

and euthanasia, but instead it creates only a moral wasteland, marked by ruined families, suffering children, and dead bodies.

On his journey through Hell, Dante encountered every human talent, gift, and ambition, and all of them, he learned, had been perverted. In Hell, he found, there is no light that is not lurid, no love that is not self-love, no beauty that is not self-serving, no honor that is not disabling pride, no religion that is not self-aggrandizement. The damned are self-damned; they suffer the self-chosen perversion of their proper human nature:

For suddenly, as I watched, I saw a lizard
come darting forward on six great taloned feet
and fasten itself to a sinner from crotch to
gizzard.

Its middle feet sank in the sweat and grime
of the wretch's paunch, its forefeet his arms,
its teeth bit through both cheeks (XXV, 46-51).

This image captures the parasitic and perverting nature of evil. Indulgence in evil makes us monsters, and turns even our strengths and our gifts into agents of destruction — the destruction of ourselves and others. Dante is the poet for us, because he, like us, was the product of a gifted, dynamic, wealthy, up-to-date, mercantile society. How is it that we cannot see that with all our good

gifts and all our opportunities to do good, we choose instead to spill the blood of innocent victims, to destroy motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood with easy divorce, to applaud ugly and decadent art, and to spread a blight of sterility over the land? As far from Heaven as Dante was in Hell, so far are we from being what Pope John Paul II calls "the civilization of love."

The deadly modern habits I've sketched above are much in the news: They are hot topics and burning issues. But hanging over all the heated debates is the unmistakable scent of fire and brimstone. To some an atmosphere that's warm — even blisteringly warm — seems attractive. Many, indeed, seem to be quite comfortable in our self-made hell on earth. But before we get too comfortable, let us go back to Dante to see what lies at the heart of Hell. Below the hot goad of perverted passion, even below the flames of Divine wrath, is the lowest circle of the *Inferno*. It is a frozen wasteland at the center of which stands Satan locked in ice up to his waist, his great wings beating as he vainly attempts to escape. Their wind only chills him the more, and tears eternally run down his face. "Do not ask, Reader, how my blood ran cold/ and my voice choked up with fear. I cannot write it:/ this is a terror that cannot be told" (XXXIV, 22-24). ■

THE "NEW ORDER OF THE AGES"?

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THOMAS STORCK

THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE GLOBE

Some years ago I was involved with the Esperanto movement. Esperanto, as most people know, is a planned language designed to supplement the existing national languages for purposes of international communication. During my involvement with Esperanto, I was puzzled about why it had never obtained greater acceptance. I was convinced of the utility

of an international language from the example of Latin in the Middle Ages, and I thought that the benefits of a tongue that united mankind would

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be evident, especially to intellectuals and educators. I even hoped that some of these educators might want to experiment with a university curriculum entirely in Esperanto, just as higher education in the Middle Ages had been entirely in Latin.

The benefits of Esperanto — the lessening of noxious nationalism, the elimination of linguistic barriers to the advancement of knowledge — would be such, I thought, as to appeal to modern, educated opinion. But educated opinion showed little or no interest. Why?

Gradually I began to see why, among Americans, there was a lack of enthusiasm about an international language to unite mankind. We believed we already had one. And this language was none other than English.

English has indeed become widely spoken, and in some sense can be called an international language today. It is at least the international language of commerce and technology. But it has become clear to me that English is not simply a convenient linguistic tool. On a deeper level, English — especially American English — is both a symbol of and an agent for the spread of a universal civilization or culture. English has become a visible, audible sign of the new world order that the globalization of commerce is fast creating.

Consider a recent article in *Foreign Policy* magazine (Summer 1997). The author, one David Rothkopf, embodies in himself most of the components of the American power structure. He is identified as a former high official in the Commerce Department of Bill Clinton, an adjunct professor at Columbia University, and managing director of Kissinger Associates, a consulting firm founded by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Rothkopf begins by warning of a new nationalism, a nationalism that is attempting to hold back or check globalization. This, he argues, is futile. Globalization is coming and will touch every culture and affect everyone. Governments' efforts to keep out what they regard as negative (witness Singapore's futile effort to keep out Internet pornography) will not succeed.

