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## THEY SAID IT

Whether France was wise to have permitted the mass immigration of people culturally very different from its own population to solve a temporary labor shortage and to assuage its own abstract liberal conscience is disputable: there are now an estimated 8 or 9 million people of North and West African origin in France, twice the number in 1975—and at least 5 million of them are Muslims. Demographic projections (though projections are not predictions) suggest that their descendants will number 35 million before this century is out, more than a third of the likely total population of France.

Indisputably, however, France has handled the resultant situation in the worst possible way. Unless it assimilates these millions successfully, its future will be grim. But it has separated and isolated immigrants and their descendants geographically into dehumanizing ghettos; it has pursued economic policies to promote unemployment and create dependence among them, with all the inevitable psychological consequences; it has flattered the repellent and worthless culture that they have developed; and it has withdrawn the protection of the law from them, allowing them to create their own lawless order.

No one should underestimate the danger that this failure poses, not only for France but also for the world.

--Theodore Dalrymple, "The Barbarians at the Gates of Paris,"  
*City Journal*, Autumn, 2002.

## ISLAM AND THE PURSUIT OF THE MILLENNIUM.

It is nearly universally agreed – among liberals and conservatives, Americans and Europeans, war supporters and war detractors – that Iraq is now the principal battlefield in the global War on Terror. Naturally, there is considerable disagreement as to why this is so and whether it is or is not a good thing. But no one doubts that Iraq is where the real action is.

Yet, despite this fact, over the past couple weeks, it has seemed as if one would be safer traveling to erstwhile war-torn Baghdad than to, say, the outskirts of Paris, where Muslim rioting has stretched into its second week and appears to be growing both in intensity and geographical spread; or Indonesia, where three schoolgirls recently had their heads cut off for the crime of being Christians; or Russia, where Chechen Islamists have repeatedly attacked government installations, including schools.

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At the same time, it has also begun to look as if the real threat to global stability and to the well-being of both the United States and its allies (i.e. Israel) comes not from Iraq and its amateurish, car-bombing, head-hacking, death-worshipping nihilists, but from the nuke-seeking, hostage-taking, Jew-hating, power-hungry, professional terrorist Mad Mullahs next door in Iran.

While it is true that the anti-Semitic and anti-American ranting of the regime and its supporters began twenty-six years ago last week, when American embassy staffers were abducted by the proto-Islamofascist “revolutionaries,” the vehemence and frankness of recent comments by new Iranian President (and suspected hostage taker) Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and related anti-Israel and anti-America rallies were far more provocative and openly confrontational than has been characteristic of the regime since 9/11. The Islamic Republic has once again openly and unashamedly declared its desire to be the most dangerous point on the axis of evil, and it has done so in a way that the “global community” will find hard to ignore, no matter how hard it tries.

Now, the good news in all of this is that the experts say that none of it is really a big deal. You see, as it turns out, the “youths” in France – who could, you must understand, be of any national origin and any religion – are merely upset about a lack of jobs and the relative meagerness of their welfare existence. Their rage, while frightening, is at least *understandable*, stemming as it does from *real grievances* and *real “root causes”* related to their stultified, second-class existence in what they expected would be a “land of opportunity.” And as for the Mullahs in Tehran, though they may bluster, they are not a threat in the sense that some in the Bush and Blair administrations may imagine, since they are Shi’ites; and if there is one thing every Middle East expert knows, Shi’ites and Sunnis hate each other more than they hate any “outsiders,” therefore making it nigh on impossible for the two sects – the Mullahs and al Qaeda, for example – ever to collaborate, particularly in some sort of joint effort against the West.

The bad news is that the “experts” are, as has become their wont, wrong.

The fact of the matter is that the riots in Paris, the beheadings and bombings in Indonesia, the Chechen civil war in Russia, and the demented and aggressive posturing in Iran are all related. They are all part and parcel of the same phenomenon. They are all, in short, components of the global war on terror. And whether the “experts” understand it or not, they are all also related to the main front in that war, Iraq, both to the ongoing “insurgency” there and even to the now-deposed regime of Saddam Hussein.

In some cases, most notably the relationship between al Qaeda, the terrorists in Iraq, and the mullahs in Iran, the link is physical and verifiable; in others, the link is merely philosophical or ideological. But make no mistake about it, all of these seemingly disparate incidents spring from the same source, purport to generate the same end, and share a common enemy.

