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THEY SAID IT

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.

I said: "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter-bitter," he answered;
"But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart."

Stephen Crane, 1871-1900.

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THE LONG WAR.

The bottom line on the war in Iraq and the "war on terror" is that both are in the very early stages, whether the American people or their elected representatives like it or not. Depending on how America proceeds to meet the threat from militant Islam, it can influence who and how many will die in this conflict, but it cannot stop it, especially at this early stage. To use a World War II analogy, if 9/11 were Pearl Harbor, then MacArthur has yet to leave Corrigidor and the Japanese Americans have yet to be rounded up and moved to "relocation centers" in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming.

There are many reasons to believe this. For starters, there is the diffuse nature of the enemy and its aims. It has no country that it can call it's own; no leader who can speak for the movement as a whole and whose death would cripple it; no specific, realistic goal or set of goals the achievement of which would cool its murderous fever; no firm benchmarks for measuring success.

It cannot be easily defeated because there is nothing concrete to defeat. There is no single head to cut off. It is a hydra, foul breath and all. It is pure evil, fueled by hatred and despair. It moves across the globe like a plague of cockroaches, insinuating itself into the world's successful centers of civilized life, sowing revulsion and spreading the disease of hatred, ungoverned by scruples or conscience, killing women and children with the same ease as it kills combatants, killing its own, eating its young, driven by a vague and futile belief that tearing down of the societies created by others will erase the shame of Islam's failed promise to produce happiness and prosperity for its followers.

This movement is unlike anything seen during modern times. It has been compared to the murderous German fascists and the Russian and Chinese communists. But it is more reminiscent of the Milton's description of the Stygian counsel of "heaven's fugitives," a "third part of heaven's sons," "outcasts from

God,” who assembled after their fall and declared war on God and all that was good, and then dispersed to the far corners of the globe, driven by a desire to revenge a baseless grievance, “roving on in confused march forlorn, the adventurous bands, with shuddering horror pale and eyes aghast . . . o’er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp, rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death – a universe of death.”

Militant Islam is everywhere, all over the world, residing in the sewers and the finest houses, in the seats of government and the slums of the cities and towns, comfortable in any setting, seething in jealousy, worshipping a God of murderous hatred, absorbed in a constant drumbeat of propaganda that spews forth from their counterfeit “religious” leaders and from the Internet and other technological inventions that were produced by the very societies and cultures that they wish to destroy.

These people are not going away. And why should they? Why should this despised race of ill disposed, anxious killers abandon their fraternity of hatred? They receive aid and comfort from around the world, from America’s professed enemies as well as its alleged friends and trading partners, including but not limited to China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The size and intensity of the fifth column movements within the ranks of its enemies encourage it to soldier on, as does the pusillanimous political leadership of the United States and the European nations. Furthermore, what else would they do? For what are they qualified but to kill?

They have a dream, a childish dream of a grand, new Islamic caliphate extending westward from Islamablad to the Atlantic Ocean and northwest to Hadrian’s Wall. What can Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, Jack Murtha, Marcos Moulitsas, and the crowd at moveon.org offer the leaders of militant Islam that could possibly compete with this dream of spreading the evil construct of their faith across the globe and achieving a martyr’s paradise in the process? Indeed, why would not the “peace” movement, which these Americans and their counterparts in Europe are so vigorously pursuing,

have just the opposite impact on the Islamists, prompting them to promote their satanic “holy war” even more diligently?

Now, we have no doubt that the Islamist fight against civilization is a lost cause. They are losers, the Luddites of 21st century, fighting against the march of mankind’s constant and restless thriving for knowledge and for technological mastery over the forces of both nature and nature’s God, to borrow a phrase from Jefferson. Any small victories they achieve will lead immediately to internal dissent. They will turn on each other like jackals fighting over the corpse of a recent kill. They are the embodiment of what the Greeks described as hubris and defined as being filled with pride, a sense of self-righteousness, and love of self. The Greeks believed this to be a fatal flaw. We agree.

