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201101 OBITER DICTA: NEW YEAR 2011

Steven Alan Samson

Liberty University, ssamson@liberty.edu

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201101 OBITER DICTA: NEW YEAR 2011
Steven Alan Samson

Tuesday, January 4, 2011

To a correspondent:

Thank you for your note. Sen. Helms circulated an article by my mentor, Edward Rozek, among his staff about 30 years ago. It was a critique of the foreign policy of appeasement that prevailed in the 1970s. I am pleased that the Helms School provides the faculty with a vehicle for articulating a critical review of our domestic and international institutions from an explicitly Biblical and Christian perspective.

<http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/4887.htm>

Note to my international relations students:

The persecution of the prophets and wise men down through history is a matter that is not usually addressed in a course on International Relations. Yet the Bible is filled with innumerable instances of persecution: all the way from A to Z (see Matt. 23:35). For the list of readings, I have added an article published last Saturday, January 1, by the Coptic editor of Egypt's *AL-Ahram* weekly. It should be read for the first day of class, along with excerpts (posted on Blackboard) from Rene Girard's *The Scapegoat*, in order to get a better sense of the singular importance of persecution for understanding the nature of International Relations. The term will conclude with Dore Gold's *Tower of BabbLe*, which brings persecution and the hypocrisy of political elites into laser-like focus. Throughout the Middle East and elsewhere, a great winnowing is taking place as Jews, Christians, and others are being harried from the land.

Wednesday 5

http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/01/psychology_and_the_shrinking_o_1.html

Robin of Berkeley, a practicing psychotherapist, quickly summarizes the therapeutic revolution that for the past century has rooted its way into every institution of public and private life. Like Gareth Garrett, the editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* in the 1930s, she understands that "The Revolution Was." Here is the way Garrett put it in 1938:

"There are those who still think they are holding the pass against a revolution that may be coming up the road. But they are gazing in the wrong direction. The revolution is behind them. It went by in the Night of Depression, singing songs to freedom.

There are those who have never ceased to say very earnestly, 'Something is going to happen to the American form of government if we don't watch out.' These

were the innocent disarmers. Their trust was in words. They had forgotten their Aristotle. More than 2,000 years ago he wrote of what can happen within the form, when 'one thing takes the place of another, so that the ancient laws will remain, while the power will be in the hands of those who have brought about revolution in the state.'

Worse outwitted were those who kept trying to make sense of the New Deal from the point of view of all that was implicit in the American scheme, charging it therefore with contradiction, fallacy, economic ignorance, and general incompetence to govern.

But it could not be so embarrassed and all that line was wasted, because, in the first place, it never intended to make that kind of sense, and secondly, it took off from nothing that was implicit in the American scheme. It took off from a revolutionary base. The design was European. Regarded from the point of view of revolutionary technic it made perfect sense. Its meaning was revolutionary and it had no other. For what it meant to do it was from the beginning consistent in principle, resourceful, intelligent, masterly in workmanship, and it made not one mistake.

The test came in the first one hundred days.

No matter how carefully a revolution may have been planned there is bound to be a crucial time. That comes when the actual seizure of power is taking place. In this case certain steps were necessary. They were difficult and daring steps. But more than that, they had to be taken in a certain sequence, with forethought and precision of timing. One out of place might have been fatal. What happened was that one followed another in exactly the right order, not one out of time or out of place.

Having passed this crisis, the New Deal went on from one problem to another, taking them in the proper order, according to revolutionary technic; and if the handling of one was inconsistent with the handling of another, even to the point of nullity, that was blunder in reverse. The effect was to keep people excited about one thing at a time, and divided, while steadily through all the uproar of outrage and confusion a certain end, held constantly in view, was pursued by main intention.

The end held constantly in view was power."