Those who continue to doubt that the relationship between the Shi’ites in Iran and the Sunni terrorists in Iraq, the West Bank, Paris, Riyadh, Jakarta and elsewhere are almost certainly being intentionally obtuse. The evidence of this collaboration is plentiful and mounts daily. Early last month, for example, *The (London) Daily Telegraph* reported that a British diplomat had accused Iranian security forces of aiding Sunni insurgents in Iraq. According to the *Telegraph*, the diplomat “started laying into the Iranians with a gusto not seen in the British diplomatic service for decades. The Iranians, said the diplomat, were colluding with Sunni Muslim insurgent groups in southern Iraq . . . ”

Also last month the German magazine *Cicero* reported that the Iranian regime is currently sheltering several al Qaeda big shots that were formerly protected by the Taliban in Afghanistan. About the al Qaeda leaders, the magazine reported, “They live in secure housing of the Revolutionary Guards in and around Tehran. ‘This is not detention or house arrest,’ concludes a high-ranking secret-service employee. ‘They come and go as they please.’”

In his *National Review Online* column last week, classics professor and sometimes Cheney advisor Victor Davis Hanson made just this point about the

interconnectedness of the world's Islamism-related problems, arguing that those who see all of these problems as discreet incidents are simply ignorant of history and are therefore missing obvious historical parallels. According to Hanson, the current spate of Islamist troubles "should at least recall the eerie resemblance of our dilemma to the spread of global fascism in the late 1930s." Then, as now, ideological similarity was often powerful enough to outweigh many perceived differences. He continued:

At first few saw any real connection between the ruthless annexation of Manchuria by Japanese militarists, or Mussolini's brutal invasion of Ethiopia, or the systematic aggrandizement of Eastern-European territory by Hitler. China was a long way from Abyssinia, itself far from Poland. How could a white-supremacist Nazi have anything in common with a racially-chauvinist Japanese or an Italian fascist proclaiming himself the new imperial Roman?

The parallels between the global fascist movement seven decades ago and the global Islamist movement today are, indeed, striking, and that is no mere coincidence. While Professor Hanson notes the "eerie resemblance" between the spread of both ideologies, he stops just short of explaining why this resemblance is so eerie. In fact, the appeal and spread of global Islamism so resembles that of global fascism because they are, in many important ways, the same core ideology, dressed up with different trimmings, to be sure, but much the same in origin, allure, tactics, and ultimate goals.

Note that the ideological similarities between fascism and Islamism go far beyond a common hatred of Jews, although anti-Semitism does play an important and common role in both ideologies. Note as well that the suggestion of similarity between the two is much more than simple "name-calling" on my part, labeling an ideology I detest "fascist" simply to make it sound as contemptible as possible.

There are some analysts who, like Professor Hanson, believe that there is a historical parallel for the Islamist movement and the battle against the West, but who think that global Communism and the Cold War make for a far better analogy. They too are right, and I could just as easily have taken up that equivalence to make the same point. Despite what conventional wisdom holds about the ideological differences between fascism and Communism, the two are in many ways identical, and both are quite similar to Islamism.

Nearly fifty years ago, British historian Norman Cohn published one of the most fascinating and, in my estimation, important history books written in the twentieth century. The book, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, traced the history of the religious millenarian (chiliastic) tradition – essentially Christian salvationism – from Judaism to Christianity and throughout the medieval West.

As the author himself notes in later editions, the book might well have been little more than an obscure, if interesting, narrowly focused and therefore narrowly read text were it not for the controversial sentiments expressed in its conclusion. That conclusion, which according to Cohn, has "attracted the most attention of all" can essentially be boiled down to one sentence, the "suggestion that the story told in this book may have some relevance to the revolutionary upheavals of our own [the twentieth] century." In other words, Cohn believed and argued quite effectively that the characteristics of the apocalyptic/millenarian tradition in Western Civilization were reflected in a secularized, quasi-religious manifestation in both fascism and communism. He wrote:

The story told in this book ended some four centuries ago, but is not without relevance to our own times. The present writer has shown in another work [*Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*] how closely the Nazi phantasy of a world-wide Jewish conspiracy of destruction is related to the phantasies that inspired Emico of Leningrad and the Master of Hungary; and how mass

disorientation and insecurity have fostered the demonization of the Jew in this as in much earlier centuries. The parallels and indeed the continuity are incontestable.

But one may also reflect on the left-wing revolutions and revolutionary movements of this century . . . Those who are fascinated by such ideas [egalitarian Millenarianism] are, on the one hand, the populations of certain technologically backward societies which are not only overpopulated and desperately poor but also involved in a problematic transition to the modern world, and are correspondingly dislocated and disoriented; and, on the other hand, certain politically marginal elements in technologically advanced societies – chiefly young and unemployed workers and a small minority of intellectuals and students . . .