Rothkopf looks on this globalization as something good, because "globalization promotes integration and the removal not only of cultural barriers but of many of the negative dimensions

of culture. Globalization is a vital step toward both a more stable world and better lives for the people in it." Better lives? For some people anyway, and it seems especially for Americans:

It is in the economic and political interests of the United States to ensure that if the world is moving toward a common language, it be English; that if the world is moving toward common telecommunications, safety, and quality standards, they be American; that if the world is becoming linked by television, radio, and music, the programming be American; and that if common values are being developed, they be values with which Americans are comfortable.

And further, "Americans should not shy away from doing that which is so clearly in their economic, political and security interests" and, it seems by a happy coincidence,

so clearly in the interests of the world at large. The United States should not hesitate to promote its values. In an effort to be polite or politic, Americans should not deny the fact that of all the nations in the history of the world, theirs is the most just, the most tolerant, the most willing to constantly reassess and improve itself, and the best model for the future.

But do we Christians really want the culture of abortion, pornography, rock music, divorce, and many other evils exporting itself around the world? Bad as these things unquestionably are, I would suggest that they are only part of the issue. America has been afflicted with a messianic complex that accords exactly with Rothkopf's desires to remake the world in our image. Let me quote the Catholic historian Christopher Dawson, an Englishman:

The United States achieved their independence in the heyday of the European Enlightenment, and this ideology of the Enlightenment was the foundation of their national existence. The peoples of Europe, in spite of their revolutions, were committed to the past and to their separate na-

tional traditions. But Americans were committed to the future. They saw the Revolution as the dawn of a new age and a new civilization which was destined to be the civilization of a new world, and consequently the principles of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were not transitory and fallible opinions but absolute truths which no citizen could question and which were to remain the firm foundations of the American way of life.

In other words, the United States of America was not to be simply one more nation among many, not simply a group of former colonies that had outgrown the tutelage of the motherland. America was to be a new kind of nation embodying a new way of life — “a new civilization which was destined to be the civilization of a new world.” It is not hard to find evidence of this sentiment in the remarks of American statesmen and politicians throughout our history. Here is a line from a speech by Daniel Webster delivered in 1826: “It cannot be denied, but by those who would dispute against the sun, that with America, and in America, a new era commences in human affairs.” Or consider Woodrow Wilson’s words from his second inaugural address in 1917: “The [American] principles in which we have been bred...are not the principles of a province or of a single continent. We have known and boasted all along that they were the principles of a liberated mankind.” And this, from George Bush’s State of the Union message in 1990: America is “not just the nation” but “an idea, alive in the minds of people everywhere. As this new world takes shape, America stands at the center of a widening circle of freedom — today, tomorrow and into the next century.”

These Americans, in different ways, witness to two ideas. First, America sees herself as something essentially new in human history; second, America considers herself as not just one particular nation in a particular place, but as somehow universal, with universal principles meant for all mankind. Most of us are brought up on this sort of rhetoric and do not see anything especially wrong with it. But try a little exercise: In the above quotations, substitute any other country of your choice for America. For example, “With Nepal, and

in Nepal, a new era commences in human affairs.” The results, I think, clearly show the arrogantly messianic quality of our self-perception.

Perhaps, though, some might think that it was not all that bad for Daniel Webster or Woodrow Wilson to desire the spread of American ideals throughout the world, since America was surely better then, and many of the evils that currently plague this country hardly existed in 1826 or 1917. There are still good reasons to question America’s universalist ambitions. Let us take a closer look at what these ambitions mean.

America’s messianic ambition, as we saw, is twofold: the establishment of a new way of life, and the belief that this new way of life is meant for all mankind. These beliefs, however, confound what man can do with what God alone can do. Mere political structures and arrangements of authority cannot alter the essential human condition. Only Jesus Christ can say, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5), and back it up. Nor can it possibly be true that one group of men in one place could have hit upon political or social notions so wise as to be forever appropriate for all mankind. It is only Christ’s Church that is catholic or universal, not the American nation. In short, America, in the constant rhetoric of her orators, is holding herself out to be something she could not possibly be.

