

MAN RAMPANT
SEASON 2: THE COVID DIARIES

OFFICIAL STUDY GUIDE

**MAN
RAMPANT**

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THE COVID DIARIES

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Man Rampant Season 2: The Covid Diaries, Official Study Guide
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EPISODE 1

THE DEATH OF DISSENT

THE POINT

“If you have a huge conformist electronic mob ready to chase people for dissenting,...they don’t care all the much what I say.... What they do know is that they hate me for dissent.... The response is not I disagree with you, this is why. The response is I wish you were dead.”

*Peter Hitchens, Journalist, Writer, Author of
The Abolition of Britain*

MARSHMALLOW SHTICK

If you are anything like I am, an exciting fourth quarter of a football game has often raised profound

philosophical questions. Whenever a team executes a brilliant and exciting two-minute offense, as the end of the game is approaching, I am prompted to wonder, “Why couldn’t they move the ball like that in the first quarter?” I guess there’s something about deadlines that creates the aura of emergency, and it motivates people to do things that they ordinarily wouldn’t be willing or able to do.

There’s an analogy here. The progressive left has an agenda for the entire globe, and their ordinary ground game is the climate change strategy. They’ve been at it for decades, and they’ve been content to gain three yards at a carry, with a number of successive first downs to their credit. But the Covid-19 scare has been their two-minute offense. They’ve gotten more ground covered in the last several weeks than they’ve been able to do over the last several decades on the climate change front. Their goal is power. They want to be able to manage, using the words of Deuteronomy 28:6, “your going out and coming in.”

No denies that true emergencies can always happen, and should be treated like true emergencies. And in a true emergency, an alien invasion, a giant meteor shower, a smaller version of Noah’s flood, nobody would have any objection to governmental authorities responding accordingly. But unfortunately there are some ostensible emergencies that

can look like a true emergency. And we should remember the truth: that there's nothing quite so permanent as a temporary government program.

We would do well to remember the warnings about governmental emergency powers left to us by Friedrich Hayek: "The conditions under which such emergency powers may be granted without creating the danger that they will be retained when the absolute necessity has passed are among the most difficult and important points a Constitution must decide on.... Emergencies have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have been eroded—and once they are suspended it is not difficult for anyone who has assumed such emergency powers to see to it that the emergency will persist.... Indeed if all needs felt by important groups that can be satisfied only by the exercise of dictatorial powers constitute an emergency, every situation is an emergency situation." That's from *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, Vol. 3, Chapter 17.

Now that last comment is worth pondering. We need to take it to heart. Are there any important constituencies out there that believe, for example, that we are living in a *constant* state of emergency because of the threat of climate change? And is there any possibility at all of a Green getting elected to high office, or someone completely beholden to the greens?

Many Christians are entirely too naïve about the goals of the Greens, thinking that they are motivated by a simple and innocent desire to keep woodland bunnies free and happy. But these people are actually watermelons—green on the outside, red on the inside. Our problem is that, in the name of fighting the Coronavirus, we have ceded to the government the authority of emergency powers that were granted on the basis of a dubious scientific approach to computer modeling, which is the same approach that is used by the climate change alarmists.

We may soon discover that states of emergency are far easier to get into than they are to get out of. C.S. Lewis once passed a Narnian proverb on to us, one that we would do well to remember: “Easily in, but not easily out, as the lobster said in the lobster pot.

Douglas Wilson

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Thomas Sowell says, “There are no solutions, only trade-offs.” Why is it important in a crisis to weigh different advantages and disadvantages instead of looking for a single solution? What are some political issues where we ignore unforeseen consequences?
2. How do liberals often accuse conservatives of not having compassion (i.e. seeking the death

of the old)? Why does this appeal work so well? How do conservatives often lose by making appeals to reason and logic?