During the half-century since 1917 there has been a constant repetition, and on an ever-increasing scale, of the socio-psychological process which once joined the Taborite priests or Thomas Muntzer with the most disoriented and desperate of the poor, in phantasies of a final exterminatory struggle against “the great ones”; and of a perfect world from which self-seeking would be forever banished.

At the time of publication, these conclusions were quite controversial, though they were not without precedent. Indeed, Cohn’s understanding of twentieth century totalitarianism is quite reflective of that expressed a few years earlier by Eric Voegelin, who, like Cohn, saw the spirit and sentiment of medieval Gnosticism reflected in modern “revolutionary” political ideologies. In any case, the belief that National Socialism and Communism are both modern, quasi-religious manifestations of Judeo-Christian utopian millenarianism is now much more accepted than it was a half-century ago and, indeed, it is difficult to argue with that conclusion. As Cohn noted, “the parallels and indeed the continuity are incontestable.”

In my estimation, the parallels between modern Islamism and medieval millenarianism – and therefore between Islamism and National Socialism and Communism – are significant as well. Though the parallels may not be “incontestable” (yet), they are nevertheless notable and can help provide a clearer understanding of the nature and aims of the phenomenon that the West faces and the congruity of purpose common among the seemingly disparate eruptions of Islamic violence.

In his revised introduction, Cohn suggests that millenarian movements, though widely varying, share a common set of characteristics related to their pursuit of “salvation.” He summarized those characteristics thusly:

Millenarian sects or movements always picture salvation as

- (a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed *by the faithful* as a collectivity; [emphasis added]
- (b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven;
- (c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;
- (d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself;
- (e) miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies.

Cohn also notes that “revolutionary millenarianism flourishes only in certain specific social situations,” in which “there existed an unorganized, atomized population, rural or urban or both,” that was “living on the margins of society . . .” Millenarians also generally believe that salvation can be achieved and the world can be “reborn into innocence, through a final apocalyptic massacre.” In this massacre, “the evil ones – variously identified with the Jews, the clergy, or the rich – were to be exterminated; after which the Saints, i.e. the poor in question – would set up their kingdom, a realm without suffering or sin.”

Needless to say, one needn't be a Middle East or Islamic expert or, frankly, even a particularly astute observer of society, to see many of the characteristics of Cohn's revolutionary millenarians in the modern Islamist movement. The writings and pronouncements of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and their intellectual forefathers, namely Sayyid Qutb, express a desire to rid the Middle East, principally the holy land of the Arabian peninsula, of the influence of infidels; they wish to "re-establish" an idyllic and historically imaginary Caliphate, which will be governed peacefully and perfectly by Sha'ria; they believe that God is on their side in this "battle" against the evil-ones (Jews and Christians) and that he will give them the strength and the means to achieve their ends.

The leaders of the movement – the bin Ladens and al Zawahiris – are, as Cohn referred to the medieval millenarian *probetae*, "petty nobles" or "more usually . . . intellectuals or half-intellectuals," who inflict their chiliastic sermonizing upon the insecure and dislocated, the "amorphous mass of people who were not simply poor but who could find no assured and recognized place in society at all."

I have neither the time nor the space to detail the entirety of the congruence between al Qaeda and the revolutionary millenarians described by Cohn, but someday when someone smarter than I writes the book about it, the similarities will, I believe, prove startling and every bit as "incontestable" as Cohn's description of the similarities between those very same millenarians and modern Western totalitarians.

Likewise, I don't think it is necessary to delve too deeply into the causes of the French riots to see how the revolutionary millenarianism of bin-Laden-ite Islamism would appeal to and have an effect on the dislocated and unassimilated Muslim immigrants in Western Europe. In a piece published in *The Wall Street Journal* last week, *End of History* author Francis Fukuyama noted this dislocation and lack of economic integration, and suggested that it predisposed these immigrant populations to extremist ideologies, namely radical Islamism. He wrote:

Contemporary Europeans downplay national identity in favor of an open, tolerant, "post-national" Europeanness. But the Dutch, Germans, French and others all retain a strong sense of their national identity, and, to differing degrees, it is one that is not accessible to people coming from Turkey, Morocco or Pakistan. Integration is further inhibited by the fact that rigid European labor laws have made low-skill jobs hard to find for recent immigrants or their children. A significant proportion of immigrants are on welfare, meaning that they do not have the dignity of contributing through their labor to the surrounding society. They and their children understand themselves as outsiders.