<http://americanvision.org/3613/una-vision-para-el-mundo-hispano-a-vision-for-the-hispanic-world/>

I plan to use this reading by Bojidar Marinov in my Political and Economic Development class. It begins by noting Simon Bolivar's despair over the future of Latin America. Marinov also quotes the lament of Porfirio Diaz about Mexico: "So far from God; so close to the United States."

Here is a highlight:

"As long as Latin America remains captive to the alliance of paganism - for the masses - and secular humanism - for the educated elites - there will be little hope for any real and lasting change. And the church isn't doing much to challenge that worldview dominance of paganism and secular humanism. Again, without a comprehensive change in the world-and-life view of the people, there is little hope for any lasting change in any other area of life.

"But there is a better way. Like every better way it is the longer way. It may take generations. It certainly took several centuries in Europe before the Reformation could produce societies with liberty and justice for all. A culture that is 'far from God' needs generations to come back to him, as a culture. But it won't happen by political reforms, nor by planting more churches; and it won't happen by more short-term evangelistic trips. A culture is 'far from God' only because it has a worldview that is hostile to God. And unless that worldview is challenged and destroyed, and replaced with a worldview based on the Bible, nothing else is going to change."

http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/01/the_military_after_dadt.html

Such problems are being glossed over by the abrupt repeal of "don't ask, don't tell." The potential "fraternization" problems are now being multiplied, perhaps exponentially.

http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/01/the_attack_of_the_radical_egal.html

Robert Weissberg shows why radical egalitarians should never be entrusted with an economy (not even a fine-tuned watch) and why competition in Silicon Valley benefited all of us.

To an honors thesis student:

I was reading Weigel's *Against the Grain* and realized that Kurth's Protestant Deformation piece illustrates a point Weigel was making in the Introduction by citing John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*.

Thursday 6

The last essay in Weigel's book -- "Is Europe Dying?" -- cites the Pope's Regensburg Lecture. You have read *The Cube and the Cathedral*.

You know, many of the people you have been reading -- M. Stanton Evans (I would add David Gress), James Kurth, Roger Scruton, George Weigel -- address the issues that interest you in very various ways. I am sure any of them would be happy to hear from you if you wish to address specific questions to them.

George Weigel is associated with the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, DC, which has done a lot of good work. I believe Herb Schlossberg has done some work with them, as has James Turner Johnson, who was one of my fellow speakers at a Lieber conference. Roger Scruton is currently associated with American Enterprise Institute in DC. M. Stanton Evans is probably still with the National Journalism Center in DC. James Kurth teaches at Swarthmore College and is associated with the Foreign Policy Research Institute. David Gress, whose *From Plato to NATO* virtually set forth a theory of modern civilization, teaches in Denmark but has taught at Boston University. Walter Russell Mead writes for *The American Interest* and has an interesting blog at its website. A thesis that draws on interviews would certainly be an interesting approach.

Among periodicals, you should examine the journal *First Things* and check *Modern Age* on-line. The latest issue of *Policy Review* (it is at the local Barnes & Noble on Ward Road) has a review of Weigel's latest book on John Paul II and a review of *The Hebrew Republic*. This last book addresses a literature of biblical republicanism that Dr. Ferdon covered in her doctoral dissertation.

Friday 7

<http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2011/01/05/yule-blog-2010-11-dwelling-in-darkness-seeing-a-light/>

Like James Kurth, Walter Russell Mead is best known as a commentator on international relations, but both men are public about their faith commitment. Similarly, George Weigel and Peter Augustine Lawler bring their faith to the table as public intellectuals. This Christmas season, Mead has taken on a very interesting mission: to bring faith to bear on the issues of the day.

"A twelve day stint as a faith blogger has left me morally challenged by the complexities and the ambiguities this work involves. But it's also left me feeling that this kind of work, somehow, has got to be done. If we leave religion out of our national conversation about values, politics and culture we end up with a vapid conversation that doesn't address the deepest realities that move most of the people in this country. And the problems we face today can't be addressed constructively without getting into the deep stuff and asking the hardest questions about the things that matter most."

