

Holy War - sacred versus secular society



by Bill Krampe, Vendor and Editorial Contributor

This is a discussion of the merits and the pitfalls of the secular versus the sacred organizing principles in configuring a society. The secular state versus a state informed by religious politics. The secular state versus the religious state. I believe in both. Or a blend of the two. But I want to explain myself, in saying this.

What this means, first of all is that the secular state, as forward, progressive, and evolved as it has been, acting like a great locomotive in pulling humanity out of the dark ages, with common law and eventually the impartial rule of law, the disinterested courts to settle disputes, the continuing historical traditions, also policy based upon the will of the people and a broadly debated public philosophy, as well as the democratic process with its, of course, electoral procedure to chose leadership, and a mostly progressive view toward women, well eventually, and women's rights also has its faults.

And, second of all the religious politics that informs the sacred state has its moments, as well. The extreme tendencies that give us great pause, possess in some cases a curious logic that makes these extremist tendencies at least understandable. I do not agree with extremism by any of these religions. But on some level I understand extremism.

For example, with

Muslim terrorists, a political strategy based upon taking the life of innocent people, by means of the suicide bomb works as a successful strategy for the Islamic jihadist and followers; meaning, it works for them. Most Muslims, of course, abhor violence. Israeli Jewish settlers finding the light in their eyes, the voice of the spiritually imbued by walking in the footsteps of the Father of Judaism, that is, Abraham, claim that it is the land that gives their life meaning. However, this can only be accomplished by stealing the land of the Palestinians, which of course sabotages the peace process, which most Israeli Jews are in favour of, as long as a lasting peace can be relatively assured. So only by stealing this land from the Palestinians can this epiphany of walking in the land of the fathers be realized.

But Jewish settlers obviously do not see things this way. And the Christian zealot cries out from the pulpit or the religious rock concert stage, denouncing same sex marriage, decrying teaching sex ed in the student classroom, and ranting against *Roe v Wade*, or pro choice abortion rights. The zealot wishes to configure the world where the patriarch controls relationships in gay society, manages the growing development of children and tells women what is best for them in the realm of self-determination. Only the

church father knows what's best, according to the zealot.

CNN's senior international reporter Christiane Amanpour presented a compelling, quite fair minded and evenly balanced series on *God's Warriors*, a six hour series on Jewish extremism, Christian zealotry, and Muslim terrorism that she believed successfully made the case that argued that the world has entered an age of religious politics. She also has made it quite clear that she feels only the secular state will save us. That the secular state is the only way to go. And she made it abundantly clear that we ignore these Holy Warriors at our peril. "We cannot, we should not ignore these Warriors of God!" This series aired on CNN for two hours each night on Tuesday, August 21, 2007 and also Wednesday, August 22, and Thursday, August 23, as well as through the rest of the week in repeat broadcasts. Millions of people all over the world are sure of their mission, she says. It is a mission, in fact, it is a Holy War that they cannot lose, because the stakes are way too high. She also claims that God's Warriors feel that modern secular society has lost its way. That modern society has lost its soul. That they, God's Warriors, will make the world a better place. And, finally, they insist that God is the answer.

So I think we have to be careful here. While we applaud the virtues of the evolved modern secular state, and sing its praises, let us not forget the wise warnings and reasoned criticisms of author Thomas Perry who remarked in his recent book *Death Benefits* (I am paraphrasing here) that the six and a half thousand people who are the most wealthy and powerful people on the planet, and who run this secular

world, often forget that there are six and a half billion of the rest of us. That they feel that the world is their playground. They grow up with the same silver spoon in each of their mouths, attend the same few dozen summer camps, go to the best few dozen prep schools and the same few dozen universities, eventually to work as corporate officers, or lawyers, or as brokerage house execs at the most profitable and prestigious Fortune 500 businesses, or law firms, or brokerage houses. They take their vacations at the same places--the Hamptons, Martha's Vineyard, the best European hot spots, like Monaco, St. Tropez, etc.

And they do indeed forget that the world is populated by the rest of us, because at each place they go and at each stage of their lives, whatever they do and wherever they go they keep bumping into the same six and a half thousand powerful and wealthy people. This is about as far as Perry went in criticizing these six and a half thousand players. But there is more to reflect upon, here. These are the same people who have configured a world to be in synch with a particular globalized socio-economic structure. That is the globalized strategy to maximize profits and to seek a "narrow utilitarian approach" in their business dealings. Like the "narrow utilitarian approach" that laid off the thousands and thousands of workers, in Canada just this summer 2007, at General Mills, GM, Ford, Chrysler, etc. Like the "narrow utilitarian approach" of, for example, Atlantica, the Free Trade strategy, which is more widely known as Partnership for Security and Prosperity, that is, an example of this globalized approach as it pertains to part of New York state, and several New England

states in the USA and some of the Eastern Canadian provinces.

This example is how the globalized strategy of restructuring our socio-economic order is creating a landscape that is rife with cold corporate control over everybody and everything. So, this is the secular state at its worst, some say. At its most cynical exercise of power. So, secular society needs to be moderated by caring, and/or a state modified by positive, progressive spiritual components, that I shall remark upon later. This is my opinion, of course. But I feel it has merit.

Atlantica witnessed a group that visited the Halifax Regional Municipality this past summer, 2007. This group was made up of government and business leaders who have usually met annually, in secrecy, making decisions that do not ever see the light of day, that is the light of day of Parliament. These leaders, conferring clandestinely, wish to carve up Canada, especially its oil, natural gas, water and other resources and serve these up cheap to the USA for breakfast. At the same time these decision-makers consequently create the circumstances that produce widespread layoffs, and make other misery for the average citizen, as well. They deem to make university tuition so costly only the rich will be able to afford post secondary education. They also endeavour to dismantle social programs, the public health care system, and labor unions, and more.

The right wing Christian zealots' exhortations, as well as extremist Jewish and Islamic voices cry out with an answer to this kind of cynical manipulation of social and economic reality. That the modern secular state has become submerged into the miasma of a culture of obscenity. It is pure gluttony, a world obsessed with consumption, a world where either in word or deed or in fact in consciousness, we have all become Imelda Marcos's. That is each of us who have intentionally or

unintentionally bought into the culture of consuming to order to find meaning in life. Which means most of us. Each and every one of us may not actually own or aspire to own 3,200 pairs of shoes, but we aspire to find meaning, belonging and our connection and/or place in community by mass consuming.

One preacher screams out at a Christian rock and roll concert for youth that "our teenaged children are being raped on every street corner of every city in our country!" That we live in a world where parents feed their kids onto the conveyor belts of the mass market which manufacture the accoutrements of a culture of pornography, and junk. Is he wrong? Do you see where I am going with this?

I guess what I am arguing for is a mix of the best of the two. The secular state that gives us the rule of law, the courts, the cops, elections, etc. And eventually a more progressive opportunity for women to excel at education and in the economic realm. But I also agree with the assertions of *Tikkun Journal*. This publication is a bimonthly Jewish critique of religion, politics, and culture. In its November-December, 2000 issue it says [that a caring candidate for government should be] "advocating a politics of meaning which asserts that we ought to be seeking in the public realm a particular spiritual outcome, a new bottom line of love and caring.

"In fact we ought to be seeking a new definition of productivity and efficiency and rationality primarily in terms of the degree to which any institution or social practice tends to maximize our capacity to be loving and caring, ethically and ecologically sensitive, and capable of responding to the world and to other human beings with awe and wonder and not only with a narrow utilitarian approach."

Finally "The voice of the prophet (or prophetess) is more of what we need in public life than the voice of the political leader."



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