He therefore concluded:

[T]he challenge that Islamism represents is not a strange and unfamiliar one. Rapid transition to modernity has long spawned radicalization; we have seen the exact same forms of alienation among those young people who in earlier generations became anarchists, Bolsheviks, fascists or members of the Bader-Meinhof gang. The ideology changes but the underlying psychology does not.

But of all the parallels to the medieval millenarians, perhaps none stands out quite as strongly as that posed by the Shi'ite Islamism that has been the official state religion of Iran for more than a quarter-century. Shi'ite Islam – or specifically "12 Imam Shi'ism," which is practiced by a preponderance of Shi'ites – is, almost by definition, millenarian, in that its chief narrative closely imitates the eschatological hopes of Christian millenarians, who interpreted literally the description in the Book of Revelation of the return of Christ and establishment of a heavenly kingdom on earth. This branch of Islam posits that the only legitimate religious and political leader (the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam) disappeared from the earth in the seventh century and will, with the help of God, return at the end of time and usher in an era of peace and justice.

As former Reagan national security aide Michael Ledeen wrote recently, “the Iranian Shiites believe that the imam is hiding at the bottom of a well in Ifahan, known as the Jamkaran well, around which a magnificent mosque has been constructed.” As Ledeen noted, those who think Iran is a legitimate democracy should understand that the regime itself believes that “It’s the 12th imam, not the people of Iran, who bestows power.”

Therefore what we have in Iran is a regime that:

- believes that its legitimacy and power are derived from God (or from God’s representative, the *Mehdi*, or 12<sup>th</sup> Imam);
- came to power in the midst of great social and economic dislocation in the late 1970s by offering a traditionalist alternative to secular modernization;
- believes it is at war with the evil ones (both the Great Satan and the Little Satan) and that it must do what it can and what God wills regarding the destruction of the evil ones;
- and believes that once the war is won, the *Mehdi* will return and will inaugurate an era of peace and justice for the Shi’ite community.

Again, I understand that this comparison is, by virtue of the nature of this publication, rather superficial, but it certainly appears that the parallels between the ideology of the Iranian regime and the medieval millenarians described by Cohn are remarkable, more striking perhaps than any other modern example.

Of course, the counter to this thesis is that Cohn describes specifically *Western* phenomena that are firmly enconced within the *Judeo-Christian* tradition, while Islamism, for all its superficial resemblances, is neither Western nor part of said Judeo-Christian heritage. Certainly, there is some validity in such an objection, but only to a point.

First, I hardly think that the charge that revolutionary millenarianism is Western disqualifies it as an explanation for the goings on today within the Islamic world. It is, in my opinion, not too terribly extraordinary that Islam would foster a predominantly Western response to the problems of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries since those problems are, themselves, historically Western in nature. In the July 25<sup>th</sup> issue of this newsletter, Mark made the argument, and quite convincingly, if you ask me, that the current manifestly unsettled nature of many regions of the globe could be attributed in large part to the spread of Western ideas, tenets, and traditions into regions in which they are completely foreign and therefore exceptionally disruptive. Specifically, he wrote:

In what is arguably an historically more significant trend than terrorism, people all over the world are increasingly demanding more individual freedom, less oppressive government, greater respect for their “fundamental rights,” more control over their lives, increased participation in the process of government, and improvement in their material well-being . . .

There are many engines driving this trend. One of the most important is the flow of information and goods across borders, which has been made possible by the end of the Cold War, the wonders of modern communications technology, and the extraordinary reach and persuasive powers of the world’s giant consumer marketing organizations. Among other things, this “globalization” of information and commerce has made people in even the most remote regions of the world aware of the material, physical, and spiritual benefits of a free and open society . . .

While this is a decidedly secular trend, it originated in the Christian belief that each human being is made in the image of God and is, as such, equal in the eyes

of God. In the 18th century, this concept gave rise in Europe and in the American colonies to the powerful notion that every person, no matter what his or her station in life, has a God-given right to be free, to pursue happiness, to own property, and to determine one's own course in life.

That the Islamic world would respond to such Western trends with Western-inspired movements is neither surprising nor particularly unprecedented. Recall that when confronted with similarly disconcerting Western-inspired modernization, an earlier generation of third world countries in Asia in particular also adopted a Western millenarian response, namely utopian socialism.

Second, it should be noted that Islam is hardly as insulated from Western religious and social trends as some might expect. After all, Islam originated in the same region of the world as both Judaism and Christianity and itself concedes a debt to the other "people of the book." Shi'ite Islam, with its expectation of a "second coming" and the creation of a heavenly kingdom on earth, obviously shares many common focal points with Christianity and, indeed, for this very reason many Islamic scholars consider it a more "Westernized" interpretation of Islam.