But we also have no doubt that militant Islam will celebrate victories along the path toward defeat, if victory can be defined as mass murder, the sowing of chaos, the destruction of established societies and cultures.

As we said earlier, the extent of these victories will be governed by the manner in which their enemies react to their aggression. As we have noted before in these pages, we believe that President Bush was correct when he identified democracy is one of the most potent weapons that could be employed against this evil. We put it this way just one year ago in an article entitled “Some Thoughts As The Dogs Of War Bark.”

To Americans, the phrase [weapons of mass destruction] refers to nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. From the perspective of the fundamentalist Mullahs and their armies of terrorists, who dream of converting all of humanity to the Islamic faith and establishing a new Caliphate that will rule over a worldwide Islamic community, the ultimate weapon of mass destruction is President Bush’s effort to introduce a modern democracy with its attendant rights and freedoms and lifestyle choices smack dab in the middle of the Muslim world.

It is difficult enough for the Islamists to deal with the menacing trends that are advancing across the globe outside the borders of the Middle East. Then add to that the difficulty of dealing with the presence of Israel within their midst as a constant, irrefutable reminder to ordinary Muslims who dream of a better life that something is terribly wrong with the Islamic societies in which they live, these societies that are marked by widespread poverty, illiteracy, state-sanctioned murder, economic sclerosis, and corruption.

But the attempted introduction of Western style capitalism, democracy, and individual freedom into a large, oil rich Muslim nation like Iraq is beyond the pale, a literal death threat to their movement and to their dreams. They would rather suffer the effects of a conventional weapon of mass destruction than to see an Arab, capitalist democracy rising from the rubble of Saddam Hussein's legacy of death.

As it turns out, the problem with the President's approach is that it requires a degree of patience and commitment on the part of the American people that is beyond the political skills of the Bush White House to produce and sustain. Granted that the Bush crowd was up against a highly organized and deliberate effort by Democrats to discredit any and all associated endeavors. But, in our opinion, the real fault lay in the White House's insistence on selling the idea primarily as a means for improving the lives of Iraqis rather than as a bold offensive effort to undermine the enemy. In our opinion, Americans don't really give a damn whether the Iraqi people live free or die unless it makes a direct difference to American security, and the Bush White House has failed miserably to make this connection clear to most Americans.

The alternative Democratic plan of withdrawal from Iraq is, we believe, similarly flawed in that the Democrats insist on wrapping it in a cloak of cowardice and defeat, which is anathema to a majority of Americans, who are generally competitive, patriotic, proud of their military, loath to lose at anything, and

traditionally uninspired by the image of the mighty Achilles skulking in his tent while his comrades die on the field of battle.

On the other hand, if Democrats would market withdrawal as a cunning offensive move designed to weaken and kill the enemy, they might be able to pull it off. How, you ask, could they argue that a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq would not be a form of retreat and would actually strengthen America's position in the long run? Well, we don't believe this argument, but if we were, like the Democrats, trying to sell withdrawal to the American people, we would do it as follows.

Withdrawal from Iraq would result in a terrible and bloody civil war that would eventually involve the entire region in conflict. The Democrats could argue that If Muslims are killing Muslims they will have less time and resources to devote to the task of killing Americans. The war would be an economic disaster for the region and provide the backdrop for killing fields that would make Cambodia after the United States pulled out of Southeast Asia look like a Sunday school picnic. On the plus side, this would deplete the population from which militant Islam could draw future recruits. Moreover, at some point, Israel would probably get involved and significantly add to the destruction of parts of the Muslim world. As for those Iraqis who trusted America's promise of continued support for their efforts to create a decent, modern Iraqi state, Democrats could simply say that they should have known better.

As a bonus, this plan would almost certainly cause a very large spike in oil prices, which would force the world to curtail its use of fossil fuels, which would help to save both the planet and the drowning polar bears, and bring happiness to such Democratic Party neo-religious leaders as Al Gore and Madonna, who recently told the "Live Earth" concert goers in London "If you want to save the planet, let me see you jump."