3. What is an expert? Why does our society respect experts so much? How is our society selective about which experts we choose to believe?
4. How did the government use the mob to enforce conformity to Covid-19 restrictions instead of using intimidation? How has the internet become a mob? How can someone on the internet use shame and intimidation and black-listing to silence dissent? How is this more effective than straightforward government censorship and intimidation?
5. Why is scientific consensus being used as a political weapon? Why do people accuse their opponents of being conspiracy theorists? Why is this such an effective tactic?

FURTHER SCRIPTURE READING

Read Isaiah 8:11-22 and John 9. How does Isaiah contrast fear of man with fear of God? How do the Pharisees use intimidation to try to get the man born blind and his parents to reject Jesus? What reasons do they give for it being impossible for

Jesus to have healed the man? How do their beliefs prevent them from seeing the truth?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM OF THE CEREAL AISLE

THE POINT

“[Consumerism] shifted us from authority to preference. You go into a supermarket. You’ve got fifty cereals you choose. Everything in America’s a matter of your choice, your preference, including things that matter like relationships and including things that really matter like faith.... You see people shopping for their churches, and shopping for music, and shopping for sermons, and giving up stuff they don’t like, the Gospel as you know well is as much demand and challenge as it is promise and fulfillment.”

~Os Guinness, *Social Critic, Writer, Author of*
The Last Call for Liberty

MARSHMALLOW SHTICK

I recently made the decision to revisit some of Francis Schaeffer's books and was really blessed by it. In many ways, his writings and his warnings remain as relevant as ever. But like that ancient prophetess Cassandra, the more his cautions are found to have been most prescient, the more contemporary Christians are likely to continue to dismiss it.

I began to read them while I was still in the Navy, back in the early '70s. Initially, it was almost entirely alien to me. I remember joking to someone that *Escape from Reason* was an odd instance of a Presbyterian writing in tongues. But this was actually the result of my own poor educational background.

As time went on, and not that much time either, things in America really began to come unstuck. I'm thinking of *Roe* in 1973 and all of a sudden what Schaeffer was talking about became intensely relevant. Most evangelicals were caught flatfooted and did not quite know what to think or how to respond and some of the initial responses were troubling.

It was by no means a foregone conclusion that evangelicals would wind up as staunchly pro-life as they've been. Credit for that, in my view, goes largely to Francis Schaeffer, his documentary series, "How Should We Then Live," was followed up by, "Whatever Happened to the Human Race," and so

it was that Christian worldview thinking was introduced to the evangelical world.

I remember starkly what a novelty it was. Consistent Christians have always wanted to be more than Sunday-go-to-meeting Christians. But what this meant was largely that we would be faithful in church attendance, we would read our Bibles and pray, we'd pray during the week, and that we would endeavor to live clean lives that would not disgrace the Gospel.

Our interaction with unbelieving culture was largely a man-the-lifeboats form of evangelism. We sought to bring in interested unbelievers so that they too could believe in Christ, start attending church, read their Bibles, pray during the week, and also endeavor to live in an upright way.

That Christians, speaking as Christians, might have something to say about architecture, film, literature, law enforcement or public policy was the novelty. For many of us, it was really bracing. The tagline that we use here in Moscow, "All of Christ for all of life," is a sentiment that can be traced back to Schaeffer's influence.

However it happened, Schaeffer became the mainstream of evangelicalism. It is a big river and there's a right bank and a left bank. There are those on the left who want to use worldview thinking as a cover for surrendering to the world. Instead of

adopting Schaeffer's hostility to every form of relativism, they want to become radically relativistic, all while proclaiming their commitment to their core values. But anybody who talks about core values doesn't have any.

On the right bank, we can find purist followers of Cornelius Van Til, with regard to apologetic method, or of Rousas Rushdoony, with regard to cultural engagement. A frequent complaint from them is that Schaeffer learned from them, packaged it differently, making it all palatable to middle of the road evangelicals, and that he ought to have been more open about his commonality with them. Schaeffer, according to them, was a middle of the road radical, and he ought to have done more to make himself unpalatable.