More to the point, it shouldn't be all that surprising that an affinity for Judeo-Christian eschatology should be found in Islam – and Shi'ite Islam in particular – since some scholars, Norman Cohn among them, believe that the early Jewish eschatology is itself derived in part from pre-Islamic Persian religious traditions, namely Zoroastrianism. Indeed, in his 1993 book *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, a follow-up to *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Cohn traced the concept of dualism and what would become the Jewish and Christian traditions of eschatology to the ancient Persian "prophet" Zoroaster (a.k.a. Zarathustra) and his reinterpretation of the "combat myth" and to his belief that the world was inevitably moving toward a great a battle and a post-battle state that would be free of conflict, or as Cohn put it, that would have "cosmos without chaos."

In other words, one may argue that Shi'ite Islam as its practiced in Iran is, in many ways, derivative in it's mythology of Christianity, but both religions, according to one of the foremost experts on the subject, derive their eschatological traditions from an even earlier common antecedent, which is itself Iranian.

Despite this common heritage, one should by no means confuse Christian millenarianism with the Islamist version, for one critical reason. Christian millenarianism has – since the first century, down through the Middle Ages, and into its modern quasi-religious manifestations – always been deemed heretical, if not immediately, then in due time. The pseudo-Baldwin was publicly hanged; the Brethren of the Free Spirit were burned at the stake, as was Jan Hus; the Nazis were set upon by the entire free world and the regime's survivors were tried and punished. Thus far at least, the revolutionary millenarians of radical Islamism have escaped similar fates and, indeed, have become the dominant ideological force within Islam.

Al Qaeda continues to wage war against the infidel "occupiers" in Iraq and to pursue the "re-establishment" of the Caliphate. Iran continues to chase the nuclear genie and to openly and aggressively court the "final conflict" with the "evil ones." Murderous radicals in Indonesia and Chechnya continue to butcher innocents in an attempt to purify their societies of their corrupting influences. And now the streets outside of Paris and, indeed, throughout France are ablaze, set afire by idle youth who have been convinced that they can be the harbingers of the new Andalusia, that they can succeed where Abd al-Rahman failed nearly 1300 years ago and capture France for the umma. And there is no voice within Islam that is, at this point, powerful enough to stop the slaughter and to put a stop to the spread of the Islamist heresy.

In fact, Islamism actually appears to be gaining the upper hand in the Islamic world. The "experts" believed this would never happen, of course, since Shi'ites and Sunnis hate one another so deeply. Yet

the Shi'ite radicals in Iran continue to arm both Shi'ites and Sunnis in the Palestinians territories; they continue to arm both Shi'ites and Sunnis in Iraq; and Wahhabi radicals in Riyadh continue to fund radicals around the globe, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

What conventional wisdom has always failed to grasp in this case is that all of the various splinter groups within the Islamist movement share something that binds them together in spite of their doctrinal differences, namely an all-encompassing hatred for the "evil ones" – the Western infidels and the Jews – who ultimately prevent the realization of the Islamist utopia. While there is no doubt that they hate each other, they hate the "evil ones" more and therefore will do whatever is necessary, even collude with fellow Muslims they believe to be heretics, to eliminate the "enemies" of Islam.

Recall that the experts also believed that it was impossible for Nazis and Communists to collude, given their intrinsic hatred of one another. Yet as the Poles and the Czechs, among others, will attest, the revolutionaries' shared beliefs more than compensated for their differences, at least temporarily.

Given that the response of the civilized world to this last collusion was to promise "never again," one might have assumed that this lesson had been learned. It hasn't, at least not by everyone. Fortunately, it will be. The comforting thing about of millenarian movements is that they are, by definition, self defeating, since the utopia they promise can never be achieved. The only question is how much damage they'll be allowed to cause in the meantime.

## WHITHER LIBERALISM?

Not long ago, liberalism was the most successful political ideology the United States had ever known. It was the heart and sole of the majority party of the world's most powerful nation. Liberals wore the label proudly in those days. To them, being liberal meant having the moral high ground. They considered themselves to be more compassionate, wise, generous, sharing, understanding, forgiving, tolerant, and nonjudgmental than ordinary mortals. They were the problem solvers. They *cared*. They were the masters of the government, the media, and the educational establishment. They were the jewel in the crown of the culture. They were the lawgivers, the Solons of modern America. They had the answers. They considered anyone who questioned them and their beliefs to be stupid, bigoted, mean-spirited, or all three. Or worse.