Our guess is that neither the White House's democracy initiative nor the Democrats' pull- out-now plan will be fully implemented, which means that the war

in Iraq will drag on well into the next presidency, regardless of who next sits in the White House. As for the “war on terror,” the Islamists will continue to call the shots. If they don’t resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction on American population centers, they should be able to prolong their terrorist initiative for at least a generation, during which time they could kill a great many people and make notable progress in the spread of Islam across the globe, particularly in Europe.

If, on the other hand, they implement some sort of massive terrorist strike on U.S. soil, the “war on terror” will enter a new and highly murderous stage, as Americas seek revenge and a higher degree of safety.

In the meantime, Democrats will continue their phony, politically-inspired initiative to bring “peace in our time,” while the Bush White House will do all it can to achieve progress in producing some sort of stable government in Iraq in time for the next presidential race, which is not only possible but probable. At least we hope so.

RELIGION AND POLITICS 2008.

Next to Iraq, the most important issue in the 2008 presidential election is likely to be God. In the last presidential race, Democrats were supremely confident entering election day, only to see victory snatched away from them by those whom exit pollsters labeled “values voters.” The party establishment responded immediately, declaring that they would not be outprayed by the GOP and using the intervening two-and-a-half years to “get religion” and to unleash the electoral potential of the “religious left.”

Today, the Democratic primary contest sounds and feels more like a revival meeting than a political campaign. The three frontrunners for the nomination – Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards – invoke God and Church explicitly and unremittingly, praying and exalting their religion so habitually that an uninformed observer would almost certainly conclude

that the Democratic Party is the party of the zealots, the party that represents those who wish to blur the lines between Church and state.

The mainstream media, for its part, has enlisted in the cause, approvingly detailing the Democrats’ political conversion. Just last week, for example, *Time* magazine featured the Democrats’ religious rebirth on its cover, under the headline “How the Democrats Found God,” and carried stories with titles such as “Leveling the Praying Field” and “The Origins of the God Gap.” And such glowing coverage of the Democrats’ “coming to Jesus” has been the rule rather than the exception this year.

A couple of months back, when the Reverend Jerry Falwell died, the theme of the shifting political loyalties of religious voters took on added urgency. Falwell’s passing seemed, if nothing else, to be an occasion for Democratic operatives and mainstream journalists to engage in a bit of conjecture about the political future of the evangelical religious movement. And many, if not most, concluded that Falwell’s absence would simply intensify the left’s appeal to erstwhile religious conservatives. As John Heileman put it in the lead to his piece in the May 21 issue of *New York Magazine*, “Falwell’s Death Points to a New Reality: The Religious Vote, for the First Time in Decades, Is Up for Grabs.”

Put us down as skeptical. Though we don’t doubt the importance of religion in politics or the Democrats’ sincerity about making themselves more appealing to religious voters, we do doubt their ability to do so. For all their public praying and personal faith, both the Democrats and their mainstream media allies still seem to be missing the point. They remain, in our estimation, ignorant of the origins of the “God gap” and just as ignorant of the means by which to eliminate it.

For starters, the Democrats and the media misunderstand the role of “leaders” such as Falwell in the evangelical movement’s political involvement. Their presumption is that Falwell and others (e.g. Pat

Robertson, James Dobson) are vital to Republican success because they guide their followers, dictating to the faithful what to believe and how to vote. By extension, this means that the replacement of leaders like Falwell and Robertson by more pragmatic and moderate men like Rick Warren and William Hybels will translate into more pragmatic and moderate voting behavior by evangelicals.

This view of religious voters is based on little more than prejudice and disdain. Fourteen years ago, *The Washington Post* crystallized the political establishment's unspoken yet firmly held belief about evangelical voters, calling them "poor, uneducated, and easily led." And though that view has been publicly repudiated by the new religious left, it continues to inform the way in which Democrats and "moderates" approach evangelical Christians.