Whatever happened there, and I do not know what it was, we should continue to be thankful for Schaeffer's legacy and in the province of God, it really is Schaeffer's legacy. If ever there was a time when Christians needed to return to a passion for true truth, it is now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so easy to become nostalgic about community? How does sin create the need for rules and written agreements within communities?

What are some of the burdens that come from living together in community?

2. Why is it that Christians often focus on just bad ideology or theology instead of on culture? How has the vast amount of choices we have as consumers affected our culture? How does it tempt us to think about truth? How has this pushed Evangelical Christians to go soft on sexual issues?
3. What is the problem with how modern Evangelicals try to arrange for church growth? How has business and entrepreneurialism changed church marketing?
4. How did the Left change the culture by capturing institutions (media, education, entertainment)? What are some of the problems with focusing primarily on political goals?
5. How do we avoid bringing the attitude of “the customer is always right” into our Christianity? What does it mean that the Gospel brings both challenge and promise?
6. How is repentance the only hope for our culture? How can we have Christian hope even though things look bleak right now? What are some

moments in history when people repented and it changed the world?

FURTHER SCRIPTURE READING

Read Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:1-18, and 4:1-13. What is the beginning of wisdom? What are some of the ways in which we get wisdom? Who should we listen to? What are the rewards of a life of wisdom?

EPISODE 3

THE LONG WAR

THE POINT

“The scientist now has taken over our lives, and he is telling us what to do, and the people we elected to represent us simply have to bow their heads and say, “Yes, we will do that”. And I’m saying, that’s not the proper understanding of the way things should be because it ignores Logos.... We are confronted in this situation with not just one scientist telling us things, but many scientists telling us many different things. How do you judge? We have to have some criterion, and the criterion is called rationality...and we all can make those decisions if we have conformed ourselves to Logos, largely through adhering to the moral law.” ~E. Michael Jones, Editor of *The Culture Wars*, Author of *Logos Rising*, Lecturer

THE MARSHMALLOW SHTICK

When our first parents disobeyed the Lord God in the garden, the Lord's response was to establish the antithesis—the long and never ending antipathy or enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).

And so began the long war which has continued down to our day. When our Lord Jesus called his adversaries a brood of vipers, he was not simply calling names. He was marking and noting their uniforms and the flag under which they were operating. And he was the one who crushed the serpent's head, the stake of the cross driven into the very top of Skull Hill.

But even after his definitive victory there, we are told that believers are privileged to participate in this very same long battle with the dragons (Romans 16:20). But as with many Wars, there are sometimes lulls in the fighting, and if you did not know better, you might even be tempted to call it peace.

And during those lulls, there are some who in varying degrees of complacency, start to blur in their own minds whose side they are on. Drifting Christians allow themselves to be catechized by mindless sitcoms and half-believing pagans are soothed by the cadences of the prayer book, whatever it is

during such times. And though no piece has ever signed, it is not a hot war.

But in other periods, and ours is one of them, the polarization is acute and both sides starts to develop what theologian Cornelius Van Til called epistemological self-consciousness. Both sides know, both sides become aware of whom they are and who they serve. And as that awareness grows ever sharper, the conflict of necessity heats up.

And C. S. Lewis has great haunting and prophetic novel, *That Hideous Strength*, he alludes to this process:

“I mean this,” said Dimble.... “If you dip into any college, or school, or parish, or family—anything you like—at a given point in its history, you always find that there was a time before that point when there was more elbow room and contrasts weren’t quite so sharp; and that there’s going to be a time after that point when there is even less room for indecision and choices are even more momentous. Good is always getting better and bad is always getting worse: the possibilities of even apparent neutrality are always diminishing. The whole thing is sorting itself out all the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder.”

There are strategic theological issues involved. The war first began when Eve reached for the forbidden fruit. There are very recent tactical issues, and so it is not wrong to ask and consider what happened to America downstream from Woodstock.

