

The West and the Rest, By Roger Scruton, Wilmington, ISI, 2002) 187 pages. \$19.95, Published in England by Continuum, London

Roger Scruton, sometime professor at the University of London, is a well-known English philosopher and writer. In this book he undertakes, in light of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, to investigate the questions of what exactly is the Western world, what holds it together, what implications does this have for the rest of the world, and likewise, what is specifically characteristic of the Islamic world, making that civilization differ so profoundly from the West.

In his first chapter, Scruton argues that what makes the West different from the rest of the world is its acceptance of a secular social contract as the basis for its political unity. He traces this approach toward a political basis for society from the ancient Greeks through the Roman concept of universal law, St. Augustine, the medieval concept of the "two swords" of Church and state, Marsilius of Padua, Hobbes and other social contract theorists and the American Founding fathers, down to our own day. Scruton avers, however, that a social contract requires a kind of prior unity, usually a unity of place, in order to be effective, so that we may have some reason for a social agreement in the

first place. "For a jurisdiction gains its validity either from an immemorial past or from a fictitious contract between people who already belong together." He contrasts this sort of political arrangement with other possibilities, ties based on religion, kinship, and so on. He points out that the Moslem world has never known a state based on a secular social contract, and that during the centuries of the Ottoman Empire, each religious group was formed by the Turkish authorities into a millet, a semi-autonomous jurisdiction having both civil and religious authority. For example, all the Melkite Catholics within the Empire would be grouped under their Patriarch, who would have civil responsibilities toward them and toward the Sultan. And while, Scruton argues, Christianity is naturally open toward the idea of universalized secular political authority, Islam, for a variety of reasons, is not.

In his next chapter the author amplifies the arguments he made in the first chapter. He speaks of the virtues of the concept of "citizenship" as fundamental to the establishment of a stable nation-state. Yet he also recognizes the undoubted fact that true patriotism is founded ultimately on local associations and love of one's own place, a "mute sense of belonging - an inarticulate experience of neighborliness - founded in the recognition that this place where we live is ours. This is the patriotism of the village, of the

rural community, and also of the city street..." But he does not stop with the local, arguing that a modern secular democracy, which is a "society of strangers," obtains a "stable social order" through cultivating the "virtues of citizenship," a concept unknown to Islamic peoples. "A modern democracy is perforce a society of strangers. And the successful democracy is the one where strangers are expressly included in the web of obligation. Citizenship involves the disposition to recognize and act upon obligations to those whom we do not know."

Scruton then discusses the case of those Moslems who live in the West and yet feel free, not only to criticize, but to urge violence against Western governments and societies which deviate from the Islamic ideal. He argues that when a Moslem says that secular laws which violate the law of God need not be obeyed, he means something different from what a Christian would mean if he said the same thing. For unlike Islamic law, religious law for a Christian is not all encompassing: "These commandments [the Ten Commandments] do not replace the secular law but constrain it. They set limits to what the sovereign can command: but so long as the sovereign does not transgress those limits, the secular law retains absolute authority over the citizen."

But the problem in the West today is that of what the author calls

"the culture of repudiation," the rejection of the "Enlightenment idea of the citizen," and its replacement by a kind of new tribalism, as various kinds of irrational loyalties such as multiculturalism, post-modernism or the cult of youth, which have replaced the universalism that Scruton identifies with the Enlightenment. Western society cannot survive if this continues.

In chapter three, entitled "Holy Law," Scruton discusses in detail Islamic conceptions of the state, political authority and Islamic attempts to deal with religious pluralism under the various regimes which they have created, such as the caliphate and the Ottoman Empire. His account of the origins of modern Islamic movements, such as the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, which ultimately gave rise to current terrorist groups, is fascinating and he evidences a genuine appreciation for the good qualities of traditional Islamic civilization. For example, he contrasts the traditional Moslem city - "a place of congregation in which individuals and their families live side-by-side in obedience to God" and in which "pious people believe that no building should overtop the minarets, or destroy their mastery of the skyline" - with the city of the modern West, with "its skyscrapers dwarfing the few religious buildings, and its high-rises in alloy and glass [in] God-defying arrogance..." Scruton even notes that Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 terrorists, had studied

architecture first in his native Egypt and later in Germany, where he had written his thesis "on the restoration of the ancient city of Aleppo" in Syria. "When he led the attack against the World Trade Center, Atta was assaulting a symbol of economic, aesthetic, and spiritual paganism."

