether Lynch was having a joke in rather bad taste at Hart's expense. Cato by tradition is not intellectually afraid to make available the views of thinkers of less orthodox persuasions, but in this case some of the commentators take individualism past the boundaries of eccentricity and into the realms of the bizarre.

The very first commentary that follows Hart's memo is by Judge Alex Kozinski, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. A 1982 Reagan appointee in the notoriously liberal circuit, Kozinski has built a reputation as a somewhat lighthearted dissenter. But last year he found it hard during hearings on an obscenity case to laugh away charges that he-according to the Los Angeles Times-"maintained a publicly accessible Web site featuring sexually explicit photos and videos" at alex.kozinski.com. Among the images the newspaper cited was a photo of naked women on all fours painted to look like cows and a video of a half-dressed man and some farm animals. In conceding the sexual material was inappropriate, Kozinski called the site's other content "funny."

This adds a certain piquancy to the title of Judge Kozinski's commentary on Hart, "You're (Probably) a Federal Criminal." He starts off with a truly astonishing assertion: "Since most people have committed at least one crime carrying serious consequences, police and prosecutors choose who'll actually suffer for their crimes." His specific target is reasonable enough, if somewhat overstated. "There are thousands of federal crimes and hundreds of thousands of federal regulations that can be criminally enforced." But then he launches into outer space with the blanket accusation that the proliferation of federal rules "becomes a loaded gun in the hands of any malevolent prosecutor or aspiring tyrant."

There are other examples of where the messenger, if not the message, gives the reader pause. Justice Richard B. Sanders of the state of Washington's supreme court is a noted libertarian whose entirely apposite commentary expresses a concern for the proliferation of "civil commitments" that social agencies use to confine or otherwise limit the freedoms of individuals outside the legal system. His particular target is his state's extra-judicial so-called sexually violent predator laws, the forerunners of which Hart specifically warned about in his essay.

Sanders, unfortunately, is something of a home-state character, albeit a popular one. Just last November he stood up in the middle of a speech to the Federalist Society in Washington, D.C., and yelled "Tyrant. You are a tyrant!" at ailing Attorney General Michael Mukasey, who shortly afterward collapsed and was carried off to a hospital. Since then, Justice Sanders has published an op-ed piece in the Seattle Times urging the Obama administration's Attorney General Eric Holder to prosecute Bush administration officials for violations of the Constitution during their war on terrorism.

IT IS ONE GETS TO THE ESSAY by Harvard gadfly Harvey Silverglate that one begins to suspect what editor Timothy Lynch is up to. A noted civil liberties (read: ACLU) litigator, Silverglate notes that Hart foreshadowed the current concern about the extension of criminal sanctions to acts that legislatures have not specifically prohibited. His more recent public statements, for example, have protested the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's announced intentions to probe whether Apple founder Steven Jobs misled investors by not fully disclosing details of his health crisis.

Even a one-year law student knows that the law is a plastic thing, not hewn out of immutable granite. By including commentary from those one might at first glance consign to the outer fringes of legal analysis- but who have standing in their areas-the Cato reconsideration of Henry Hart is one, I will venture, that Hart himself would have endorsed. We are squarely in a time that Hart warned about, when criminals are portrayed as "victims" of the society they inhabit and are entitled to "treatment," without regard to the victim or the far broader law-abiding population. So in this time of what we might call the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Theory of American Law, Justice, and Society, we need to know what its various advocates are saying.

So, quite properly, Alan Dershowitz, probably the most loquacious of cable television's legal chatterers, should be read for raising a very timely question, "How Would Henry Hart Have Approached the Problem of Suicide Terrorism?" After all, how can the law prevent a violent criminal act by a perpetrator whose self-destruction is his goal?

Lest you think Lynch and Cato have become prisoners of fringe loonies, be advised there also are cogent insights from voices more familiar to Spectator readers, including James Q. Wilson and Judge Richard Posner. As a lagniappe, Lynch has included a still relevant 1984 essay by Milton and Rose Friedman, a 2003 address to the American Bar Association by Supreme Court justice Anthony M. Kennedy, and a particularly timely speech made in 1940 by then attorney general Robert H. Jackson, the Supreme Court justice who later served as the chief U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. His comments on the role of the federal prosecutor should be required reading-especially by today's federal prosecutors.

Read this book. Then think about it.

James Srodes is a longtime Washington journalist and author whose latest book is *Franklin: The Essential Founding Father* (Regnery).

*Liberty and Tyranny: A Conservative Manifesto*

By Mark R. Levin

(Threshold Editions, 256 pages, \$26)

Reviewed by Jeffrey Lord

I first encountered Mark Levin when our respective bosses, Drew Lewis (mine) and Ed Meese (Levin's), were leading figures and friends in the Reagan era. Meese was counselor to the president and later attorney general, the conservative Reagan's champion of conservatism; Lewis was the secretary of transportation who recommended Reagan fire the striking air-traffic controllers. The issue at hand was a minor one, a mid-level job in the Justice Department for an ex-Lewis aide. My task was simple: call Mark Levin, my counterpart, and see if Meese couldn't help move the process along. The conversation that resulted was memorable. It turned out the ex-Lewis aide had been a Bush supporter in 1980. And while it was true that George H. W. Bush was now Ronald Reagan's vice president, Levin took pains to instruct me on the importance of the conservative principles behind the Reagan Revolution.

