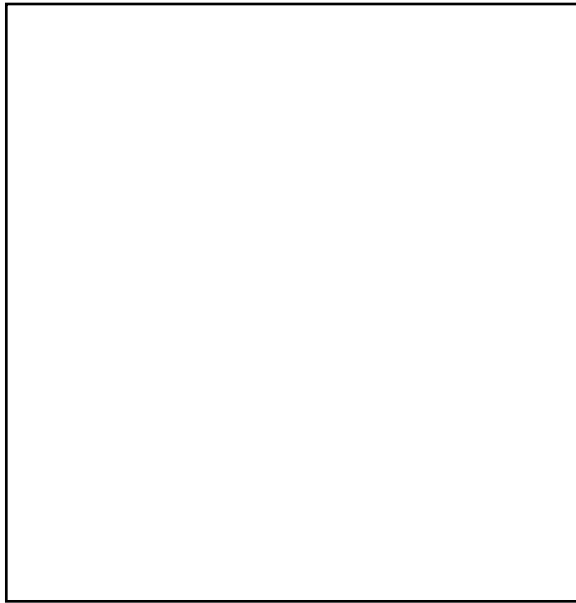


REFILLING THE CONSERVATIVE TANK

BROTHER BOB SMITH

The Movement isn't out of gas, but did get a bad tank of fuel on its present journey. This "bad gas" is starting to cause all kinds of problems in the rest of the car. Those are my primary thoughts about the question: "Is Conservatism Out of Gas?" I think that there are more than enough issues and ideas to champion or debate, but conservatives have gone against some of the very principles that set them apart from liberals. Whether we have failed to deliver, or have simply "lost our way" does not matter at this point. What is important is that we must raise new leadership that will not only pledge and promise, but we need people who can and will deliver! It is not enough to simply make empty promises, but leadership must never give up on the principles and tenets of conservative ideology. These leaders have to be free from special interests and independent enough to make hard decisions that may not only be unpopular, but decisions that may ultimately conclude with them standing alone. This is not a mission for the faint of heart or for someone looking for a lifetime job. It is a call for sacrifice and for seriousness with a high level of urgency.



As I travel around our nation and listen to people, the issues that people struggle with are pretty common—education, crime, the economy, and our position in the world. History shows that many of the great leaps we have made came when we were "dreamers." We were a people who were not afraid to stand up for liberty and freedom, but

also who came to the aid of others in need. Few ever asked if what we were doing was popular, the only question asked was if it was right? Kids used to love getting science kits for birthdays or Christmas hoping that they would be the one to find a cure for some nagging disease. Today, many people think only about today and have no hope for tomorrow. Neighbors don't want to know each other, fearing that everyone has a phone that is also a camera and nothing is a secret.

Today, we don't value life. Abortion is widely used as birth control and men impregnating women is a sport. Children having children is now the norm. It is no wonder why many of the values and norms most of us took for granted are no longer in place. Respect for

Brother Bob Smith, Capuchin, is President of Messmer Catholic Schools in Milwaukee.

authority seems to dwindle more each day, and even basic appreciation of the National Anthem appears to be the exception versus the rule as each person singing publicly strives to leave his or her personal stamp on this historical song. Egos trump tradition. How did we get this way?

I believe that the answers to our journey through darkness can be traced back to families (or lack of), drugs, education, and crime. All of these are interconnected and interrelated. It would be easy and tempting to put all of the blame on the 1960s, but the problems in today's society began much earlier. As parents and guardians changed from one person leaving the home to earn a wage to both parents being employed, we saw children being raised not by other family members, but in day care facilities. Television, movies and music were the teachers, and now violent video games have become the elixir to pacify the young. Whatever problems some of the other children carry from home are brought to the before and after school environments of the centers. Having children out of wedlock has only perpetuated the feeling that "I can do whatever I want with my or another's body!" Unfortunately, this attitude does not anticipate the gaps left for children. Many have documented the American education system, and while we can manipulate statistics to "prove" we are doing better, the fact is that many others around the globe learn more and do it at a much faster pace. There is a hunger among the young for school and for a future of hope, yet we don't teach children how to think.

Finally, we have the problem of drugs. I call it a *problem* because rather than identify and confront problems—we treat the symptoms, and we do this with drugs. Our nation has used prescription and non-prescription drugs to keep ourselves on a continual cloud, which allows us to not think, feel, or care. In short, the drug does it for us. It is no wonder that most of the people who fill jails and prisons in the United States are there on drug charges, or they have committed crimes that are drug-related.

So, what is the fuel needed to again fill our engines? The first tank will be one of *non-negotiables*. Adults and leaders need to "draw a line in the sand," and stick to it. Some will again call conservatives rigid and uncaring, but the fact is that if we set some hard and fast guidelines and stick to them it is a measure of how much we care. Whatever we want to call it someone needs to say, and mean, that there is a line that must not be crossed in schools, society, work, and with others. We need tank two to be *faith*. People who do not believe in God, or who do not respect those who do, set up a reality where they are masters of their own universe. Finally, the new fuel we need is a dose of ideas. Far too many people believe that all creative thinking and dreaming is something reserved for the past. They are folks who keep moving farther and farther away from what scares them—other people.

No, conservatism is not out of gas, but we may be traveling on fumes.