Although America cannot replace God, it is the case that she is a nation of a new type. That is, in her attempt to be new and universal, she does make herself different from all the traditional nations of the world. For America is as much an idea as a nation, as Bush said. But this is not the normal way a nation thinks of herself. The only other nation with such prodigious messianic ambitions was the Soviet Union, where the New Soviet Man was to be the embodiment of her supposed new and universal way of life. But the reality of the Soviet Union was very different. Communism was new, but not in the sense that Communists believed it was. Enlightenment Americanism is also new, but not in the sense that Americans believe it is. Both are new in the sense that they are new intellectual and political movements in history, but their novelty is not such as to create an essentially new era in the annals of humanity. Man is left as before; neither of these ideologies could

possibly change that.

But just as Communism by its philosophy struck at the foundations of society, so the United States with her philosophy challenged the existing foundations of European culture. And she did this by striking at the religious foundation of existing society.

At the time of the establishment of the United States, the entire Western world was officially committed to the belief that religion was the foundation not only of the lives of individuals, but also of the life of the state and the nation. True, men did not always behave as if their relationship with God was the most important thing about their lives. It is also true that this very dedication to religious belief could itself produce warfare and civil strife. The devastating Thirty Years War, the last great religious war, had ended only in 1648, less than 150 years before our constitutional convention met. And the several wars that occurred between France and Great Britain in the 18th century, though primarily having political and economic causes, often had an undercurrent of reli-

gious hostility too. So it is easy to see why not just the doctrinaire *philosophes* of the Enlightenment might think that a little less religion in public life would be a good thing for everyone.

But it is one thing to arrange for men of varying religions to live together in peace, and another to yield the place of religion to a messianic secular philosophy. It is precisely the latter that America did, and she accomplished this by rendering religion a purely private affair in the new nation.

The truly unique thing about America has been our successful attempt to privatize religion, an attempt founded in the "establishment clause" of the First Amendment to the Constitution, that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...." As understood in both official legal interpretations and in the popular mind, these words remove any religion founded on dogma, or even any concern for religious *truth*, from the public life of the nation. And we have replaced that with the secular principles of Americanism. As the social critic Will Herberg has said, "the American Way of Life is the operative faith of

God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization.

--Pope John Paul II

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the American people." If religious faith is considered important, it is faith regardless of its content. It may be important to have a religion, but what you actually believe is a private matter — and doesn't matter. As President Eisenhower said, "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith — and I don't care what it is."

Now, it is true that this brand of "civil religion" no longer flourishes as it once did. But it is still here. Politicians still sometimes invoke God or end their speeches with a "God bless you." And let no one forget that President Clinton himself prayed to this god of American civil religion before he vetoed the ban on partial-birth abortion. We were supposed to be reassured that he had prayed, but it didn't matter what he prayed for or to whom he prayed.

Eisenhower wanted Americans to have a faith, any faith. And earlier than that, President Washington said much the same thing. In a famous passage in his Farewell Address, Washington characterized "religion and morality" as "indispensable supports" for "political prosperity," and stated that "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." Here again any faith will do, for religion's role is purely instrumental, to support "political prosperity."

Neither Washington nor Eisenhower was hostile to deeply held beliefs. But each assumed that such beliefs were matters of private opinion, having nothing to do with the common life of America. The intense Protestant Christianity that has marked different periods of American history likewise has too often been content to be merely a private and individual expression of Christianity, or it has blended without much difficulty into the various forms of American civil religion. As Christopher Dawson said in 1960:

Thus American religion was detached from the objective world which was the domain of business and politics and focused on the subjective world of religious feeling — above all the intense experience of religious conversion. This, I believe, has left a permanent mark on the American mind, so that, as several Americans have remarked

to me, they find some difficulty in relating the two concepts of religion and civilization since these seem to belong to two quite distinct orders of existence.