Sunday 9

http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/01/the_constitution_did_not_condo.html

Ken Blackwell and Bob Morrison set the record straight: The Constitution was not a slaveholders' document.

"In *The Slaveholding Republic*, [Don Fehrenbacher] writes: '[The] fraction 'three-fifths' had no racial meaning. It did not represent a perception of blacks as three-fifths human...' It was a compromise on methods of levying taxes and apportioning representation in Congress.

"Further, the Three-Fifths Compromise reduced the power in Congress of slaveholding states while giving an electoral bonus to any state that voluntarily emancipated its slaves. When seven of the original thirteen states abolished slavery, they were allowed to count free black people in the census for purposes of representation in Congress."

Monday 10

http://www.amazon.com/Death-Orders-Terrorism-Revolutionary-International/dp/0275997529/ref=cm_cr-mr-title

To a Colleague:

This book appears to trace modern terrorism primarily back to Russian revolutionary nihilism. It is available via computer file through the library. It would be better to have a hard copy.

Tuesday 11

<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2011/01/jared-loughners-behavior-recor.html?hpid=topnews>

Zero-tolerance for this sort of behavior in the classroom should become the norm.

http://www.amazon.com/Informing-Statecraft-Angelo-Codevilla/dp/0743244842/ref=sr_1_10?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1294796730&sr=1-10

Note to a colleague:

Have you seen this book on intelligence by Angelo Codevilla? Adda Bozeman worked into that field, too.

To another colleague:

I had an interesting correspondence about Edward Rozek last week after I wrote a letter of recommendation for a student. An earlier version of my Rozek piece is on the Digital Commons. I wrote most of it in two hours between two and four on a December morning in 1993 when I awoke from a dream. I had lost my job months earlier and was undoubtedly suffering from increasingly severe obstructive sleep apnea, which was not diagnosed until September 1996. We moved to Texas in 1995 and here in 1998.

Wednesday 12

http://news.yahoo.com/s/politico/20110112/pl_politico/47477_1

Sarah Palin's reference to "blood libel" may have offended some people, but her words did not simply refer to accusations that have been directed against her. No, I believe she recognizes that most of the reaction in the media is designed to scapegoat those who dissent from the regnant political orthodoxy - an "orthodoxy" that, by the way, is defined by a rather small minority of the public and contrary to the public's own self-understanding. What Palin sees at work is, in fact, what Herbert Marcuse recommended in his 1965 essay entitled "Repressive Tolerance." In Marcuse's judgment, the kind of free speech that still prevailed at that time in America was repressive because conservative, anti-progressive views could still be freely advocated. In other words, Marcuse contended that liberalism itself is repressive. Why? Because, contrary to Marcuse's recommendation, it does not repress the Right.

Given all the talk about incivility and hate speech in the wake of the murders in Tucson, it is time to pause and take a broader view of the problem. René Girard

believes that cultures originate in some founding act of violence that was outwardly repressed but is nevertheless recalled in some fashion through myth and religion. What is unique about the Bible, he says, is that it testifies to the reality founding murders, such as the murder of the prophets (Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:51), and that it absolves the victims. The Bible reveals the nature of the sacrificial mechanism and lays a new foundation based on the love of God and love of the neighbor. And yet, western civilization, as Victor Davis Hanson shows in *Carnage and Culture*, has historically brought violence to a fever pitch. Those who peremptorily condemn the West do not recognize that the Bible has provided the antidote. They blame the West for slavery when, in fact, slavery was universal until the seeds planted by the Bible began to destroy it. The same pattern is evident with respect to the whole area of social, economic, and political liberty.