Scruton also has words of praise for traditional Moslem education, which "teaches piety, consideration, and respect for age [and] offers a clear rite of passage into the adult world [and] presents the student at every point with certainties rather than doubts, and consolation rather than anxiety." Such an education can "serve to elevate the believer's thoughts and feelings so far above the banal level of the TV sitcoms or the pop-music video that he can, without effort, see those products of Western materialism for the rubbish that they are."

In his next chapter, "Globalization," Scruton discusses how the increasing globalization of the world, economically, technologically, culturally, both serves to facilitate Moslem access to the West for purposes of aggression, but is itself partly responsible for the feelings that give rise to that aggression in the first place by covering Islamic lands with the products, cultural and physical, of Western degeneracy. He again takes up his theme of the political differences between Western and Islamic countries and the importance of what he calls "personal

states," by which he means democratic regimes in which each citizen feels committed to the government and responsible for the decisions which it makes. He warns against multi-national organizations, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and especially the European Union, which he sees as undermining that sense of place and citizenship upon which these "personal states" depend for their stability.

Finally, in a short conclusion Scruton recommends a kind of slowing down or reversal of globalization, in which Western nations will feel free to limit access by would-be Moslem immigrants and in turn would limit the economic and cultural impact they have on traditional cultures throughout the world.

Scruton certainly raises a number of interesting points in this book. But even on its own terms this book exhibits some curious traits, the most obvious of which is that the author frequently seems to contradict himself, or perhaps not to know exactly on which side of the question he falls. For example, Scruton has many passages in which he makes clear that he regards many products of the modern West as "rubbish," as in the TV shows that he mentions and which I noted above. And in the next paragraph he continues to criticize Western education and culture: "The education offered by our schools does not impart a common culture; it gives little guidance for

life, few certainties, and unequal skills." But then the very next paragraph begins: "In other words, Western societies provide a public space that compensates for educational decline by offering the freedom to grow and to learn in other ways." What those "other ways" may be he does not specify. And in other places he excoriates modern Western architecture. He speaks of Le Corbusier and "his insolent [and] repulsive plan" for razing and rebuilding Algiers, a "once beautiful city," in a modernist style. He refers to the "emptiness of [our] civilization in which only technology seems to matter." Yet despite this, Scruton continually defends post-Enlightenment Western culture, indeed, he holds it up as an exemplar and model. He writes that "the Enlightenment displaced theology from the heart of the curriculum in order to put the disinterested pursuit of truth in its place." In upholding his vision of a contract-based society held together by citizenship, he writes of those whose commitment to their religion overshadows their commitment to the secular state. "People who see all law, all social identity, and all loyalty as issuing from a religious source cannot really form part of this [secular Enlightenment] political culture, and will not recognize either the obligation to the state or the love of country on which it is founded. This does not mean that religion should be excluded entirely from the affairs of state... [For] the liberal belief in the separation of

state and civil society implies that religion may thrive in all social institutions in which the citizens wish it to thrive...without violating the principle of secular government." And earlier he had spoken of various civic practices that he approves of as tending "to displace religion from the public to the private realm." And yet he notes the "mounting religious deficit in modern societies - the disappearance of the rites of passage and forms of submission that grant...the transition to a higher state of membership. When religious faith evaporates, when adults cease to induct young people into the national culture, when loyalties no longer stretch across generations or define themselves in territorial terms, then inevitably the society of strangers, held together by citizenship, is under threat." But can a religion seen as merely an instrumental good, something which exists mainly to stabilize and preserve secular and civic goals, have any lasting loyalty on people? Does not the privatization of religion ultimately lead to the absence of religion?