Clearly, the job applicant didn't understand them, or he would never have been caught dead supporting Bush. So, as sweetly as possible, Levin told me that Ed Meese would not be pushing a candidate who was less than devoted to conservative principles for even a mid-level job in the Reagan Justice Department.

Levin never actually used the phrase "Get off the phone, you big dope"-the line he has now made famous in his role as a star of the conservative talk radio firmament. But I found myself laughing after I hung up, sensing that in some form that was exactly the essence of the message just politely delivered.

Levin has now taken the time to put those principles into book form. It is an irony in light of the considerable success he has begun to enjoy with his ABC-syndicated talk radio show that his less public work as an attorney (the longtime president of the conservative Landmark Legal Foundation, he was also the attorney general's chief of staff at Justice) is overshadowed by celebrity. Yet it is his first-rate legal mind, combined with an astute political sense, that has launched his veritable Renaissance-style career as lawyer, radio star, and writer.

That mind is well on display in *Liberty and Tyranny: A Conservative Manifesto*. The dawn of the Obama era has brought forth like clockwork the usual wringing of hands on the right. As Thomas E. Dewey whined about "impractical theorists" leading the Republican Party to destruction (this after twice losing the presidency as a moderate), so modern self-appointed "reformers" prattle about the need to "moderate" conservatism so that it can "win again." As if winning to implement the wrong principles were not the classic Pyrrhic victory.

Levin will have none of this.



In a crisp series of essays he illuminates in detail essentially what he was saying to me on that long-ago telephone call. "Conservatism is a way of understanding life, society and governance," he writes. Going back to original sources including Adam Smith, Charles Montesquieu, John Locke, and Edmund Burke, Levin briskly demonstrates how to apply conservative principles in policy areas as diverse as the free market, welfare, the environment, immigration, and the interpretation of the Constitution itself.

Pointing out that the classical definition of "liberal" is directly opposite to today's authoritarian liberals, Levin prefers the term "Statist." The word is a cogent description of the American left's "insatiable appetite for control." Says Levin of the Statist: "His sights are set on his next meal before he has fully digested his last. He is constantly agitating for government action...concocting one pretext and grievance after another to manipulate public perceptions and build momentum for the divestiture of liberty and property from its rightful possessors." That constant agitation, he notes, is wrapped always in tones of moral indignation.

Levin is an originalist, viewing the Constitution as the philosophical bedrock on which America is built. "It is-and must be-a timeless yet durable foundation that individuals can count on in a changing world." Issue by issue, he provides the reader an X-ray of Statism gone wild.

One issue is free market economics. This is an era when the president of the United States has fired the head of General Motors and a Rasmussen poll claims only 53 percent of the American people prefer capitalism over socialism. It is no small thing, then, for Levin to patiently explain that the "key to understanding the free market is private property." He connects the dots among Statists, government, and recent disasters featuring Fannie Mae, the Federal Reserve, and the financial tool known as the derivative, a child of government intervention in the marketplace.

Nor is he afraid to connect the dots in the environmental struggle with Statists. Levin explodes the myth that conservatives reject science. Whether discussing the use of DDT as an insecticide, global warming, or automobile technology, Levin moves effortlessly from core principle to scientific fact, statistics, and research. He deconstructs the Statist reliance on bad science or no science, emotionalism, and faddishness. The latter could not have a better illustration than Levin's recounting of Newsweek magazine's alarmist 1975 article on the looming perils of "The Cooling World." Said the magazine breathlessly: "The central fact is that after three quarters of a century of extraordinarily mild conditions, the earth's climate seems to be cooling down." By 2008, Newsweek was insisting that "Global Warming Is a Cause of This Year's Extreme Weather." Oops. In a flash of his radio show humor, Levin runs a two-and-a-half-page list of every phenomenon attributed by alarmists to global warming, from "better beer" to "gingerbread houses collapse" to "short-nosed dogs."

This is a serious book written with great purpose by a serious man. A call to action, as its subtitle "A Conservative Manifesto" proclaims. Provided at the end of the book are tactical steps for conservatives to employ in the fight.

Hence it should not go unmentioned that Levin's popularity as the growling, volcanic voice on the radio is more than mere shtick. It is a threat to all things left in that most sacred of leftist venues: the entertainment world. Without question, a real fear of Statists is the insistent acclaim of not only Levin but his radio colleagues and friends Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, both of whom get an acknowledgment in the book. A book signing on Long Island featuring Levin and Hannity produced a celebrity-sized crowd of 8,000 fans. These three have mastered the art of translating core conservative principles into a popular entertainment form. This is kryptonite to the American left, which views itself as the invulnerable arbiter of American culture in the media. The telltale mention of Hannity and Levin in a recent Vanity Fair hit piece on Limbaugh is a sure sign of just how outraged Statists are over the trio's influence. This influence also irritates conservative "reformers" who don't have 8,000 people standing in line for their books.

Mark Levin has written the necessary book of the Obama era. A book that he was born to write. Its best-seller success testifies not only to Levin's smarts and popularity but also to the hunger in America for timeless conservative principles.

By the way: the guy I tried to get Levin to hire in the Reagan administration? He got his job.

In the Bush administration.

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