

Physician of My Sin-Sick Soul

John Newton (1725–1807)

Physician of my sin-sick soul
To thee I bring my case;
My raging malady control,
And heal me by thy grace.

Pity the anguish I endure,
See how I mourn and pine;
For never can I hope a cure
From any hand but thine.

I would disclose my whole complaint,
But where shall I begin?
No words of mine can fully paint
That worst distemper, sin.

It lies not in a single part,
But thro' my frame is spread
A burning fever in my heart,
A palsy in my head.

It makes me deaf, and dumb, and blind,
And impotent and lame,
And overclouds and fills my mind,
With folly, fear and shame.

A thousand evil thoughts intrude,
Tumultuous in my breast;
Which indispose me for my food,
And rob me of my rest.

Lord I am sick, regard my cry,
And set my spirit free;
Say, canst thou let a sinner die,
Who longs to live to thee?

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Christianity and the Alt-Right

Kevin T. Bauder

The old dictum says that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. I disagree. A friend is someone who values and honors what I value. An enemy is someone who destroys or debases what I value. It is quite possible for an enemy of my enemy to destroy or debase what I value. The enemy of my enemy may still be my enemy.

Modern conservatism was built upon three thinkers. Richard Weaver laid a philosophical foundation in *Ideas Have Consequences*. Russell Kirk traced the history of conservative thought in *The Conservative Mind*. Friedrich Hayek pointed out the connection between political and economic freedom in *The Road to Serfdom*. These were learned men. Each wrote many works, but ordinary readers found them challenging. To flourish, conservatism needed a popularizer.

Enter the young William F. Buckley, who burst onto the scene in 1951 with *God and Man at Yale*. In 1955 he launched a conservative journal of opinion, *National Review*. His goal was to establish an articulate, reasonable standard-bearer for a conservative movement. To achieve that goal Buckley had to distance conservatism from two pretenders: radical libertarianism, represented by Ayn Rand, and (usually antisemitic) conspiracism, represented by the John Birch Society. Consequently, *National Review* regularly denounced both Randian libertarianism and the Birchers.

Buckley saw liberals as opponents, but he saw the Randians and the Birchers as enemies. He understood that allying with these groups would poison conservatism. Instead of trying to rally the hard right, he aimed to persuade moderates on his left. The strategy worked. Buckley's circle was chiefly responsible for the conservative takeover of the Republican party in 1964 and the eventual election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency.

This early version of conservatism was fully compatible with Christian principles. In fact, certain Christian insights were definitive: belief in a transcendent moral order, recognition of human fallenness and imperfectability, and private property as a fundamental right. Indeed, many of the leading conservatives were committed to some version of "mere Christianity."



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

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The origins of contemporary conservatism provides a contrast with the situation in which conservatives now stand. Donald Trump gained popularity through the support of the alt-right. After his election I began to follow the postings of alt-right figures. I wanted to understand what their values were and how closely they aligned with both traditional conservatism and biblical Christianity.

At this point two caveats are necessary. First, not every alt-right figure holds every objectionable opinion. The alt-right is not particularly systematic. Second, the alt-right objects to many things that any reasonable person should find objectionable. The press really is biased. Illegal immigration really is a threat. Politicians really are trying to take away your guns. Voter fraud really does take place. There really is an entrenched and powerful bureaucracy that resembles a “deep state.” So, is the enemy of my enemy my friend? Or is the enemy of my enemy also my enemy?

Despite these caveats, certain trends appear to be widespread within the alt-right. Here is a quick listing.

Conspiracy theories. Just over three years ago I started seeing references to “Q,” now often called “Q-anon.” This shadowy figure, who was supposed to be highly placed, began to leak news about a secret cabal of government officials and other powerful individuals who were involved in Satanism, cannibalism, and even worldwide child sex trafficking. Q also began to predict specific events such as arrests and a “storm,” or mass cleanup of corruption, most of which never came to pass.

Visceral reaction. Much of the alt-right is motivated and dominated by visceral reaction, relying less on thoughtful argument and more on screeds and memes. In moments of true emergency, visceral reactions may be useful, but as a way of life they are dangerous. Most people cannot think while they are reacting. Consequently, they are easily manipulated and driven by unscrupulous demagogues. Reactionaries cannot sustain the kind of decades-long momentum necessary to achieve a consensus and build a constructive movement. Reactionary movements are almost always destructive.

Exclusivist nationalism. Patriotism (the love of one’s country) is a good thing. Even nationalism (seeking the interests of one’s country) is not necessarily bad. There is a kind of exclusivist nationalism, however, that is dominated by xenophobia and is callous about the damage that self-seeking interest can do to others. This sort of national exclusivism is incompatible both with Christian charity and with the interconnectedness between the United States and many other nations.

Ethnic separatism. The alt-right is very white. It looks at other ethnicities with condescension, suspicion, and contempt. Much of the alt-right is openly hostile toward people of color. It is hard to say where the alt-right ends and where white supremacy movements begin. The alt-right is also laced with

antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Its opposition to the state of Israel and its suspicion of Jewish ethnicity and culture run deep. These features cannot be reconciled with a biblical anthropology or Israelology. Neither can they be reconciled with the emphatic rejection of antisemitism by Buckley and other builders of conservatism.

Neopaganism. Connected with the antisemitism of the alt-right is a silly revival of paganism. In particular, the white supremacist side of the alt-right is seeking to reinstitute cartoon versions of the old Germanic religions, particularly devotion to Odin and Thor. These are sometimes combined inconsistently with Native American or other occult practices. The influence of paganism accounts for the haberdashery of the “buffalo man” Jake Angeli in the chamber of the United States Senate. Angeli considers himself to be a shaman—a pagan priest. This commitment to paganism is obviously incompatible with Christianity; this display of sheer looniness is at odds with any thoughtful conservatism.

Disorder. The first generation of modern conservatives emphasized that order must precede liberty. Disorder corrodes freedom, and anarchy dissolves it entirely. Conservatives have always recognized that “hasty innovation may be a devouring conflagration, rather than a torch of progress” (Kirk, *Conservative Mind*, 9). For the alt-right, however, freedom comes first, even at the cost of complete social upheaval. One gets the impression that most figures on the alt-right are preparing for civil war. Some do so reluctantly, but others seem eager to precipitate Ragnarok. This willingness to promote disorder runs contrary both to conservatism and to biblical Christianity (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Tim 2:1–4; 1 Pet 2:13–17).

Even if conservatives and the Republican party can separate themselves from the alt-right today, it will take years to repair the damage. The alt-right is poison, and the body that has swallowed it will be sick for a long time. At minimum, Christians of all sorts—including the most genuinely conservative Christians—should repudiate the alt-right and its ideologies.

Granted, the alt-right is concerned about much of what I am concerned about. The alt-right opposes much of what I oppose. But sometimes the enemy of my enemy is still my enemy.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