But there are also what might be called mid-range considerations. We have always lived on the slopes of this volcano, but I would want to date the most recent major eruption with Rousseau and Kant, followed later by the likes of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Sartre, that whole bloody crew. If I might be allowed change the metaphor just slightly, from volcano to tapeworm, unbelieving thought is of necessity parasitic.

And so when some parasite of unbelief first begins on a relatively healthy host, it is possible at the very start of the process for people to say these strange new thoughts are, quote unquote, harmless or, quote unquote, just philosophy or a point of view certainly. This is because the prodigal son didn't run out of money on his first weekend away from home. Rebellion works for a time because moral capital, like other forms of capital, needs to be squandered over time. You can't do it all at once.

Richard Weaver reminded us that ideas have consequences. As we look around at the modern world, we have to come to grips with the fact that many of them have daisy-cutter consequences. Our

purpose in the next hour is to discuss some of those consequences.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is God transcendent (outside of us, distant)? How is God infinitely immanent (cares for us, near)? How do the Gospel and the Incarnation solve the problem here?
2. Why is it not necessary for God to create? Would God have been totally happy without creating mankind? Why did He do it anyway?
3. What are some other examples in the Bible of a huge “setback” or tragedy that makes it seem like the Gospel will fail? What are some other examples of setbacks in history? How did the Gospel make a comeback after those setbacks? How does God use such events?
4. How is sexual liberation actually a way that people in power can create slaves? Why is it that churches are closed and wine stores and pot shops are “essential services”? What kind of freedom do our elites want to take away from people?
5. John Adams said, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

How have we seen our civil liberties fall away as a result of moral libertinism? How has individualism and the loss of the family made the federal government stronger?

FURTHER SCRIPTURE READING

Read John 8:31-38, Romans 6, and Titus 3:3. What is it that frees us from sin? What are the two things that a man will be enslaved to? What kinds of passions enslave us? What are the results of a life enslaved to sin?

EPISODE 4

REACHING FOR FORBIDDEN FRUIT

THE POINT

“I don’t want to presume that what feels right in my heart is going to be godly and right. It’s why we need the constant course-correction of the Word of God. So I need to keep bringing my own desires, my own heart, and setting it up alongside God’s word and constantly checking it against God’s word. If I’m not constantly hearing the word of the Lord, I will be drifting into self-deception.... The basis of it is always there. That doesn’t mean that I assume every single instinct and thought within is always wrong all the time, because that’s not right either. I have the

Spirit, I have godly desires to press in with Jesus, to be more like Him, and to live like Him.”

~Sam Allberry, *Apologist and Author of Is God Anti-Gay?*

THE MARSHMALLOW SHTICK

6,000 years after Adam first reached for the forbidden fruit, and 2,000 after Christ atoned for that rebellion by reaching for the required fruit, Evangelical Christians are still struggling to define what sin is exactly.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* appears to have it covered when question 14 asks us: What is sin? That answer is both brisk and biblical: “Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.” That about covers the waterfront, doesn’t it? But that does not really address our dilemma. We can define sin all right; we just have trouble seeing it.

All believing Christians know that it is a sin for a drunkard to get drunk or for a lustful man to commit fornication or for a hateful man to strike someone. Where we get tangled up is with questions about whether it’s a sin for a recovering alcoholic to lick the rim of a glass full of bourbon. In addition, we have trouble because of how the

word sin can refer to two very different kinds of situations. There is sin that must be mortified in the heart of every true believer. There is also the sin that must be acted upon by pastors and parents and magistrates.

It is the difference between seeds of lust and malice and the harvest of adultery and murder. It is the difference between where you get onto the train in James 1:14 and where you get off at the terminus of the next verse: “But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14-15).

