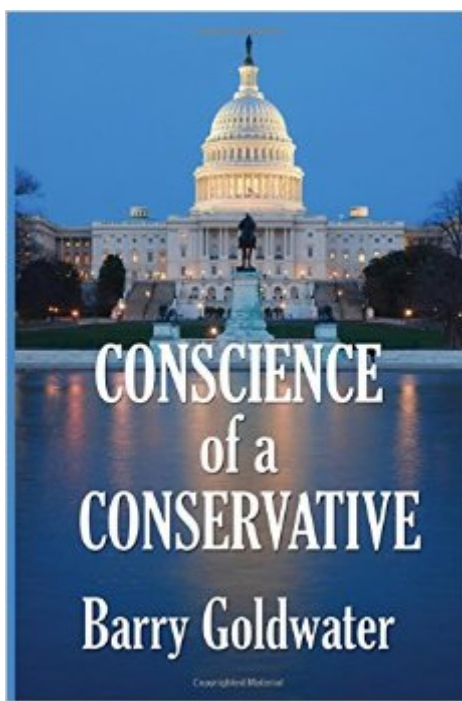


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Conscience Of A Conservative



Synopsis

The Conscience of a Conservative reignited the American conservative movement and made Barry Goldwater a political star. It influenced countless conservatives in the United States, and helped lay the foundation for the Reagan Revolution in 1980. It covers topics such as education, labor unions and policies, civil rights, agricultural policy and farm subsidies, social welfare programs, and income taxation. This significant book lays out the conservative position both politically and economically that would come to dominate the Conservative Movement in American.

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Customer Reviews

"The challenge to Conservatives today is quite simply to demonstrate the bearing of a proven philosophy on the problems of our own time," notes Barry Goldwater in his introduction. The problems from 1960 that Mr. Goldwater chose as topics for his book were: States' Rights, Civil Rights, Freedom for the Farmer, Freedom for Labor, Taxes and Spending, The Welfare State, Education and the Soviet Menace. His thoughts later became political gospel for conservative activists and a measuring stick against which politicians were held to see if they were truly conservative. One such prominent conservative activist, Phyllis Schlafly, stated: "It is hard to overestimate the importance of Barry Goldwater to the conservative movement. If there hadn't been a Barry Goldwater, there wouldn't have been a Ronald Reagan." A closer look at what Mr. Goldwater wrote in 1960 convinces one that he would still have plenty to say today. His barbs would target both Democrats and Republicans. Perhaps it's discovering the barbs he would have tossed at

today's Republicans that makes reading this book full of surprises. States' rights formed a cornerstone to Barry Goldwater's conservative thought. Although the States' rights to permit slavery were ended by war and constitutional amendment, Goldwater saw no such restrictions on a state's right to keep racially segregated schools. Simply put: "no powers regarding education were given the federal government" and "it has never been seriously argued ... that the authors of the Fourteenth Amendment intended to alter the Constitutional scheme with regard to education. ... I therefore support all efforts by the States ... to preserve their rightful powers over education." (p.

At just over 100 pages, this brisk handbook for Conservative political thought impressed me by its constant recourse to the sanctity of the US Constitution, and by its thorough enumeration of the ways in which the federal government has trespassed into areas forbidden it by that same founding document. It is clear that these repeated violations of the Constitution, carried out by both Democrats and Republicans (as Goldwater assiduously points out), have spoiled the Senator's good mood. Yet Goldwater has written here a gentleman's treatise. There is no partisan venom, just good, clean, political argumentation from a man who feared, in 1960, that decades of growth in federal power had taken the nation down the wrong path in several areas of public policy, and that this same growth in government was already strangulating individual freedom and sapping the souls of those dependent on government welfare. Goldwater presents what he perceives to be a striking contrast between the mode of thought of politicians in the 1960s and that of the radiant group who founded this country. On the one hand, at least one Republican of Goldwater's generation was quoted as saying "The underlying philosophy. . . is that if a job has to be done to meet the needs of the people, and no one else can do it, then it is the proper function of the federal government." Goldwater shows how this kind of intellectually lazy rhetoric is actually a declaration of the first principle of absolutism--that the State is competent to do all things--and is a repudiation of the Constitution itself, which defines many spheres of activity (education, agriculture, even some forms of foreign aid) as being expressly outside the power of the federal government.

I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. -Barry Goldwater (1964 Republican Convention Acceptance Speech) If, as Oscar Wilde opined, homosexuality is "the love that dare not speak its name," then we might say that Conservatism is "the political philosophy that dare not speak the truth." Liberals are wont to bathe the masses in comforting but demonstrably false platitudes, because at the root of their political philosophy they maintain a series of fictions, like: (1) we're all

essentially equal--all differences in intelligence, ability, etc. are a function of external factors and these external factors can be corrected by government; or, (2) all problems, both international and domestic, are soluble by government action because basically we all really have each others best interests at heart, we just sometimes need a push from Big Brother to realize it; and so on.

Conservatism meanwhile is based on a set of somewhat ugly truths, derived from hard experience: (1) the natural state of man, like that of other animals, is one of competition, not cooperation; (2) it is because this competition was so brutal, often fatal, that men reluctantly gave up some measure of freedom, in order to establish a government to protect them from one another; (3) government, foreign and domestic, is now the greatest threat to man, because those governments will seek ever increasing levels of control over human behavior; and so on. Obviously, conservatives are left with a harder sell here.

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