

“Dittos,” *Rush*

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The Way Things Ought to Be, by Rush Limbaugh, *New York: Pocket Books, 1992. xiii + 304 pp. \$22.00.*

PROBABLY MOST readers of *Modern Age* are already familiar with Rush Limbaugh. But for those who may not be, a few words are in order.

Limbaugh conducts a three hour daily talk/call-in radio program that is now broadcast by over 600 stations (the number increasing weekly) and, in any given week, approximately 15,000,000 (the number increasing daily) listen to at least a portion of it. Since quitting his job in Sacramento in 1988 in quest of a larger audience, his rise to become America's most popular talk show host is nothing less than phenomenal. His spectacular success has even rejuvenated radio as a medium, particularly for serious political discourse. Some restaurants have gone so far as to provide “Rush Rooms” for their luncheon patrons who don't want to miss his words of wisdom. In the fall of 1992 he launched a half hour television program which has already enjoyed enormous success in syndication, now being telecast by over a hundred stations in all major market areas. The work under review, as these lines are being written, has been at or near the top of the *New York Times* best seller list for over eight months, another unmistakable measure of his national acceptance.

What makes all of this the more exceptional is that Rush Limbaugh is a conservative; an outspoken conservative who makes it his business to challenge the liberal orthodoxy that prevails in the media, in Hollywood, and in the academy. That he finds such a large and sympathetic audience in the hinterlands of America is reason enough to take a careful look at what Limbaugh has to say. In

our view an even more compelling reason is that he might be the catalyst for a sea change in American politics.

The early chapters of *The Way Things Ought to Be* provide us with a good deal of background concerning such matters as the difficulties he encountered in “going national” and forming the EIB (Excellence in Broadcasting) Network, his attitudes and approach in selecting the focus of his programs, the techniques he has used to stir listener interest, the background and nature of the National Conservative Forums which he periodically sponsors, and, *inter alia*, the origins of his highly popular “Update” feature, periodic and humorous reports on the doings of liberal movements, leaders, and icons. There is also an appendix, “The Limbaugh Lexicon,” which contains definitions and explanations of terms and phrases frequently used in his broadcasts.

Chapter five (“The State of the Union”) provides a fitting prelude to the remaining twenty-two chapters. Here we find the general indictment of our current political culture which also provides a background for his more detailed discussion of policies, personalities, and issues in the remaining chapters. What follows in these chapters is largely a discussion and critique of the liberal positions with regard to feminism, the homeless, Hollywood, religion, the media, multiculturalism, law enforcement, abortion, the Congress, animal rights and environmentalism. Some chapters, such as those concerning Anita Hill and the Los Angeles riots, are more topical in nature, while others—those, for example, dealing with the decade of the 1980s, the Reagan legacy, and a new national symbol—are reflective essays intended to set the record straight (*i.e.*, to correct media distortions) or to deplore liberal pandering to special interests.

Limbaugh's views on feminism and environmentalism are clearly among his

most controversial and probably best illustrate the temper and manner of his approach. Both movements, as presently constituted, he regards as fronts or covers for militants who want to advance life styles and cultural norms conformable with the liberal agenda, that, if advocated openly, would be repudiated by the people. He is particularly harsh on the militant feminists associated with NOW, whom he labels "feminazis." These feminazis, he writes, are not really interested in pushing for the justifiable ends such as women's equality, equal pay for equal work, and the like. Consumed with "bitterness, hatred, and resentment," they are "searching for power," a search intimately related to their fanatical resistance to any restrictions on a woman's so-called right to an abortion. "The most important thing" for the feminazi, he writes, "is seeing to it that as many abortions as possible are performed." Their "reasoning" he finds "quite simple": with abortion on demand, "men" are "precluded from the ultimate decision-making process regarding the future of life in the womb, they are reduced to their proper, inferior role."

Little wonder, then, on Limbaugh's showing, that Quayle "was savaged by the dominant media culture, most comedians, Democrats, and the Hollywood community" for his now famous criticism of the "Murphy Brown" TV episode in which the main character gives birth out of wedlock. Quayle hit a nerve; he was, in effect, attacking one of the fundamental tenets of militant feminism, namely, "that women don't need men, shouldn't desire them, and that total fulfillment and happiness can be achieved without men or husbands." (Limbaugh's motivational analysis, we may remark parenthetically, certainly helps to explain the increasingly militant character of "Women's Studies" proponents in academia.)

The goals of the environmentalist

"wackos" of which Limbaugh writes are of a different order. Indeed, these wackos come in two varieties: those for whom "environmentalism has become the new refuge of socialist thinking," and those for whom it is a religion. The former group, he informs us, are socialists who believe in "central planning and instructive government," who see the potentiality of eliminating or stringently limiting "private property rights" in the guise of protecting the environment. The religionists, by contrast, hold "that God is the earth and that God is nothing more than the earth." This group, aside from its immediate desire "to preserve the earth at all costs," wants to go back in time to what, in its view, was a "cleaner" and "purer" age, one free from the pollution of "Western white people." So both groups, despite their differences, are at war with private property and the free enterprise system.