And so, is it a sin to be tempted? Not at all. The Lord Jesus was tempted, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). But for those of us who have been marinating in sin from the womb onward, is there a difference between how we are lured onto that train, oftentimes successfully, and how the Lord Jesus was unsuccessfully invited onto it? Yes, there is a world of difference. At the very beginning, in the first stirrings of our lusts, we often tempt the devil to tempt us. Now, is that a sin? It is certainly not the same thing as the train of degradation and corruption arriving at the gates of Hell, but it is still something that must be mortified. It is most likely nothing actionable. The session will not bring you

up on charges, your spouse will not divorce you for it, and the cops won't arrest you. But in its very nature, down in the DNA of the thing, it is still what astute theologians of yore, and I'm thinking here of John Owen, used to call sinnity sin sin.

So how does this relate to our contemporary controversies over the Revoice movement? It appears to me that we have a great deal of confusion that has resulted from an equivocal use of the word *sin*. An overt act of sodomy is something that everybody appears to agree on, at least thus far. Such a thing is sinful and is actionable. The Church should discipline for it.

But what, if anything, should be done about effeminacy? Effeminacy is to overt homosexual acts what licking the rim of the glass of bourbon is to a drunkard. And it appears to me that what we are being asked to do is to concede something that we should never concede. If it is true that a man should never be formally disciplined by his church simply for being a little bit light in the loafers, as I would happily grant, does it somehow follow that this is not a sin to be hated and mortified, not celebrated?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the problem with defining actions purely in terms of external behavior and not in terms

of thoughts and feelings? How do we best resist temptation to overt acts of sin by resisting it in the heart?

2. What is the problem with being defined as a person by your sin? What is the problem with calling oneself a “Gay Christian”? What are some other sins that people make part of their identity?
3. Did sin exist before the Fall? What did the Fall bring into the world?
4. What does Hebrews say about Jesus’ temptation? Did Jesus experience feelings of temptation and how did He resist them? What is the difference between Jesus’s temptation and sinful human temptation?
5. How can we be skeptical of our desires without paralyzing ourselves? How can friends give us accountability and some objectivity about ourselves? Why is it important to have other people be a part of our sanctification instead of it just being an individual battle?
6. What is the difference between a “Gay Identity” and our other subordinate identities? What does it mean to have an identity as a Christian, family member, or member of a culture? What is the

difference between idols that you destroy and idols you depose?

7. What is the difference between a mutually fulfilling romantic relationship and a covenant? What is the difference between a contract and a covenant? How is this contrary to modern individualism?

FURTHER SCRIPTURE READING

Read Matt. 5, Rom. 8, and James 1:12-15. What does Jesus teach about sin? Why is it not enough to just obey the letter of the law and not the spirit? What does the Holy Spirit do to our flesh and sin? What does James say causes sin? What does sin always lead to?

EPISODE 5

THE VIRTUE OF NATIONALISM

THE POINT

“We know that a powerful nation is never going to be inclined to act like a weak nation. But at the same time, there is such a thing as an attempt to inject some degree of justice into the world order, some degree of justice and some degree of freedom, and the way that’s achieved is by drawing borders.... Now, that aspiration is in the Jewish and Christian tradition. That aspiration becomes a moral principle to allow other nations to be free. That’s the basis of nationalism.”

~Yoram Hazony, Israeli Philosopher, Bible Scholar, and Political Theorist; Author of The Virtue of Nationalism

THE MARSHMALLOW SHTICK

What do you think of when the word *nationalism* comes up? For many people, the first thing that comes to mind is North Korean missile parades, or Nazi soldiers goose-stepping their way into history. Or you might think of counterproductive economic policies like tariffs. Or you might think of a politician you find distasteful, like our current President [Trump]. And if he likes a word, then you don't like it.

At the benign end of things, you might meditate on the doings of small-town Americana, with hot-dogs, flags, and a lame but endearing Fourth of July parade, the highlight of which is the mayor of a small town with 268 people in it, waving at you from his cousin's convertible: not threatening in any way, but still too corny for the kids at the cool table.

But when we raise a subject like nationalism, one of the questions that really ought to occur to us is this basic question: compared to what? It is easy to come up with plenty of bad examples of nationalism gone wrong. Indeed this is a fallen world and nationalism has often gone wrong in demented and idolatrous ways. But if we refuse to compare this nationalism gone wrong with nationalism done right, then we are forced to consider what the other alternatives might be.