Scruton, it seems to me, wants to have it both ways. He wants a secular society based on Enlightenment ideas of the privatization of religion, and yet he realizes that such a society is indeed held together by thin bonds. In a passage with some resemblance to Plato's allegory of the cave from the Republic, Scruton compares mankind to a "herd perambulating in some gloomy valley,

where the warm smell of collective life [i.e., religious and tribal bonds] provides a refuge from anxiety. Every now and then the herd emerges onto a hilltop and is suddenly bathed in the rays of the sun. Cool breezes scatter the scent of fellowship, but for a while the true nature of mankind is visible. A few individuals try to stay aloft, enjoying the light and the knowledge that it brings. But the rest are troubled by the breezes and the herd moves on, dragging everyone downhill into darkness." And "We are products of Enlightenment, living through the decline in the forms of membership on which Enlightenment depends, and prey to the superstitions that arise in the wake of our crumbling orthodoxies." But if the Enlightenment destroys the pre-Enlightenment bonds of fellowship upon which it depends for success, then one must question whether there is not a contradiction at the heart of any society that attempts to base itself on that ideal, as indeed the modern West does. The Enlightenment necessarily destroys the Enlightenment.

Indeed, one can go further than this. The very irrationalisms, such as post-modernism, that Scruton attacks under the name of "the culture of repudiation," though seemingly so much at variance with the clarity and universalism that the Enlightenment promised, actually flow directly from it. Kant, for example, by grounding his purportedly universal

metaphysics and moral norms not in reality but merely in our perception of phenomena, opened the way for the frank subjectivism of later thinkers. So with the Enlightenment we ultimately lose both a rational universalism and religion. Both must necessarily collapse into various kinds of irrationalism. One is reminded of Chesterton's remark that when men cease to believe in God they do not believe in nothing, but in anything or everything.

Scruton's exaltation of the Enlightenment highlights his identification of the West purely with the secular tradition, what has been called "the Whig interpretation of history." He confuses the distinction between Church and state, surely characteristic of European thought, with the separation of Church and state, another matter entirely, and one which has been condemned over and over again in Catholic tradition. Indeed, Scruton sees the pre-modern West as nothing but a prelude for the Enlightenment. That there is any alternative to Islamic fideism except the Enlightenment does not occur to him.

A Catholic of course must judge that, while Islam is a false religion, in that its theological tenets do not agree with God's authentic revelation made in Jesus Christ, nevertheless Moslems are right to see the secularism of today's West as a baneful force in the world. Scruton himself often seems to acknowledge this point. But how is Islam, espe-

cially Islamic terrorism, to be opposed? A Christian, of course must hope and pray for an eventual conversion of Moslems to faith in the Triune God. But short of that, what can be done? Some of Scruton's policy suggestions, made in the Conclusion of his work, though they come from premises that I largely do not agree with, actually offer some ideas of merit. If we stop irritating the Moslem world, by our military, economic and cultural incursions, and if we prevent or slow down the migration of Moslems into Europe or the Americas, we may be able to keep these two worlds sufficiently apart that they can coexist on the same planet. This is not to retreat into a West conceived as a fortress, but to realize that under present circumstances Western ideas and morals are largely an affront to the Moslem world. Perhaps if that West that was once Christendom ever gets its own house in order, we can then renew our contacts with Islam, this time though, to present a Gospel rooted not in commerce and pseudo-freedom but in One who called himself way, truth and life.

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Shakespeare After All. Garber, Marjorie.
New York: Pantheon Books, 2004.

G. K. Chesterton admits wryly that he does not profess to know much about Shakespeare "outside

such superfluous trifling as the reading of his literary works" (Essays on Shakespeare 18). To miss Chesterton's irony here is to miss the point. He was not an academic and, as journalist, he was far more apt to identify himself with the common reader than with the professional literary critic. But his comment raises a significant point, so obvious it is easy to miss: what is extraordinary—very nearly miraculous—about Shakespeare, whose biography remains obscure, is that such a large corpus of his writings even exists to be read and enjoyed over one's lifetime, which is, of course, Chesterton's meaning.

That Shakespeare's literary works invite re-reading is the "instrumental test," according to Marjorie Garber, "of what we have come to call 'greatness' in art and literature" (6). In *Shakespeare After All*, Garber considers all of Shakespeare's plays in a learned and readable volume of essays that will appeal to both the common reader and the Shakespearean scholar. Garber insists that Shakespeare is a great writer because every age re-invents him, so that in every age he is also re-inventing his readers. In his plays, Shakespeare has given readers a modern lexicon by which to understand what it means to be human. Garber might merely appear to be echoing Harold Bloom's claim that Shakespeare "invented the human." Garber's study of Shakespeare, however, is more measured