Today, liberals have fallen on hard times. They control neither the White House nor either house of Congress. And they are in the process of losing the overwhelming presence on the Supreme Court that they enjoyed for so long. Indeed, many are reluctant to identify themselves as liberals. They prefer to use the word "progressive." Once they were "happy warriors," optimistic, in control, disdainful of those who spoke of limits on what the government could do under their direction and wisdom. Today, they are on the defensive. Many seem to be angry all the time, cur like, snarling. They attribute their failures to illegal acts on the part of the Republicans or ignorance on the part of a public that is incapable of grasping what's good for them.

So what happened? What changed? Customarily, this question is answered by a discussion of the processes by which change occurred. Political pundits speak of the radicalization that set in during the 1960s when the party of FDR and Jack Kennedy and such liberal stalwarts as Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey became the party of Abbie Hoffman, Jane Fonda, George McGovern, and Eugene McCarthy.

Some cite the sanctimony, fecklessness, and moral obtuseness that became a permanent part of the Party's character during the Carter years, which provided the impetus for both the slow extinction of the conservative, "Scoop Jackson" wing of the Party and the exodus of the neo-conservatives to the GOP.

Others concentrate on the Clinton years when ordinary Americans discovered that the liberal elites in Washington, in the universities, in the media, and in the entertainment industry, whom they had trusted to define and defend the nation's time-honored beliefs and customs, were morally bankrupt, incapable not only of demanding decency and honor from the president but of distinguishing decency from corruption, right from wrong, and truth from lies.

This procedural approach to the question of what has changed generally leads to a discussion of an assortment of specific changes in attitudes toward various subjects that liberals have undergone over the years, ranging from demands for a loosening of the moral norms associated with sexual matters to equally assertive demands for a strengthening of government enforcement of an ever expanding list of "rights" that Americans are said to be guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

These discussions describe the process by which liberalism has changed and offer useful examples of how these changes have been manifested in politics. But they don't, in my opinion, adequately address the fundamental, philosophical changes that have occurred in liberalism over the years that make it less appealing to Americans today as a political ideology than it was in years past. To understand what I mean by this, think of Teddy Kennedy on a stage somewhere in drag singing the old song "What Did I Have That I Don't Have?" from the 1970 musical "On a Clear Day."

What did he love that there's none of?  
What did I lose the sweet warm knack of?  
Wouldn't I be the late great me if I knew how?  
Oh, what did I have I don't have now?  
What did I have that I don't have?

What do I need a big supply of?  
What was the trick I did particularly well before?  
What did he see that's gone in me?  
What did I use that now I'm shy of?

The question is, what did American liberalism have when it was riding high that it doesn't have now? This is important because the answer to this question will, I believe, go a long way toward helping one to make a reasonable projection as to whether there is something fundamental about liberalism in its new manifestation that will prevent it from returning to its prior dominance of American politics.

And the answer to the question is – drum roll here – that American liberalism no longer has the two elements that once clearly distinguished it from European socialism; the two elements that once endeared liberalism to so many Americans who nevertheless despised its European cousins, socialism and communism; the two elements that made American liberalism unique among the many offshoots and branches of left-wing movements around the world.

The first of these two elements is a firm religious basis. The European left was built on the foundation of atheism. Rousseau was highly critical of Christianity. Marx despised all religions. And all the movers and shakers and shapers of European communism and socialism, both between and after the appearance on the world stage of these two architects of modern left-wing thought, have shared their distrust and hatred for religion. And this disdain followed the spread of the ideology around the world, wherever it went, from Russia to China to the jungles and cities of Latin America.

Except in the United States. In the United States the mainstream of the American left never bought into atheism, or even agnosticism. Until recently, that is. Certainly the roots of American liberalism are intertwined with those of the European left, but the direct connection is largely confined to the more benign elements of European socialism, principally the early 19<sup>th</sup> century utopians and the English Fabians.

In fact, not very long ago American liberals gave no ground whatsoever to conservatives when it came to honoring God in the Public Square. They publicly prayed for God's divine guidance and embraced Judeo-Christian morality as the guide for ethical and moral conduct. Consider, for example, the following short speech made by FDR, the father of American liberalism, on the afternoon of D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor . . .

Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith . . . These men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate . . . They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home. Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom . . . And, O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee; faith in our sons; faith in each other . . . Thy will be done Almighty God. Amen.

