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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On Dr. Samuel T. Francis

I first met Samuel Francis more than 30 years ago, when he was a graduate student in Chapel Hill and a stalwart member of the Carolina Conservative Society—subsequently, the “Orange County Anti-Jacobin League” when it lost its university recognition on a point of principle. I was a brand-new faculty member, a refugee from Columbia University, and the group’s “advisor” (not that they wanted or took any advice). Sam’s inimitable personality was already fully formed: gruff, combative, impatient with what he saw as stupidity or timidity, but with an underlying sweetness—yes, sweetness—that he usually kept well hidden. After he left North Carolina, I saw him fairly often in Washington. I recall several dinners at The Palm, surrounded by caricatures of politicians, both the framed and the all-too-living variety. We would argue into the night. Sam regarded me as squishy soft on most matters and didn’t hesitate to berate me for it, but we enjoyed sparring with each other almost as much as we enjoyed sharing our contempt for our common adversaries, who were legion. Since the early 90’s, I’ve had few occasions to go to Washington and generally haven’t lingered when I went, so I gradually lost touch with Sam, but I kept up with what he was writing (and often argued with him in my mind). I always assumed that one of these days we would pick up where we left off. I now bitterly regret his loss, and my lost opportunities. I will miss him.

—John Shelton Reed
Chapel Hill, NC

Sam was brilliant and courageous and is irreplaceable. Despite his great knowledge of Machiavellian political thinkers, Sam’s writing was anything but Machiavellian. He was not interested in writing to advance an agenda, much less an agenda devoted to self-promotion. What interested Sam was truth, and what motivated his writing was a desire to tell the truth as he saw it, regardless of the consequences to himself.

Sam was also a wonderful friend. Talking with Sam was always a treat. His knowledge was vast, ranging from a pro-

found grasp of history and political theory, to an amazing familiarity with the many strands of American conservatism, to a keen appreciation of good books and movies. He also possessed as dry and fine a wit as anyone I have ever known. He will be missed.

—Tom Piatak
Strongsville, OH

Since the death of Sam Francis, the world has lost a voice of singular brilliance and clarity. I have always feared getting into a debate with him, but I will miss the acuity with which he delivered his blows against political foolishness and moral deceit.

—Harold O.J. Brown
Charlotte, NC

Sam was indeed a gentleman of the old school and capable of great courtesy as well as gruffness and bluntness. I always appreciated his kindness to me, and I admired his strength of character, which was evident in many ways. He was also very funny, and I can remember him clearly, sitting in the midst of a group of *Chronicles* editors, surprisingly attentive to his lengthening cigarette ash as he waved it above his host’s carpet, making witty observations that were both bleak and accurate.

I am about 15 years younger than he was, and I have long felt that Sam was one of a group of men who, whatever their respective faults, have a combination of abilities and qualities that people my age or younger do not have. So to lose his knowledge and clarity and decency seems a very great loss, and larger than a personal one.

—Katherine Dalton Boyer
New Castle, KY

Sam Francis was one of my heroes. I think of myself as his student, as someone who benefited immeasurably from the writings of a man who never backed away from telling the truth. I’m certain there are a lot of Sam’s readers who feel the same way. I am fortunate to have known him. He was a genuine patriot and a first-class intellect. The real America has lost a true son and champion. Goodbye, Sam; we’ll miss you. May the

Good Lord bless and keep you; may He make His face to shine upon you and give you peace.

—Wayne Allensworth
Keller, TX

Although I had known about his grave condition and had tried unsuccessfully to visit Sam the day before his passing, the news of his death shook me deeply. Sam was one of my closest personal friends, and, during my years in Washington, my wife and children had viewed him as a family member. What seemed his solitary nature concealed a fearless heart and a devastating wit, which helped turn him into a brilliant, courageous journalist. May our longtime comrade-in-arms dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

—Paul Gottfried
Elizabethtown, PA

Sam and I corresponded regularly from 1992 up until a few short months ago, and I enjoyed his company at John Randolph Club functions and similar get-togethers. I remember the standing ovation he received just by walking into a room at the Soldiers and Sailors Club in Manhattan, where he was to give a talk. It was a thrill for me to receive a letter through mail or e-mail from a writer I so admired. In reading numerous testimonials, I notice that other people felt the same way. If you wrote Sam, he'd find time to return the favor. Both Thomas Jefferson and Robert E. Lee, in their final years, wrote one return letter after another to total strangers.