The world is filled with nations and with people who love those nations. If we want to discourage all that, which direction should we go? There are only two alternatives really: we can go up or we can go down. We can go larger than nations or we can go smaller than nations. We can go transnational, which would either come out as imperialism or as globalism, or we divide nations up, which would amount to some form of tribalism.

Given the fact that human beings are created in such a way as to have social and civic loyalties larger than themselves, the question is basically the same as what you confront when you are ordering a coffee at your local coffee emporium. Will you go small, medium, or large? Or if it is a Starbucks, tall, grande, venti, and if you want to go for the full globalist option trenta.

A moment's reflection should tell everybody who loves liberty, that all the problems that tend to develop within the governments of nations (e.g., bureaucracy, mindless regulation, et cetera) are not going to go away simply because you made everything bigger.

That is not the way to encourage bureaucrats to be better. It doesn't make them better. You don't fix alcoholism by giving a drunk the keys to a warehouse full of rum. Shrinking everything might seem

attractive to some, but there are some real contradictions and challenges involved in that.

We've seen too many failed states not to know what happens when a territory is governed by a number of competing warlords. Such arrangements are invariably incredibly violent. In order for tribalism, to remain tribalism, you have to somehow ensure that all the other warlords will want to maintain the same stay-at-home attitude that you have somehow managed to cultivate. But the logic of the arms race is not lost on warring tribes anymore than it is lost on superpowers. During the debates of the Constitutional Congress someone proposed that the United States never maintain a standing army of over 10,000 men. I think it was 10,000, but something like that.

George Washington was the Chair who was therefore not participating in the debate. But he leaned over to a person near him, and said that the position needed an amendment that would ensure that the United States would never be invaded by a force of more than 25,000 men. This is the issue.

When it comes to nationalism, we have to play cards with the hand that we were dealt. If you don't like nationalism, we return to our earlier question, compared to what?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are tribalism and imperialism the two alternatives to nationalism? What are the downsides of each? Why is it important not to be romantic about any of these options?
2. What is it about internationalism that tends to be utopian? Why is nationalism sometimes more modest in its goals? How was Hitler's nationalism actually a form of internationalism?
3. Why is international law sometimes more tyrannical than national law? How did America try to export American democracy? How successful have America's recent foreign interventions failed?
4. In the Old Testament, why is Israel not commanded to extend its empire over other nations' borders? How was Israel supposed to change the nations around it?
5. How has internationalist utopianism made people opposed to the idea of dialogue and free speech? How does conflict and disagreement make for a stronger society? How did Covid show that we do not respect disagreement anymore in our society?

6. How is our modern notion of human rights radically individualistic? How has individualism weakened familial, local, and national bonds? How do our families, churches, and local bonds protect us better than international rights?

FURTHER SCRIPTURE READING

Read Acts 16:1-4, Galatians 2:1-5, 3:27-29, 1 Cor. 9:15-23, and Philippians 3:1-11. What does Paul say about circumcision? How has it removed differences between Jews and Gentiles? Why did Paul circumcise Timothy but not Titus? What does Paul say about his relationship to the Jews and Gentiles? How does this show that he has an identity as a Jew that is subordinated to his identity as a Christian?

EPISODE 6

THE SUICIDE THAT WON'T DIE

THE POINT

“All conservatism [is] ... basically this idea that you look around the place where you live, and you look at the things that are lovely and lovable and deserving of love, and you say, I’m grateful for these things. And when you’re grateful for something, you try to preserve it and keep it alive and pass it on to the next generation.... Hannah Arendt said, “Every generation, western civilization is invaded by barbarians. We call them ‘children.’” ... The baby who was born into a family today has got the same basic fallen human nature and programming that a baby born a thousand

or ten thousand years ago has. And the only thing that gets us out of the barbarianism of the human past is civilization—civilizing people. And that starts with families, then local communities and these concentric circles that move outward, and we turn barbarians into citizens at some point. And I think the way you do that is to teach them to have at least a little gratitude.”