It is worth noting that even the *New York Times* editorial staff seemed to have shared Roosevelt's belief in God and his respect for America's religious heritage, as evidenced from the following line in that paper after his death. "Men will thank God on their knees a hundred years from now that Franklin D. Roosevelt was in the White House,"

It is difficult to say exactly when the antagonism toward religion began to form among the liberal elite. It was clearly not apparent during the 1960s, when religious leaders and their flocks, from all persuasions, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, were in the forefront of the civil rights movement. In fact, the civil rights campaign was first and foremost a religious action, as was the abolitionist movement before it. Nor was devout religiosity a problem for Democrats in the 1970's, given their support for Jimmy Carter, whose self-proclaimed, deep devotion to his religious beliefs were, to my recollection at least, never an issue.

The tension seems to have begun in the mid 1970s when several, grass-roots, Christian activist organizations were formed in order to combat what the organizers of these groups perceived as a breakdown in traditional American moral and ethical behavior and troubling anti-religious trends in public education, as well as the rapidly increasing use of abortion as a means of birth control following the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. The left didn't like it and its reaction was, well, reactionary.

By the mid-1980s the left's antagonism toward religion was in full bloom. Indeed, by 1990 Ted Turner felt perfectly comfortable describing Christianity as a "religion for losers," and by the mid-1990s the *Washington Post* was able to generalize in print about conservative Christians being generally "poor, uneducated and easily led."

This trend took an interesting twist during the 2000 presidential campaign when Joseph Lieberman's fellow liberals began to question whether his regular references to his faith might not be threatening to their agenda. The Anti-Defamation League became so distressed by it all that they publicly warned Lieberman of their belief that "there is a point at which an emphasis on religion in a political campaign becomes inappropriate and even unsettling in a religiously diverse society such as ours."

Lieberman offered the obvious response to this missive, which was to explain to the ADL that if voters are "unsettled" by his public affirmations of faith, then they should not vote for him, and that those who wouldn't vote for him for that reason should be happy to be informed of his commitment to his religion before they went to the polls.

But this fear of the God-fearing reached a new level during the Senate hearings on President Bush's nomination of John Ashcroft to be Attorney General, when various liberal groups publicly questioned whether his Christian faith would interfere with his ability and willingness to enforce the laws of this nation.

The importance of this schism between the left and the right over religion was highlighted during the last Presidential campaign, when post-election analyses revealed that “moral values” played a decisive roll in the Republican victory. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi reacted by telling CNN’s Wolf Blitzer that “Democrats are faith filled,” but she admitted that they didn’t do a good job of demonstrating this fact.

Numerous bigwig Democrats echoed her sentiments, and while none said it directly, all seemed to have the same mystified reaction that the unnamed New York attorney was said by historian William Lee Miller to have uttered in response to the emergence of the Moral Majority in the 1980s, namely that “millions of those people out there believe what nobody believes anymore.”

The second element that is missing from liberalism today that was a hallmark of the movement in by-gone days and which clearly distinguished it from European socialism is “pragmatism,” both as a philosophy and as word defined in the dictionary as “a practical, matter-of-fact way of approaching or assessing situations or of solving problems.”

Pragmatism as a philosophy is a uniquely American approach to empiricism, developed at the turn of the century by Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, and John Dewey. As with all philosophies and belief systems, this one is quite complex. But for the narrow purposes of this article, I will just note that it defined truth as (quoting from *Harper’s Dictionary of Modern Thought*) “that which it is ultimately satisfying to believe, either because the expectations a true belief excites are actually fulfilled or . . . because they contribute to the satisfactoriness of, and effectiveness in the conduct of life.”

Now it is easy to see today how this philosophy opened the door for the post-modernist assertion that truth is relative, which is diametrically opposed to the Christian and politically conservative concept of the existence of universal truths. Indeed, this conflict was presaged by G.K. Chesterton’s famous stinging

criticism of pragmatism, as follows: “One of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist.”

But in fairness, undermining the Christian concept of truth was not the driving force behind the efforts of the authors of pragmatism as a philosophy. Their pragmatic goal was to promote social reform, progressive politics, equality, cooperation over conflict, and tolerance by promoting the principle that all ideas are useful in arriving at the truth, that none should be excluded from consideration on the basis of some preconceived notion that there is only one avenue to truth.

From this perspective, truth can be a subjective amalgam of diverse ideas that together could offer a pragmatic solution to problems and in doing so avoid destructive ideology-based conflicts. Relative to this latter point, some historians, most notably Louis Menand, argue that the Civil War was a particularly potent influence on the development of pragmatism as a philosophy, since, he says, it was widely believed in the post-war years that that terrible conflict had been caused by the fanaticism of the abolitionists, who refused to consider any compromise on the issue of slavery.