Sam figured prominently in three of my books. I chose his 1992 essay "Nationalism, Old and New" to close out my 1999 collection, *The Paleoconservatives*. That pretty much says it all. I can only add that reading Sam's column in *Chronicles*—not just for its worldview but for its manly prose—gave me the same pleasure as does a passage from William Faulkner or Thomas Wolfe or Andrew Lytle. He was that great a writer.

—Joseph Scotchie
New York, NY

I was shocked to hear about Samuel Francis's death. It looked for a while as if he would pull through; and then this happens. What a terrible loss to us all.

His passing deprives us of one of America's most courageous and funniest writ-

ers. How I wish I'd met him more than once. (We did exchange the occasional cordial e-mail and telephone call.) I am glad to have confirmed my suspicion that underneath his irascibility was a good deal of sensitivity, not to mention downright timidity.

Every writer who read Dr. Francis's work realized that here was a master stylist, witty, opulent, and devastating. However much one might try to achieve a Francis-like idiom, the feat was impossible. He could be neither emulated nor even adequately mimicked, because *le style, c'était l'homme*. At least he retained his formidable authorial skills to the last. If his hand had forgotten its literary cunning, he would, I should think, have found that unbearable.

—R.J. Stove
Melbourne, Australia

I didn't know Sam Francis as well as I would have liked to, but he and I had several long talks together and some correspondence at different times over the last seven or eight years of his life. I have very fond memories of those conversations and the impish gleams that so often crept into Sam's eyes just before he delivered himself of some delightful anecdote or *aperçu*.

Apart from our shared political interests, we were both slightly shamefaced aficionados of horror-story writers such as M.R. James, H.P. Lovecraft, and Sheridan Le Fanu and had a wistful admiration for that numinous world of ivy-clad vicarages, fog-bound English country houses, and haunted churches. Yet, while I was content just to read the stories, Sam had researched into the writers, the stories they wrote, and their sociopolitical context—perhaps more than these rather lightweight subjects merited. But such intellectual curiosity and thoroughness was characteristic of the man. Without ever becoming embittered or cynical, he took nothing on trust but would always cut to the quick, whether discussing Vathek, immigration, the Tudors, or revolutions from the middle. Without being

bombastic or self-satisfied, he was someone perfectly prepared to suffer for his principles and for his art. Nor did he bear grudges against those who had behaved so contemptibly toward him. His print lacerations of those who had attacked him, although cutting, were never ill judged or unmanly and were antiseptic rather than poisonous—which is more than can be said about the streams of bile that flowed in his direction from those who hoped that, by denouncing him, they might themselves escape attack.

Even from a trans-Atlantic perspective, I can see that his death (how ironic that he should have suffered this heart trouble despite his resolute and highly effective weight-loss program) has deprived the American right (and, for that matter, the Western world) of one of its most distinctive and eloquent voices and left a gaping hole at the heart of many worthwhile enterprises and publications, not least *Chronicles*. Such gaps can never be filled completely, but he has mercifully left a corpus of insightful and invaluable work that can and will help inspire similarly doughty Westerners in the future. He would have smiled at the sentiment and demurred at the compliment, but the fact remains that he was—and will remain—a noble example to all who value what he valued.

—Derek Turner
London, England

I was deeply saddened to learn of Samuel Francis's sudden death. Although I haven't met or known him personally, his brilliant essays were well known to me.

His views and comments on conservatism, religion, and current culture-war issues were both valuable and impressive, and one could get to know his character through them. Dr. Francis's death is a great loss, and he will be missed by his colleagues and friends, as well as his readers. Let me express my sincere sympathy.

—Vladimir Palko
Minister of the Interior
Slovak Republic

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letters to the editor to:
Polemics@ChroniclesMagazine.org**

Aid and Comfort to the Enemy

According to an April 2 report published by *Intelligence Online*, for some months now, Washington has been putting out feelers to various Islamic activists who spearhead the opposition to the Syrian regime. According to this source, American diplomats are also cultivating contacts in Qatar with TV preacher Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, “with whom they frequently discuss the Syrian question.” The Americans are said to be supported in this endeavor by the British, as evidenced by the Blair government’s approval of the sheikh’s visit to London last July. “The Americans are counting on Qaradawi to help them bring together the moderate elements of the Moslem Brotherhood in Syria,” the report concludes, while the Saudi and Jordanian governments prefer to see a Sunni regime come to power in Syria as a counter to the growing Shiite influence in Iraq and Lebanon.