John Ranieri writes in *Disturbing Revelation* (2009) that "it may be helpful to recall Girard's observation about the paradox at the heart of the modern Western world: that no culture has created more victims and no culture has done more in behalf of victims. To the extent that these phenomena [communal murders and general violence] have their roots in processes unleashed by the Bible's exposure of the sacrificial mechanisms employed to sustain culture, it would be accurate to describe [Leo] Strauss and [Eric] Voegelin as thinkers whose fear of the destabilizing tendencies wrought by the biblical message outweighs and to some degree blinds them to the Bible's role in the rehabilitation of victims. It is as if they appreciate only one side of Girard's twofold insight."

What confounds the American public today is the deliberate destruction of our culture of liberty by those who wish us to be married to and dependent upon the State. Hence the systematic attacks on traditional institutions and institutional liberty that have eroded our constitutional independence. In *The Character of Nations* (1998), Angelo Codevilla warns that our regime and its ruling class have been undercutting the fabric of our society. "In fact, the century's kindred spirits of secularism, of statism and radical individualism, most clearly manifest in the totalitarian regimes, as well as our century's peculiar combination of pacifism and disdain for human life, have affected in some measure the rules by which we live. This triad shapes the choices that face us in the future quite as much as our heritage from de Tocqueville's America."

Thursday 13

<http://pajamasmedia.com/tatler/2011/01/12/word-salad-of-hate-at-oakland-vigil-for-tucson-victims/>

The news seems to have degenerated into "all politics all of the time." What is becoming of a republic that once was founded upon the principles of limited constitutional government and the rule of law and which is degenerating into "all government all of the time?"

Addressing the disheveled state of our union in 1998, Angelo Codevilla channeled Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Montesquieu in his excellent evaluation of the character of regimes:

"Within the bounds set by any given civilization, the various broad categories of regimes – tyranny, the several kinds of oligarchy, and democracy – have peculiar effects on the capacity of peoples to be prosperous and civil. To live spiritually meaningful lives in families, free from foreign domination.

"The hallmark of the politics and economics of tyranny is cronyism. Wealth is just another of the privileges that flow from connection to the tyrant. The differences between modern party dictatorships and ancient tyrannies lie primarily in the much greater size of the retinues that society is compelled to support and obey today, as well as in the modern dictatorship's intentional degradation of family and spiritual lives. In military matters, tyrannical regimes are marked by special units with privileges far superior to those of the (usually very large) regular armed forces. The loyalty of such units is both the arrow and the Achilles' heel of the regime. The differences between oligarchies, regimes built to enrich the rulers, lie in the attitudes of the rulers regarding the wealth of others. On one extreme are what we might call the mafia oligarchies such as post-Communist Russia, where the rulers regard others' prosperity as a threat to their own and where friendship is restricted to families. Religion is pressed into superstition, and armed force is sometimes used to rub out rivals. Then there are defenseless free ports, like Singapore, where the rulers thrive within systems of law and low taxes that encourage large numbers of people to think of nothing but making money. At the other extreme are grand oligarchies such as those of nineteenth century Britain, ancient Carthage, and medieval Venice, all of which hired armies, built empires, and spread refined manners along with wealth.

"Because democracies have no character except that which their regimes and their peoples combine to give them at any time, they can exhibit any of the features of other regimes. And they can change rapidly. The history of the Roman and Athenian democracies, to name but two, is replete with swings between valor and cowardice, poverty and prosperity, freedom and tyranny, piety and sacrilege, harmony and civil war. While no people is ever spared the choices by which it defines its character, democratic peoples face those choices constantly. Alas, history teaches that when democracies find themselves astride the world, their enemies vanquished, they tend quickly to destroy the remnant of the habits that made them great."

"We define ourselves by what we argue about and by how we structure our competition. Arguing about which interest group gets what is conducive neither to prosperity nor to civility."

- Angelo Codevilla, *The Character of Nations*, pp. 8-9 (excerpts)

Perhaps Codevilla had in mind Harold Lasswell's definition of politics, which is the title of one of his books: *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*. Such is the tenor of our interest group politics in what another political scientist, Theodore Lowi, calls the Second Republic of the United States.