Menand notes in his Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Metaphysical Club*, that although the chance of another civil war was remote at the turn of the century, “a philosophy that warned against the idolatry of ideas was possibly the only philosophy on which a progressive politics could have been successfully mounted.” And he further claims that this philosophy ushered in the progressive, or liberal era, of American politics. In support of this claim he notes that “the year James introduced pragmatism was also the year the American economy began to move away from an individualist ideal of unrestrained competition and toward a bureaucratic ideal of management and regulation.”

By the time Franklin Roosevelt entered the White House, pragmatism had become an integral part of the progressive or liberal philosophy of government, not

so much in the philosophical sense of the relationship between ideas and truth but in the sense of being open to a variety of ideas and not being wedded to a particular ideology or approach to solving problems. As Paul Johnson notes in his great history *Modern Times*, at one of his early press conferences Roosevelt boasted that he “played things by ear and compared himself to a quarter-back who ‘called a new play when he saw how the last one had turned out.’”

Among other things, this playing “by ear” led to such initiatives as the Emergency Banking Act and the Loans to Industry Act, the Home Owners’ Loan Act, The Sale of Securities Act, the Banking Acts of 1933 and 1935, the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, the First Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Soil Erosion Act, the National Industrial Recovery Act and, of course, the TVA.

Concomitant with this burst of federal innovation was a decline into virtual extinction of voter sympathy for a conservative ideology of restraint and prudence. And this attitude continued in the immediate aftermath of World War II, eventually leading to another whirlwind of “pragmatic” new federal programs to solve the problems of the nation under the guidance of Lyndon Johnson, who bettered the New Deal in both scope and the expenditure of money with his Great Society.

Conservatives continually pointed out that liberalism’s pragmatic problem solving more often than not did more harm than good, largely because the approach did, in fact, ignore one fundamental truth after another. But this not only did not stop liberals from trying, it didn’t even slow them down. In fact, when the number of problems to solve in the United States failed to match the enthusiasm liberals had for problem solving, the liberals took their act abroad and “solved problems” there. And when the number of problems that needed solving around the world failed to keep up, then liberals made up problems to be solved.

Liberalism in those days was the ideology that never slept. As Max Eastman put it, liberals yearned to do good and were obsessed with the power of state to do it. And pragmatism was always there to encourage innovation and the adoption of new ideas, whether they were based on real truth or not, and to prevent the stale, old, conflict-causing theories proclaimed by conservatives as representative of prudence and common sense from standing in the way of “progress.”

And the public loved it while it lasted. And today it’s gone. Social security is going broke. Medicare is going broke. The population is aging rapidly. The war in Iraq is not going as well as its planners had hoped. The fiscal and trade deficits are skyrocketing. Illegal immigrants are pouring into the nation. Threats of terrorism and terrible pandemics loom over the nation. Even the conservative stalwart Peggy Noonan thinks that the “wheels may be coming off the trolley.”

Yet the liberals today have no answers, no programs, no baskets of ideas to gather into a pragmatic mix to be used to solve even one of these problems. They complain and carp a great deal. But that’s it. In the last two elections, they have sent political hacks into the fight, who were barely able to defend the party’s past actions, much less articulate a new pragmatic approach to governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is hard to say when the pragmatism disappeared from liberalism. Somewhere along the line, most probably concurrent with the development of the antagonism toward religion, liberals lost their enthusiasm for social reform, progressive politics, equality, cooperation over conflict, and tolerance. They became the reactionaries that they once disdained. Not only do they have no ideas of their own, they scorn those offered by the neo-liberals in the Republican Party of George Bush.

Why this happened is not entirely clear. But it seems to be because many of the party’s largest and most important special interest groups would be directly threatened by any changes that are made in response

to the new realities of the economic, social, and cultural changes that have occurred over the past few decades. So they cling to the status quo, content to have these problems turn into nightmares rather than to lose the advantage they hold as a result of them. These groups include, but are not limited to the old-line liberals, black leaders whose livelihoods are threatened by the emergence of a large black middle class that doesn't share their victim mentality, labor unions that are threatened by the globalization of trade and the privatization of retirement savings, and teachers' unions that rely on failure to justify their demands for more money and jobs.

Can liberalism gain back what it once had that it doesn't have now? Frankly, I doubt it. The election of Howard Dean to the Chairmanship of the Party was no fluke. The Party is what it is. And Dean's brand of liberalism is liberalism today. It is a highly secular, reactionary liberalism, not unlike its European cousins which are fighting desperately to retain a social and cultural system that has rotted under their stewardship. Liberalism's future does not rest on gaining back something it once had. Its future will depend on whether it can convince the American public to love the new liberalism as much as it once did the old. The rest of us can only hope this doesn't happen.

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