



Sacred and Profane Extremes in the USA

Apocalyptic Christianity and Neo-Marxist Deconstruction

by **Lou Marinoff** (Guest Columnist, 2006)

As globalization unfolds, it reunites disparate cultures, redefines civilizational contours, and recombines divergent ideologies. In the background of this momentous and often chaotic process, a new and inclusive human paradigm is quietly being forged. But in the foreground, the global village reels from the impact of extremisms – political, religious, tribal, socio-economic, educational, ideological – which are plainly exposed and sometimes exacerbated by globalization’s transcendent recombination of civilizations and cultures.

Every person and therefore every nation is capable of manifesting extremisms – Americans included. Yet the happiness and fulfillment of persons, as well as the prosperity and harmony of nations, flow undeniably from moderate (as opposed to extreme) acts of thought, speech and deed. In this article, I will briefly contrast sacred and profane extremes in the USA: apocalyptic Christianity, and neo-Marxist deconstruction. They not only polarize the American polity, but also militate against the emergence of a shared human paradigm for the 21st century.

Religious extremism in America contributes to the “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West. Astute political observers such as Lee Kwan Yew recognize that Islamic civilization is struggling both to modernize and yet to retain its identity; and thus that its decisive conflict is internal – between a minority of Islamist extremists and a majority of peace-loving and tolerant Muslims. By contrast, a decisive conflict in the USA – reflected in the pivotal 2004 presidential campaign issue of morality – is between religious fanatics of the Christian right (the “sacred” extreme), and neo-Marxist postmodernists of the deconstructed left (the “profane” extreme).

Certain extremists of the Christian right – including sects of Pentecostals, Southern Baptists, Televangelists, elements of the powerful Christian Coalition – are anti-scientific, anti-intellectual, and zealously intolerant of other faiths. One “scholarly” representative of a Southern theological seminary (a Ph.D. and professor no less) recently informed a CNN audience that every non-Christian in the world is in league with the Devil. He specifically demonized Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, agnostics, gays and lesbians. While he and his brethren have neither hijacked airplanes nor perpetrated suicide bombings, their self-righteous intolerance is nonetheless anathema to the cultivation of the mind, compassion of the heart, and transcendence of the spirit that all world religions – and secular humanisms alike – teach in their purest and most moderate distillations.

Ever since 9/11, an understandable concern among Americans and others is the specter of radioactive materials if not nuclear weapons falling into the hands of Islamist extremists. Deterrence theory “worked” during the Cold War precisely if perversely because proliferation of nuclear weapons threatened Mu-

tual Assured Destruction (MAD). In the last analysis, neither American nor Soviet leaders sought annihilation of their own populaces. However, deterrence works only until it fails; and if it ever fails then it never worked at all. Deterrence may fail spectacularly if applied to the “Mutual Assured Demonization” (the new MAD) between Christian and Islamist extremists. Nuclear terrorism may prove difficult to deter, while Christian extremism is by definition apocalyptic – and therefore prone to regarding nuclear retaliation as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelations. Thus a “worst case scenario” in the City of Man becomes grist for the mills of Christian extremists longing for Armageddon. Mutual Assured Demonization – whether an ayatollah’s vilification of America as “the Great Satan” or an Televangelist’s indictment of Islam as “a Satanic cult” – serve only to inflame and not to alleviate the “clash of civilizations.”

In the past, Christian extremism has helped motivate and justify medieval Crusades, European Inquisitions, New England witch-hunts, and Ku Klux Klan vigilantism, among other sustained outbursts of murderous Western violence tinged with perversions of Jesus’ pacific teachings. Jews and Arabs together endured a bitter expulsion from Iberia, by intolerant Christians, in 1492: the very year Columbus landed in America. To be sure, America has offered sanctuary to millions of devout believers seeking to worship their God or Gods in peace – including ultra-orthodox but non-violent adherents of all Abrahamic persuasions, who pose no threat to anyone. Yet America’s Bill of Rights, and the precious freedom of worship it confers, thereby tolerates religious intolerance’s “sacred extremism” too. This is one paradox of liberty.

At the profane extreme, the intelligentsia of the global village, along with observers of American culture, are appalled at the spiraling decline of American education standards, the pervasive cultural illiteracy of American graduates even of formerly world-class universities, and the rabid politicization and deconstruction of the liberal arts curriculum that formerly constituted the foundation of historically and humanistically laudable values in the West – including the liberty, opportunity and hope that were once the envy of the global village.