~Jonah Goldberg, *Columnist, Political Analyst, Commentator, Author of Liberal Fascism*

THE MARSHMALLOW SHTICK

When I was a teenager, I happened across a book by William F. Buckley in a bookstore in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Given the politics of that town, this was something of a minor miracle, but I went home and read that book. It was *Up from Liberalism*, and Buckley made an immediate conquest of me. I subscribed to *National Review* and I’ve been a faithful subscriber ever since.

Although my politics have solidified well to the right of *NR*, I remain deeply grateful. I begin with this autobiographical note so that I can plausibly assure you that I’ve read a boatload of conservative books in the decades since.

I write these words as a movement conservative. But I've also noticed something curious in that time. Buckley accepted the archetypical conservative attitude that the future is bleak. The policies being adopted by our overlords are so retrograde that they must be doing it on purpose. And if they're doing it on a purpose, then there must be a deep conspiracy, and down the wormhole we go.

We can illustrate this point by looking at the predictions of hard money, hard right financial writers. My entire adult life I've been reading conservative warnings, telling us to catch the last train out. Now, I do not dispute the basic outlines of the conservative arguments against deficit spending or bankrupting Social Security or anything like that. They seem to me to be self-evident, but there is more to it.

Suppose we've fallen off a skyscraper, a very tall one. When we are at the 38th floor, the prescient writers among us warn that death is inevitable. Even now we are at the third floor. It is true that death is inevitable. It can also be true that absent an intervention by Spiderman, there's nothing that can be done, but it is false that we're at the third floor.

We do not hit the sidewalk as predicted, and after 10 more floors whizz by us, we all decide to become Keynesians. The same kind of thing is true about conservative cultural analysis, from Burnham's

Suicide of the West to Goldberg's *Suicide of the West*. The picture is pretty grim.

There are two opposite mistakes that conservatives can make. It seems to me: one is that America is indestructible and cannot die, and the other is that America is already dead. But if we are to get away from these two alternatives, it seems to me that what is required is the development of a conservative eschatology. Why should the Marxists have an eschatology and we not? But how that might be accomplished will require some thought.

In 1985, the economist Herbert Stein wrote, reasonably enough, that “If something can’t go on forever, it will stop.” These are words to live by.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are political conservatives often pessimistic about the future? What have been some good that have happened in the last half-century since the conservative movement began? Why has global poverty shrunk?
2. Goldberg quotes political philosopher Voegelin who said that we must not “immanentize the eschaton.” Here, the “eschaton” is the future age, the time after the Second Coming. To immanentize it means to bring it near. So the problem with immanentizing the eschaton is

that you are bringing heaven on earth before Jesus comes back. Why is this a temptation for non-Christians? How have totalitarians tried to make heaven on earth? Why are conservatives skeptical of utopianism?

3. Why is it that conservatives are often critical of how institutions are run? How has the fact that institutions have been run by liberals in America affected our country? What are the consequences?
4. Does our nation have a shared “center”? What would be the problems with forcing the nation to have a shared center? What is the problem of making a shared center “from above” instead of “from below,” from the people?
5. How has the internet made it easier to demonize people? How does the internet decontextualized people? Is it possible at this point to make our nation highly localized again or is it too late?
6. How has our nation, on both the right and the left, failed to teach gratitude? How is this central to a principled conservatism? How is the opposite of our victimhood culture?
7. Did you know that much of the elite does not have a divorce epidemic? How is it that divorce

continues to be a problem in the middle and lower classes? How is religion good for the poor? How is religion good for society? Should we think about the benefits that religion has for society?

FURTHER SCRIPTURE READING

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:22 and 2 Thessalonians 2-3. How does Paul tell the Thessalonians to act now based on the future? How does he avoid both over-inflated optimism and exaggerated pessimism? What kinds of things should we be doing now while we wait for Jesus?