Limbaugh argues convincingly that we have been, and continue to be, misled about environmental dangers by certain members of the scientific community, those he calls "junk scientists." In this category fall those who predicted that the Kuwaiti oil fires would produce "catastrophic global climate changes" and fretted about an "ozone hole over Kennebunkport." But these junk scientists, he adds, are aided and abetted by the media which accept their apocalyptic predictions, never questioning whether "burning and clear-cutting the rain forests" really destroys "50 to 100 species a day" or whether 400,000 new skin cancer cases will develop within a year "if we don't do something about the ozone hole."

Limbaugh's emergence does not bode well for the American liberal, and this book, taken as a whole, reveals one reason why. He is far from being an intellectual or academic conservative, showing little evidence of familiarity with the intellectual development or roots of con-

servative thought. He is, rather, a common-sense conservative (which places him in the mainstream of the American political tradition) who possesses an instinctive and unerring capacity to see the vulnerability of liberalism as clearly as if he were well-steeped in the rich heritage of conservative thought. In the parlance of sports, he is a "natural," and his endowments render him more effective than the intellectual conservative in doing battle with contemporary liberalism.

That he understands the chief theoretical vulnerabilities of liberalism can be easily demonstrated. To begin with, he is fully aware of the totalitarianism inherent in the gnostic tendencies of liberalism, tendencies that find expression in its utopian promises and total commitment to egalitarianism. He recognizes as well the complex ways in which liberals seek to advance these goals. Because, he remarks, men possess "different abilities, talents, desires, and characteristics," the only way that "they can be equalized is through the use of force," and the initial step towards this "egalitarian Utopia" must be "to chip away at the faith of Americans, at their spiritual foundations"; to deny that man is a "spiritual being." For once man's "faith in God is destroyed, the void will be filled with something else," "a man-made god called the state"; the omnipotent state with the force to advance the liberal agenda.

In like manner, he perceives the gnostic variants of our modern politics; how a deranged order of being (a derangement that results from blocking out the transcendent), rather than elevating man to the status of a god fully capable of remaking man and building a heaven here on earth, can reduce him to that of a beast. Such is the case with the animal rights wackos who operate from the proposition "that the difference between animals and man is only one of degree" to the conclusion "that animals have special abilities and deserve to become a

new protected class in society."

Nor is Limbaugh blind to other strains of liberal thought that have severely weakened, if not destroyed, our moral fibre. One of these, stemming from the relativism endemic to liberalism, is its hostility to any nourishing of an inner self-restraint, the inner check to which Irving Babbitt refers that is so essential for social cohesion. In fact, he stresses, they even support policies, such as abortion on demand and condom distribution in the schools, that seek to remove any guilt feelings that would otherwise attach to "wrong and morally vacant" behavior. "There is, after all," he comments, "strength in numbers." By the same token, he is fully aware of the liberals' shameful practice of placing the blame for our problems — from homelessness, AIDS, to the riots in Los Angeles — on society, never the involved individuals.

There is another reason, quite aside from the fact that Limbaugh has their number, why liberals should be worried. Liberalism has always comprised a relatively small, but highly cohesive and influential, ideological force in the United States. Its success, to recur to a battlefield metaphor, derives from massing sufficient forces at the point of attack to overwhelm isolated conservative outposts stretched out over a wide front. In this process, liberalism's victories in large measure come about because the conservative outposts not under siege are slow to perceive that the attackers also pose a potential threat to their positions; they do not perceive, that is, the relationship between the liberals' tactics and their strategic goals.

Limbaugh poses a threat to liberalism precisely because, day-in and day-out, as this book attests, he is bringing the resisters (conservatives) to an awareness of liberalism's basic goals, tactics, and nature; to the understanding that an attack on one outpost is, indeed, an attack

on the others; that liberals are grimly determined to refashion society to fit their ideological mold. Put otherwise, in his own way he is demonstrating that those who advocate multiculturalism, condom distribution, strict separation between church and state, abortion on demand without any restrictions, extreme feminism, animal rights, quotas under the guise of "affirmative action," as well as those who blame society for all

evils or resist the teaching of morals, all drink from the same ideological well.

Finally, we should note, Limbaugh masterfully uses humor to spoof liberals and their pet causes, another factor that contributes enormously to his wide appeal. The mock commercials for "Bungee Condoms" and "Feminazi trading cards," aired on his radio program and reproduced in this volume, are alone worth the price of admission.

The True Crib

One of Giotto's
Followers
Was too primitive.

In his painting
Of our Lord's
Threadbare infancy

The cradle
Is a coffin
Filled with light.

— *Lawrence Dugan*