

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*Darrick Taylor awakened my thinking with this article.*

*I lament the “end justifies the means” way the world has changed.*

*I also tried to fall back on the foundations of the Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, The Rule of Law. This technique no longer works.*

*In the church, I relied on the Bible, Sacred Tradition, the Magisterium (long held teachings of the church), pope and bishops at the service of those rather than new masters of interpretation according to their wills.*

*The religious upheaval is the primary irritant for me.*

*The political upheaval and its analysis sheds light on how those who come to power begin to claim to own, to control, to dominate, and to impose their will in all aspects of life.*

*I am disappointed that Taylor could not offer a solution since I don't have one either.*

*At least I am awake to what is happening and to know that relying on past foundations will not stop the steamrolling over what I hold sacred in civics and in the church.*

*As the comedy Blazing Saddles unfolded, even the physically strong but mentally slow character Mongo spoke of himself in the third person, “Mongo only pawn in game of life.”*

*I am also, Mongo, but I believe the Divine Assistance is much stronger than the current chess masters who cheat on the board of their domains for self gain.*

*I continue to follow Him even though I might get stepped on in the process.*

- ***“So, those on the Right will need to think more long-term about how to build alternative systems of legitimacy and, more importantly, how to protect them while they are being built.”***

## **The Conservative Ghost Dance**

*Conservatives who appeal to traditional aspects of American polity as a means of defeating the new seemingly unstoppable threat to the world they have known are setting themselves up for disaster.*



- Darrick Taylor

**One of my favorite TV shows some years ago** (at least the first two seasons, anyway) was an AMC Western called *Hell on Wheels*, about the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. In one episode, the main character, acting as a deputy of the railroad company, tells a German immigrant that he has to leave town or else. When the man refuses, the deputy knocks him to the ground and reiterates his warning as he walks away. As the German recovers from the blow, he tells his assailant that “this is a free country by God!” The deputy, a former Confederate soldier, turns around and laughs grimly: “Yeah, that’s about the funniest damn thing I ever heard.”

Looking at political news these days puts me in mind of that scene. It has become increasingly clear that, since the George Floyd riots of 2020, we no longer live in a “free country by God.” Whatever one thinks of Donald Trump (and he deserves a share of the blame in the escalations of the past several years), the treatment of the January 6 “rioters” and now the indictment of

the former president by a George Soros-backed DA in New York means we have crossed the Rubicon politically.

**The weaponization of the administrative state for partisan purposes is a momentous change whose potential impact goes far beyond electoral politics.** The Democratic Party and its activist supporters have put Republicans and those of a conservative political bent in a terrible bind. **If they do not push back against these types of outrages, they have effectively become wards of a hostile regime.** If they try to use the state to protect their constituents against, say, the imposition of puberty blockers on their children, they will erode the rule of law even further. Either way, **the far-Left benefits because they have long since ceased to believe that their opponents were fit to share in self-government with them.**

It is a terrible situation, one to which there are few easy answers. I am not really attached to any of the post-liberal options currently on offer on the Right. I have some sympathies with the new “national conservatism” of people such as J.D. Vance and Josh Hawley, and I am currently a citizen of the state of Florida, home to Ron DeSantis, whose brand of anti-wokeness is notable (as is that of Glenn Youngkin) for using state power successfully against cultural opponents. Yet no single vision has emerged (and may not any time soon) that is capable of replacing the conservative liberalism that has been the default of most Americans for so long.