Beginning with the neo-Bolshevik student revolution of the late 1960s, the American Academy has been steadily transformed into an American Gulag. Alan Bloom rang a clarion alarm in his 1980s bestseller “The Closing of the American Mind,” which created a sensation but did not deter the ongoing Stalinization and Maoization of North American university campuses¹. The core curriculum of liberal arts – including European and American history, Western philosophy and Great Books – has been systematically replaced with a congeries of vindictive identity politics, mandatory political indoctrination, and coerced political correctness.²

Under the Orwellian banner of “diversity,” students and faculty are compelled to conform to a monolithic set of distorted doctrines, which blame the world’s ills exclusively on Western civilization, and specifically on a reified conspiracy of “white male heterosexual patriarchal hegemonists” – who allegedly and ubiquitously “oppress” humanity on the bases of race, class and gender³. This view is a pretext for perpetuating retributive oppression and ideological terror, precisely on the bases of race, class and gender. Martin Luther King’s celebrated dream “that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” has been revoked by the American Gulag. Its political commissars have decreed that race, class and gender are the paramount criteria by which students are judged. To facilitate this injustice, they have purged content and deconstructed character.

The American Gulag imposes political rectitude by demonizing white heterosexual and Jewish males, by excluding them from admission and employment on the basis of reverse-racist and reverse-sexist quota systems, by replacing inalienable individual rights with entitlements based on membership in “historically disadvantaged” collectives; by celebrating gay and lesbian orientations as norms while denigrating heterosexuality as socio-pathology; by vilifying science, mathematics and philosophy as “male-dominated” mechanisms of social control and tools of capitalist exploitation; by preaching vituperative hatred of Christianity, Israel and America; by compelling students to attend “sensitivity training” which “corrects” and monitors their views; by suppressing and prohibiting individual freedom of thought, speech and mannerism; by confiscating Christian and conservative student newspapers; by punishing dissenting opinions as thought-crimes against university administrations; by dispensing with presumption of innocence and due process; and by denying the rights of those “denounced” to the Gulag to know the identities of their accusers and the nature of the accusations themselves. Punishments for exercising individual liberties on campus range from suspension to expulsion of students, from summary firing of faculty to sabotage of careers by totalitarian administrators who operate with impunity from justice and immunity from accountability.⁴

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci theorized that one could bring down a civilization without firing a shot, by commandeering its cultural institutions. This is precisely what European and American neo-Marxists have accomplished, utilizing French postmodern philosophy (thanks to Trotskyite Jean-Francois Lyotard) and its seductive deconstructions of meaning and truth, morality and reality (thanks to Jacques Derrida) to infect millions of university graduates across a spectrum of disciplines with the virus of political correctness. In one of my public Philosopher’s Forums in Manhattan, an Ivy League graduate refused to assert that $1+1=2$. She had been taught that all truths are “socially constructed,” and therefore that all assertions are equally valid (or invalid). Moreover, she had been conditioned never to say anything that anyone might find “offensive” – everyone being held accountable for everyone else’s mind-state, but never for their own. Logical anarchy is but a prelude to moral anarchy. For if no equation can be correctly solved, then no moral proposition can be justifiably upheld – demonization of white males and Western civilization excepted.

A generation of such graduates has spread the contagion of political correctness into the general culture: media, civil service, justice system, corporations, and governments. The creators and sustainers of the American Gulag have perpetrated a catastrophic educational fraud on a credulous American public, which in any case spends ten times more money annually on fast food than on education.

The American mind politic has been so severely deconstructed that it lacks the capacities to sustain the body politic, as we know it. Thus, as Kishore Mahbubani has observed, 20th century American greatness (“the most benevolent great power in history”)⁵ has ironically paved the way to a 21st century world that Americans themselves are increasingly ill prepared to understand⁶. America’s interventions and sacrifices in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War restored and protected the liberty, opportunity and hope so prized by so many peoples. America overcame hard forces of fascism and communism abroad, only to succumb to their softer but not less insidious manifestations from within. America’s sacred and profane extremes – and their associated “culture wars” and “gender wars” – have polarized the nation, robbing its citizens of a common purpose and a shared humanity.

Polarizations can be neutralized. Every nation and each person has the power to pursue moderate pathways, for the benefit of one and all. Fortunately, humanity has at its disposal ancient yet ample resources for tempering extremism and engendering moderation⁷. Three great teachers of antiquity – namely Aristotle, Buddha and Confucius – all discouraged extremism and engendered moderation.

Aristotle's golden mean, Buddha's middle way, and Confucius's balanced order neither expediently appease nor violently oppose extremism; rather, they work to dissipate it by transforming human minds and hearts. The ABCs of moderation may contribute vitally to an inclusive human paradigm, in America and throughout the global village of the 21st century.

Notes

1 Bloom, Alan: *The Closing of the American Mind*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987

2 E.g. see Kimball, Roger, *Tenured Radicals*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998

3 E.g. see Sommers, Christina Hoff: *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994

4 E.g. see Kors, Alan and Silvergate, Harvey, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses*, New York: The Free Press, 1998

5 Mahbubani, Kishore: *Can Asians Think?*, Singapore: Times Books International, 1998

6 Mahbubani, Kishore, *Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding trust between America and the World*, NY: Perseus Books Group, 2005

7 Aristotle: "Moral excellence is a mean ... between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency." Buddha: "Avoiding these two extremes [over-indulgence and asceticism] the Awakened One gains the serendipity of The Middle Way." Confucius: "To go beyond is as wrong as to fall short."

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