Friday 14

http://townhall.com/columnists/BrentBozell/2011/01/14/no_tucson_lectures_for_artists/page/full/

Concerning last weekend's rampage in Arizona, Brent Bozell evaluates the role played by a mind-warping aesthetic of death-obsessed nihilism. We have seen this cult of death at work in countless school shootings and drug-related murders. On the very same day the press carried the story of the 14 decapitated bodies discovered in Acapulco. And yet no one in the press seemed interested in searching for a common thread. All of the media rage was directed against the Tea Party, Sarah Palin, and right-wing radio personalities. But this has been the pattern ever since that notorious right-winger, Lee Harvey Oswald of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, assassinated John F. Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. The conspiracy literature generated by that event soon merged with subterranean currents of the age-old pornographies of violence and death. Soon enough the conspiracy-mongering that followed produced newer strains of the disease. James Piereson discusses some of the political consequences for political liberalism of the first Kennedy assassination in *Camelot and the Cultural Revolution*.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/at-public-school-anti-americanism-hides-in-plain-sight/>

Based on his son's reports, Barry Rubin describes in some detail how that branch of the grievance industry known as the public education curriculum has been hollowing out the support beams of our house divided.

"The bills for this calamity will be paid in the future, just as today we are living in the shadow of the radical 1960s come to cultural, ideological, and political power.

"'Political correctness' and 'multiculturalism' are creating a nation full of thin-skinned people ready to identify virtually anything as racist or discriminatory. It is conditioning young people to believe instinctively that ours is a fundamentally contemptible society, riddled with haters and racists who are out to get them or anyone who constitutes 'the other.' It is instructing them that freedom of speech does not and should not apply to vast swaths of public, and perhaps private, life.

"While all of this indoctrination is supposed to reduce friction, the fact is that it is having the opposite effect, setting up a future of incredible antagonism, hatred, and pain. The mentality of perpetual victimhood, endless grievances, and bitter divisiveness is set to cripple the United States. In Europe and Canada, the results are likely to be even worse.

"Of course, this is no accident, but a form of political mobilization in which certain viewpoints will be demonized as unacceptable because they are based on bias. The only redeeming factor is that it is not universal but restricted – at least for the present – to certain states and counties where such curricula have been imposed."

The outpouring of rage in the media during the past week shows how worn the "thin veneer of civilization" has become in recent decades. The polarization of the public media continues apace.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljAANHPkrAE>

I plan to show this speech by Czech President Vaclav Klaus during the first class session of my Politics of Europe course next week, along with the reaction piece by MEP Nigel Farage. These film clips give further evidence that, if we cannot confront these ideologues who claim to speak for the majority and defeat them at the polls, they will soon enough be goose-stepping through our city streets. Lenin styled his followers as Bolsheviks because they won a majority in a single vote. This is what democracy is coming to mean again: one person, one vote, one time. But in the case of the Lisbon Treaty in Europe, the people did not even get to vote. Most Americans do not know that we had a close enough call of our own in the 1930s with the fascist-style mobilization of political support for the other NRA, the National Recovery Administration. It took a decision by the Supreme Court to shoot down the NRA Blue Eagle. Who will be alert to the danger next time?

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110114/ap_on_he_me/us_med_congresswoman_shot_doctors

An interesting profile of the two physicians who have been treating Rep. Giffords.

<http://www.myopenforum.com/forum/showthread.php?48169-Here-s-to-Us-Those-of-Us-Born-1930-1969-No-matter-what-our-kids-and-the-new>

To my children:

This was passed along by your grandfather. Most of it was true when I was growing up in Denver. Some of it was still true when you were growing up - at least while we were still in Florida and Texas. Nobody I knew had a bicycle helmet when I was a kid. I rode my bicycle into the mountains and down to Douglas County while I was still in grade school. I had my share of wrecks, including being hit by a car. When I was a bit older, I can remember when help wanted ads distinguished between men and women (a practice that ended about the time I was seriously looking for work). More changes came when the children's rights movement took off in the mid-1970s. By then, the Nanny State was getting into full swing.