When I was in grammar school in the late 1950s, in public school in Ohio, we said a prayer and had a Bible reading every day. My fifth-grade teacher was a particularly devout Protestant. But none of this influenced whatsoever the content of our schoolwork, which was solidly based on the civil religion of Progress and the American Way of Life. (Christian religion was not a subject like math or social studies or spelling, but a bit of throat-clearing at the start of the day.)

America has based her public life on a shared belief in the American Way of Life, "the principles of a liberated mankind," as Wilson put it. And real dogmatic religion has been relegated to the private realm, at best a prop for personal morality or a solace. And more and more it seems that the fate of "liberated mankind" is to be reduced to the status of producers and consumers. Let us look once more at David Rothkopf's article:

The global marketplace is being institutionalized through the creation of a series of multilateral entities that establish common rules for international commerce. If capital is to flow freely, disclosure rules must be the same, settlement procedures consistent, and redress transparent. If goods are also to move unimpeded, tariff laws must be consistent, customs standards harmonized, and product safety and labeling standards brought into line. And if people are to move easily from deal to deal, air transport agreements need to be established, immigration controls standardized, and commercial laws harmonized.

On the Great Seal of the United States, which appears on the back of the dollar bill, is the motto *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, the New Order of the Ages, a perfect motto for American messianism. And in our time this New Order of the Ages has become simply the freedom for "capital...to flow freely" and for people "to move easily from deal to deal." The "principles of a liberated mankind" consist in our trying to outsell everyone else and to ensure

that in a world that has become nothing but a market, we will all be busy running from deal to deal in the service of our god, Mammon.

But there is another possibility. George Bush said that America was both idea and nation. But actually America is not two things; rather, there are two Americas, the America of the idea and the America of people and land. One is a secular messianic dream which no orthodox Catholic can accept. But the other is the land in which, by God's providence, we have been born or to which we have come to live. Toward this latter we may and even should have feelings of affection. Pope Leo XIII stated the true principle of patriotism when he wrote, "the natural law enjoins us to love devotedly and to defend the county in which we had birth, and in which we were brought up..." (*Sapientiae Christianae*). This is a patriotism that any Catholic in any country can accept. We are enjoined to love our country not because she is the harbinger of a new age or because she has a message for the whole world or

because we fancy that she is the best there is. No, we love her because we happen to have been born or to have come here. In America this modest patriotism is shouted down by the patriotism of the idea. But if we are to make sense of both our faith and our country, we must nevertheless try to foster it. Nor should we feel that this traditional sort of patriotism will produce an irrational attachment to one's country that disregards the rights of other nations. What we should fear is the messianic patriotism that seeks to extend America until the globe is a vast parking lot for a worldwide McDonald's, and full of American music, American television, American porn, and American gadgets.

The political Left and Right each has its own version of American messianism. It is practically in the air we breathe. It will not be easy to resist it. But we have no choice but to try, however discouraging the task. After all, we have been told: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). ■

FROM NEW DELHI TO ROME

Bobby Jindal

REFLECTIONS OF A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD CATHOLIC

Mystical, meaningful sevens throned through the Bible, from the seven days of Creation through the seven fat years and seven lean years foretold by Daniel to the seven angels of the Resurrection and Judgment. In Catholicism, seven is the number of sacraments, of cardinal virtues, of gifts of the Holy Spirit, and of deadly sins. In traditional catechetics, seven is the age of

reason, the beginning of the capacity for knowledge; in folk wisdom, seven is the pivotal anniversary in marriage, the passing of the first hurdle toward mature intimacy. For me now it is seven years since I was baptized and confirmed as a Catholic. So I celebrate my seventh birthday in the Faith, my seventh spiritual anniversary, by reflecting gratefully on how it all came about.

My parents, who came from India, imparted to me a nominal Hinduism backed by a solid belief in God and His desire for man to engage in regular prayer, but I did not make progress toward a systematic religious faith until the awkward years of junior high school. In between gos-

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