The veracity of this report needs to be confirmed, but, as Leon Hadar points out, “it doesn’t sound crazy if you take into consideration the current U.S. alliance with the pro-Iran Shiite fundamentalist parties in Iraq.” The Iraqi scenario entailed replacing an unpleasant secularist autocrat with Ayatollah Sistani’s people. And, to bring down Bashar al-Assad — another secularist autocrat who presents no threat to America — we are now cultivating some allegedly “moderate elements” of the Muslim Brotherhood.

I do not know whether to laugh or to cry. Any Islamist alternative to Assad would certainly prove far more detrimental to American interests than the *status quo*. Furthermore, today’s Syria presents a diplomatic realist with many creative possibilities. Assad and the old guard he has inherited are nervous and keen to make a deal with Washington if they are left in peace. They have removed most of their soldiers from Lebanon, and the eventual completion of that withdrawal is not in doubt. They have signaled repeatedly that they are ready for concessions, most recently when Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer came to Damascus on April 13. It is rumored that they may even accept a peace treaty with Israel and let her keep some parts of Golan “on lease,” if Syria is removed from

Mr. Bush’s list of rogue states. Syrian diplomats point out that their country has never been guilty of a terrorist outrage comparable to Lockerbie, and yet Libya’s Qaddafi — having done his penance — has been allowed back into polite society.

In the last years of his father’s life, Assad had emerged as an advocate of modernization and economic reform. After coming to power in June 2000, he has released hundreds of political prisoners and allowed the first independent newspapers for more than three decades to begin publishing. Syria’s economy is being opened up, with plans for private banks for the first time in decades. In brief, Syria seems much better poised for the sort of domestic transformation that would be in line with Mr. Bush’s vision of a democratic Middle East than, say, Saudi Arabia is.

By contrast, the quest for a “moderate” variety of the Muslim Brotherhood is absurd. The Muslim Brotherhood is an organization based on a simple credo: *Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.* It was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, an Egyptian schoolteacher nurtured on Wahhabism, as an Islamic revivalist movement that opposed the ascendancy of secular and Western ideas in the Middle East. The Brotherhood advocated a return to integral Islam as a solution to the ills that had befallen Muslim societies; this program was embodied in the Party of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb Al-Ikhwani Al-Muslimoon. It blamed the Egyptian government for being too soft on Israel and started performing terrorist acts in Egypt, which led to a ban on its activities. An Ikhwanite tried to assassinate Egyptian President Nasser in 1954, and four others succeeded in killing Anwar al-Sadat in September 1981.

Today, the Brotherhood has branches in every traditionally Muslim country and all over the world, including the United States. Some minor regional differences notwithstanding, they all share the same long-term goal: the establishment of a worldwide Islamic state. They all believe that the Koran justifies violence to overthrow un-Islamic governments, and they all call for the destruction of Israel and see

America as a sworn enemy.

Al-Qaradawi, far from being a “moderate,” is a mainstream Brother. His Ikhwanite affiliations led to his imprisonment in Egypt in 1949, then in 1954-56, and again in 1962. For some years, Al-Qaradawi has been a media superstar in the Arab world, thanks mainly to his regular program *Al-Shariaa wa Al-Haya (Islamic Law and Life)* on Al Jazeera. His comments on social, political, moral, and sexual issues enjoy a popularity and authority that could be replicated here only by blending Oprah and Billy Graham. His call for Muslims to fight Americans (whether troops or civilians) in Iraq — because they are occupiers and fighting them is a religious duty — carries special weight.

During the Cold War, Washington routinely pandered to various Islamists as a means of weakening secular Arab nationalist regimes. In the mid 1950’s, the White House even promoted the idea of forming an Islamic bloc, led by Saudi Arabia, to counter Nasserism. To his peril, Sadat freed dozens of Ikhwanis to help him deal with opposition in his own ranks (and, in that same period, Israel backed Islamists, including Hamas in the West Bank, to challenge Arafat and the PLO).

Such policies reflect either an impressive degree of stupidity or a naiveté not normally associated with the policymaking community. To any sane person, the lesson of American involvement in Afghanistan after 1979 should have been that militant Islam cannot be turned into a tool of policy. *Blowback* is the apt metaphor: The strategy of effective support for Islamic ambitions in pursuit of short-term political or military objectives of the United States has helped turn Islamic radicalism into a truly global phenomenon detrimental to U.S. ideals and interests.

If those brilliant minds advocating Chechnya’s independence, Bosnia’s centralization under Izetbegovic’s heirs, Kosovo’s “sovereignty” under the KLA, and Al-Qaradawi’s disciples at the helm in Damascus are neither idiots nor innocents, the only reasonable conclusion is that they *want* to create new hotbeds of Islamic radicalism in order to justify their quest for global hegemony and hasten the destruction of Christianity. ☞