In his piece on post-Falwell evangelicals, John Heileman wrote glowingly of the Reverend Rick Warren, "the pastor of Orange County, California's Saddleback Church (regular attendance 20,000) and the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, which has sold more hardback copies (over 25 million) than any nonfiction book in history," and his likely impact on the political process. "Whereas Falwell described AIDS as 'the wrath of God against homosexuals,'" Heileman wrote, "Warren has donated millions of dollars to fight HIV in Africa. Whereas Falwell bemoaned the emerging strain of Evangelical environmentalism as 'Satan's attempt to redirect the Church's primary focus,' Warren declares 'the environment is a moral issue.' And regarding his pro-life stance, Warren says, 'I'm just not rabid about it.'"

All of this, Heileman and countless others have concluded, suggests that evangelical voters should now be more flexible as well, taking their cues from the likes of Warren. They should thus be more willing to embrace "progressive" candidates and center-left politics, which should, in turn, shift the long-term balance of power back to the Democrats.

Again, we remain skeptical. Not only does this presumption hinge on evangelicals being unthinking, uncritical, and willing simply to do as they're told,

but it also posits that liberalism is the norm, even in religion, and that the moderation or liberalization of religious beliefs is a natural occurrence that will make today's evangelical churches more tolerable to the left but will leave them otherwise unchanged. This flies in the face of both historical experience and contemporary evidence.

The story of religion in the West during the twentieth century is precisely the story of "modernization." Over the decades, most Christian denominations slowly but surely liberalized both their politics and their core beliefs, culminating in Vatican II and the "modernization" of the Catholic liturgy. And though some of this liberalization and modernization was indeed necessary, many denominations simply took it too far, subjugating core beliefs to secular trends.

This liberalization was rationalized as a means to remain "relevant" and to retain the interest of the young and progressive, but the net effect was precisely the opposite. Mainline Protestant Churches were emptied and have never been refilled. Throughout Europe and the United States, Churches pushed relevance through liberalization but instead found themselves completely irrelevant and without congregations. Indeed, the rise of the evangelical movement in the United States can be traced to the liberalization of mainline Protestantism and the faithful's collective rebellion and demand for orthodoxy.

This demand for orthodoxy has been reflected not only in the rise of evangelism in the United States, but in the Catholic Church's post-Vatican II adjustments as well. Liberal Catholics have called both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI "reactionaries," claiming that both men have tried to "turn back the clock." But the fact of the matter is that both men saw that the modernization permitted by Vatican II was misused by some, and thus threatened both Church's universality and its appeal to the faithful.

This past week, for example, Pope Benedict was roundly criticized by both liberal Catholics and secular liberals for the minor adjustment he made to the Church's position on the celebration of the Tridentine

Mass. The Pope's critics claim that he is a backward looking man who has altered the Church's stance to please a mere handful of "ultraconservative" or "ultraorthodox" Catholics. But nothing could be further from the truth. As the journalist Raymond Arroyo notes, the Pope's action was, in reality, undertaken principally to quench the thirst for orthodoxy that exists throughout the Church, but especially among the young. Arroyo wrote:

There is a generation gap emerging in the reception to the Pope's decree. Generally those Catholics in their late 50's and older are not as receptive as their younger counterparts. Several years ago I was struck to discover, while visiting a seminary abroad, that a group of seminarians were spending their recreation time learning the Old Rite of the Mass from an Octogenarian cleric. I have since discovered that this underground movement among seminarians is more widespread than I had imagined. Benedict's liberalization of the old rite is not the case of a Pope on a nostalgia kick. Rather, he is tapping into an organic liturgical movement that has sprung up among the young—a natural yearning for devotions and traditions that they were denied in their formation. Catholics in their 40's, 30's, and 20's are rediscovering their roots and craving greater orthodoxy than their parents or grandparents. John Paul the Second was laughed to scorn when he began his World Youth Day gatherings, but he rejected the conventional wisdom and pressed forward, with a conviction that his Church's future resided with the young. His successor is following a similar course.

Go to any parish where the Latin Mass is offered with regularity: Old St. Mary's in Washington, St. Agnes in New York, or St. Patrick's in New Orleans and you are likely to find only a handful of people who were even alive when the old Mass was still

the norm. The cries of infants rise up like incense at these services and young people are everywhere.

