

O 'Tis a Lovely Thing to See

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

O 'tis a lovely thing to see
A man of prudent heart,
Whose thoughts, and lips, and life agree
To act a useful part.

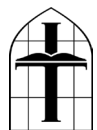
When envy, strife, and wars begin
In little angry souls,
Mark how the sons of peace come in,
And quench the kindling coals.

Their minds are humble, mild, and meek,
Nor let their fury rise;
Nor passion moves their lips to speak,
Nor pride exalts their eyes.

Their frame is prudence mixed with love,
Good works fulfil their day;
They join the serpent with the dove,
But cast the sting away.

Such was the Savior of mankind,
Such pleasures he pursued;
His flesh and blood were all refined,
His soul divinely good.

Lord, can these plants of virtue grow
In such a heart as mine?
Thy grace my nature can renew,
And make my soul like thine.



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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Now Is the Time

Kevin T. Bauder

The words *conservative* and *progress* are not antonyms. Conservatives do believe in change and in some forms of progress. In particular, they seek the progress of conservative ideals within human cultures and societies, and especially within American culture and society. They want this progress because they believe that human beings flourish better under conservative ideals than under liberal, “progressive” ones.

One idea that conservatives favor is limited government with checks and balances. They want to slow down the political process both to foster adequate deliberation and to protect the rights of minorities. To do this, they believe that interests must be pitted against each other. Population is only one legitimate interest. Region is another. Class is another, if class is understood as function rather than income. The interests of miners are not identical to those of physicians, which are not exactly those of farmers.

Conservatives are also realists. They recognize that no perfect balancing of interests is possible. But in the Constitution they deliberately pitted the interests of population (the House of Representatives) against the interests of region (the Senate). Both kinds of interests are represented when the Electoral College selects the President. Direct election of the Chief Executive by popular vote would remove an important check against mob rule.

Another important way of balancing the government has been to divide its functions among distinct branches. The work of legislation is different from the work of implementation and enforcement, and that in turn is different from the work of interpretation. In America, each of these functions has been assigned to a distinct branch of government. The theory is that when each of the three acts according to its assigned role, no single branch gains too much power.

That theory has been placed under severe stress during the past century. The stress comes from several factors, of which three are particularly noteworthy. The first is that the legislative branch often finds itself paralyzed because representatives and senators become unwilling to place the interests of the nation ahead of their chances of being reelected. The second is that the judicial branch has stepped into this vacuum by assuming a quasi-legislative

role, fabricating constitutional rights out of thin air and effectively making law from the bench. The third is that, since Woodrow Wilson at least, the Chief Executive has assumed an imperial role through the use of executive orders.

Over the past hundred years, the Left has rarely advanced its agenda directly through legislation. Instead, it has tried to control social and governmental policy through domination of the judicial and executive branches. A runaway executive branch has turned elementary legislative initiatives into sweeping programs of social change by imposing a massive burden of governmental regulation. The courts have often acquiesced in the executive's overreach, and they have supplemented it by rulings that blocked challenges to executive rule-making authority. The result is a muddle of bureaus, offices, and red tape that truncates individual rights and frustrates individual initiative. The movement is virtually always in a Leftward direction.

The mess that I have just described is what the hard Right sometimes describes as the Swamp. The Right wants to drain the Swamp, for only when the Swamp is drained will American government be checked and balanced as envisioned. Donald Trump has taken one very important step in the direction of reform. He has appointed originalist judges to the Supreme Court. These are justices who understand the importance of judicial restraint, and they seem determined to rein in the power of runaway courts—including the Supreme Court. Amy Coney Barrett's recent warning to Ketanji Brown Jackson about an "imperial judiciary" sounds exactly the right note, and we can hope that her attitude continues to dominate the court.

But a second adjustment must be made, and that involves dismantling the imperial presidency. Here, conservatives are faced with a dilemma. The Obama and Biden administrations significantly reshaped the social and political landscape by issuing executive orders. The most immediate redress comes from the Trump administration's willingness to rescind those orders and to issue contrary executive orders. The effectiveness of this approach can be gauged by the speed and degree to which DEI initiatives have collapsed. It can also be gauged by the way that men are suddenly finding themselves barred from women's sports and by the way that the Trump administration has gone after key universities for blatant anti-Semitism.

These are good results, but there is a problem. They all rely on an imperial presidency, only a more conservative one. That is the political equivalent of providing methadone to drug addicts. We have switched from a liberal drug to a conservative one, but the goal should be to get off the drug altogether.

What real conservatives must work toward is the dismantling of the imperial presidency. By that, I am not suggesting that the legitimate and enumerated powers of the executive should be abridged. What I am suggesting

is that the powers of the executives should be restricted to those that are enumerated in the Constitution.

Conservatives who may rejoice in what the President is doing today must remember that the office of President will not always be held by a (relative) conservative. In the hands of a Leftist, all the progress and gains of the current administration can and probably will be lost. Conservatives must not allow themselves to forget the havoc that Obama and Biden wreaked upon the United States, largely through the imperial presidency.

Right now, those on the Left seem eager to rein in the presidency. They will be less eager if a Democratic Congress is elected. They will be completely unwilling next time a Democratic president is elected. If presidential authority is going to be trimmed, it needs to happen now. This is the moment to restore balance to American government.

How do we get there? Reining in the imperial presidency requires Congress to act decisively. By *decisively*, I mean that it must act in sufficient numbers as to override the presidential veto that will surely come. And it must act within the next year.

My guess is that Republicans will not be able to look past the short-term gains that they can accrue by letting Trump issue executive orders. Those short-term gains, however, will prove ephemeral if—when!—another Leftist occupies the White House. Congress is supposed to make laws. So let it make laws that break the executive branch's stranglehold over the American bureaucracy.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and 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.