I will pass along an article published today that is a sign of the times. Not all "progress" is an improvement. Much of it is simply a subtle form of slavery. There is no doubt that society has gotten worse. The reason is that self-government has been increasingly replaced by a culture of dependency that serves the interests mostly of those who wish to be our masters.

I have long had a sense that John 21:18 expresses a truth about our society, as well, not just about what would happen to the Apostle Peter. I was not surprised to read the other day that more and more young people are taking up residence in assisted living facilities. This is why the article I am sending separately did not surprise me, either, because I have heard the same story in so many different forms.

Reply to my father next day:

You should write down your memories. Years ago Peter Laslett wrote a book about a long lost age entitled *The World We Have Lost*.

Last night, Sally and I watched *ALL the King's Men*. I read the book in the 70s and we watched the film early in our marriage. At some point it became clear to me that Willie Stark did make it all the way to the White House. He was a man who stamped his brand onto everything he touched.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/7381016.html>

The Nanny State reaches down into every corner of our lives. Today if any member of the countless politically-protected classes of people sneezes, the whole country catches pneumonia. And guess what? It should be clear that all of us are included in one or more of these politically-protected classes. Back in the late 1840s, Frederic Bastiat, a member of French National Assembly, observed that the legislative process was becoming increasingly occupied with the promotion of what he called "legal plunder," which is based on the principle that the State can enable people to live at the expense of other people. Bastiat noticed that, if left unchecked, this "fatal tendency" toward plunder will lead to universal plunder. Of course, a Nanny State such as ours cannot brook any rivals. Those who wish to use their own property to benefit others may now act only by first securing permission, which means submitting to political control. It is the reign of Rousseau's General Will, to which all must bend the knee.

Sunday 16

To one of my sons:

No, it is a portrait of the reality and not simply an expression of nostalgia. It is the world as we knew it then. Our neighborhood may not have been an affluent one, but we were not impoverished, either.

Your grandfather did not quit smoking cigarettes until I was in my early teens. The five kids next door did ride in the back of the pickup truck a lot of the time. Their mother was institutionalized during much of this period, so the older kids, who got into their share of trouble, helped raise the younger ones. Your grandfather had the only car in our family until your grandmother started to drive during my early teen years. Parents in the neighborhood watched after things. And, yes, we had seat-belts.

This is not to deny that many things have improved, but these improvements did not have to come about through an intrusive social-welfare state that, in the future, will be ready to dispatch us once we become a burden on the state itself rather than relying on the remnants of families that previously had become such an inconvenience to progressive public policy interventions. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal projects often broke up real neighborhoods that at least provided some checks and balances even when the families were relatively poor and poorly educated. The rise of easy divorce and AFDC regulations dealt the whole institution of the family some real hammer blows. These were self-inflicted wounds done by the regime to society as a whole. This is one reason I wanted you to read Walter Williams' *Up from the Projects*, whose title makes a clear reference to Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*.

In the end, the Interventionist State cannot take the place of basic social institutions. In fact, submission to its tender mercies can undercut and destroy them. Before I left Denver in 1975, I occasionally looked in on a security worker at the zoo where I worked who had been injured by a patron while on the job. She was trying to raise her son in a home for unwed mothers run by the Methodist Church. She was part of a small Bible study, but otherwise the place, which housed about ninety families, was a sink of depravity that lacked adequate security and counseling services. The place was already visibly falling apart two or three years after it had opened. Your mother and I looked her up during a visit to Denver several years later before she moved back to Nebraska.

The world of my childhood has now largely disappeared. Angelo Codevilla made a similar observations in *The Character of Nations*. The Progressive social legislation of the 60s and 70s has become an increasing drain on the national economy as the tax burden rises while the quality of services suffers. We have to learn to become more competent and competitive again.