What this suggests then is that folks like Rick Warren are playing a dangerous game. By liberalizing the beliefs of their erstwhile evangelical churches – in deference to the beliefs embraced by "the young," mind you – they run the risk of alienating those very people they presume to placate. When Warren declares that he is pro-Life but is "not rabid about it," he places himself in the untenable position of conceding that abortion is the taking of human life but that it's hardly anything to get all worked up about. Eventually, even those evangelicals who tell pollsters that abortion is not the most important political issue to them are likely to find this position distasteful and shifty at the very least.

In short, liberals may place their faith in the likes of Rick Warren, hoping that his moderation of evangelism will deliver some religious voters to the Democrats. But such a political shift is far from guaranteed. Indeed, the evangelical movement is driven by and has its origins in the desire for orthodoxy, the need to believe in unchanging, universal truths. The "moderation" of those beliefs is just as likely to spur a new orthodox evangelical movement as it is to push current conservative Christians in a more liberal direction.

And this brings us to the most important reason to remain skeptical about the Democrats' ability to appeal to "values voters." Democrats can display their personal religiosity all they want, but none of it is going to make even the slightest bit of difference if they continue to ignore the aforementioned "need to believe in unchanging, universal truths." The Democrats think that the key to religious voters is religion, which makes a certain logical sense. But the truth is that religion and religious belief is merely a proxy for a belief in the universality of truth. It doesn't matter if Hillary, Barack, Nancy, Harry and the rest go to Church every day from now until the

election, so-called “values voters” aren’t going to vote for them as long as they embrace a political value system that renders truth and morality conditional.

Last week (and for many years prior), we noted that “the essence of the debate that lies at the heart of American politics today, and is abundantly evident in Mrs. Clinton’s race for the White House, is the confrontation between two competing moral systems.” We continued:

One side in this conflict can be described as traditional Judeo-Christian. The foundation of this belief system was established some three thousand four hundred years ago with the receipt of the Decalogue by Moses at Mt. Sinai. It combines Talmudic truths and the teachings of Jesus Christ, as interpreted and clarified by such scholars as St. Augustine, Moses Maimonides, and St. Thomas Aquinas, each of whom introduced portions of Aristotelian philosophy.

This system embraces a host of traditions, customs, and mores that developed in Western society over many centuries. It is emblazoned with a rich repository of art and literature, and historic struggles, both religious and secular. The twin concepts of “sin” and “truth” are the glue that bind this system together.

The opposing system espouses beliefs that are often referred to today as “post-modern,” although many of the ideas that form the foundation of this system can be traced back to various 13th century European sects, such as the Brethern of the Free Spirit, which believed in the complete subjectivity of authority and disregard for the standards and norms taught by the Church.

The centerpiece of this system is that there are no ultimate, overarching truths; that judgments about right and wrong are little more than the means by which some people control others, or as Nietzsche, an icon of the movement, put it, the outward expressions of will and power. To Nietzsche, history, truth, and reality are all man-made. He argued that “there are no eternal facts just as there are no absolute truths.”

The bottom line is that the Democrats remain on one side of this divide and “values voters” remain on the other. And no amount of public religiosity or pandering to religious groups is going to change this.

It is nice, we guess, that the Democrats have, at long last, come to realize that it is not in their benefit to marginalize religious voters. If nothing else, the Democrats newfound friendliness toward religion may help to curb some of acidity and odium that has characterized the political atmosphere in this country for most of the last four decades. But it is unlikely to win an overwhelming number of religious voters over to the Democrats or in any way destroy the religious conservative movement.

The Democrats and the media misunderstand the roots of the “God gap” and they are thus unlikely to be able to do much of anything about it. Until they understand that the moral foundations of modern liberal thought conflict directly with American religious tradition and its interminable quest for orthodoxy, they are unlikely to make a great deal of headway with religious voters, no matter how many times they invite the media’s cameras to watch them pray.

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