Before a positive, alternative vision can emerge, it is more immediately urgent to decide what the new politics of the Right will not be. In the maelstrom of events, it is easy to murmur about the “friend-enemy” distinction without really thinking about what a new coalition might and might not be willing to tolerate. In this, there is **one danger in particular that I think should be avoided at all costs.**

And that is what some on the Right have termed **“Ghost Dancing.”** **“Ghost Dancing”** refers to conservatives who invoke aspects of the American polity—constitutionalism, the rule of law, a neutral administrative state, **“democratic norms”**—that have effectively disappeared, as a response to the latest **Left-wing assaults on human society.** The name refers to the so-called **“Ghost Dance”** that emerged as a religious ritual among the Plains Indians toward the end of the nineteenth century. **In it, they sought to summon their ancestors who would help them drive the White Man back to where he came from and away from their ancestral lands.**

That movement ended with the Massacre at Wounded Knee, which is why the name is so apt. **Those conservatives who appeal to the original meaning of the Constitution, the ideal of the Founders, the Declaration of Independence, or even to Abraham Lincoln as a means of defeating the new seemingly unstoppable threat to the world they have known are setting themselves up for disaster. And that is what the term “Ghost Dancing” is meant to convey.**

And it is accurate. I don’t mean that those opposed to the current madness should despise their ancestors or forget their past. What I mean is that **people continue to act as if the social contract with which they grew up still exists. It does not.** As Christopher Caldwell has **pointed out**, for those who inhabit the **“blue” enclaves of American society—large metropolitan cities, the two coasts—that contract was replaced in the 1960s by one which has fundamentally redrawn the way society should operate.**

People in **“red”** states naturally look to the U.S. Constitution to protect them, but they must recognize that their cultural opponents, who now effectively control the administrative apparatus that governs the country, think of it as little more than a racist document

from the “before times” and therefore null and void. Needless to say, these opponents have both the means and the conviction to make good on these ideas. We are not in Kansas anymore, not by a long shot.

**This means that we cannot expect that one day things will return to normal and the federal government will begin adhering to the Constitution because it is the right thing to do. People of goodwill who oppose this new order are going to need to readjust their thinking, their tactics, and their strategy when it comes to politics. People are naturally loath to change strategies that have worked for them in the past. But those who love their country and the civilization that created it need to carefully and accurately distinguish between the principles that must endure and the tactics that are disposable, even if they have worked for quite a long time politically.**

This is more difficult than it seems, however, because many people often become attached to ideas and institutions that produced real good for them. Republican Party support for big business is one example of this. Tax cuts were a great idea when the top tax rate was seventy percent and corporations largely stayed out of politics. But in the new dispensation, when corporations are subject to the whims of “woke” commissars, automatic support for corporations only aids the adversaries of Republicans and their constituents.

This observation applies to the **situation of Catholics** as well. There is one familiar strategy in particular they need to wean themselves off of—that of appeals to religious liberty. The U.S. bishops have expended quite a bit of energy touting the Church’s stance on this in the past few decades, but continuing to do so would be a grave mistake.

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I don't mean the Church should shed the idea completely, but **one would have to be quite blind not to realize the futility of invoking religious liberty as the country comes more and more to be run by people that believe Catholics (or genuine believers of any sort) shouldn't have any.** The future “woke” leaders of the country don't believe all religions are equal; and they will seek to destroy the influence, if not the existence, of those that do not affirm those beliefs (about sexuality, race, etc.) they hold sacred. Unless you are talking to sympathetic allies like conservative Protestants, appeals to religious liberty are already a waste of time.

**What is needed in the short-term is detachment from failed policies;** what to do next is much harder to discern. Shedding failed strategies will make this easier to accomplish, freeing up resources and energies best spent elsewhere. This will take time. Besides the administrative state, the Left also controls most of the culture-building organs of society. **So, those on the Right will need to think more long-term about how to build alternative systems of legitimacy and, more importantly, how to protect them while they are being built.**

How this can be accomplished or what shape it will take I cannot say. But what I can say is that **the shared ideals of the Cold War era or even those of the 1990s are not going to protect those who dissent from the new ruling class as it takes the reins of power in the coming years.** We should resist the siren call of the Ghost Dance and learn to act differently, lest we share the fate of Sitting Bull and his companions.



- **Darrick Taylor**

Darrick Taylor earned his PhD in History from the University of Kansas. He lives in Central Florida and teaches at Santa Fe College in Gainesville, FL. He also produces a podcast, **Controversies in Church History**, dealing with controversial episodes in the history of the Catholic Church.