

Idle Smashing

An evening with Christopher Hitchens

IT IS TYPICAL of religion to attempt to police our most elemental instincts with a stentorian list of rather *schmutzig* Thou-shalt-nots. Case in point: there I was at the “Morning Joe” studio a few months ago, second wake-up brandy down the hatch and, with seven minutes till airtime, enjoying some discreet (if vigorous) *plaisir solitaire* under the desk, my usual warm-up. Co-host Mika Brzezinski, after coughing none too subtly five times, apparently felt herself “empowered” enough to ask me to desist. Little did she know that the Hitch doesn’t cotton to such clerical fascism.

“What, my dear Mika, would your Pope not approve? Does St. Aquinas proscribe a bit of self-help before airtime? Well, does he? Is it possible, I submit, that you don’t even know?”

La Brzezinski swiftly fell silent, like so many of the devout when their folk-beliefs are questioned even gently.

[Swigs from plastic cup, pauses, vomits]

Mother Teresa evinced so very much lachrymose sympathy for the wretched of the earth even as she cavorted with jet set and power elite: in short, a repugnant phony. And it is not just Trotskyists at heart like the Hitch who have judged her as such. During a rather sumptuous recent evening at Graydon Carter’s new downtown trattoria, not one person present—Salman Rushdie, Tina Brown, Larry Summers, Anderson Cooper, Cate Blanchett, Richard Parsons, Gwyneth Paltrow, Charlie Rose, Kate Moss, and Mike Bloomberg himself—could recall a single kind favor that “Mother” Teresa had ever done for them. *Not one.*

How did anyone ever fall for the hypocrisy of this bon-vivant fraud, this wrinkly Tartuffe? The credulity!

[Swigs from plastic cup, pauses, vomits]

Of all the ecclesiastical grifters ever to have fleeced their flocks, surely none was as slimy as that two-bit Nepalese princeling Siddhartha Gautama. (Martin Amis and I have always called him S-t Arthur Goat Mama, if we may be permitted such a *calembour* in these dark, PC times.)

This vaguely oriental fatso is worshipped the world over and provides bookend support for many craven apologists for religion. But don’t be taken in by the soft, gender-free features of this epicene blob: our buddy the Buddha was not a nice guy. In fact, he was a totalitarian and a bounder. He wrote mash-notes to Mussolini and went to Studio 54 with Henry Kissinger. Like Jesus, Confucius, and Gilgamesh, he was an outspoken opponent of the bikini and an advocate of suicide bombing.

To be sure, had I lived in Nepal at the time I would not have refused a dinner invitation from the so-called “Buddha,” who was certainly among the best-read and best-traveled people in the Kingdom of Kapilvastu, as well as one of the few with whom one might expect to pass an amusing evening. His wine cellar was renowned, and though his evening cable talk show got only middling ratings, the green room was famously well stocked.

[Swig, pause, vomit]

True enough, there have been cock-ups in the Iraqi War for Freedom, includ-

ing a largish number of civilian casualties. This is what Bertie Wooster would have called “a bit of a facer.” That said, I still look forward to joining my Iraqi comrades in Fallujah or Sadr City for a long-promised champagne toast to democracy, and we will thumb our noses at the appeasers, theocrats, and weak-kneed defeatists.

I would go next week, if only I could. But Charlie Rose has me on, and one learns that champagne is terribly hard to come by in Iraq. Turns out, dear friends, that Iraq is full of, well, Muslims, and of the worst teetotaling persuasion. Fascistic.

[Swig, pause, vomit]

Excremental. I’m afraid no other word will do for the Upanishads. Frankly, they make the Koran read like Proust. (For this reason Mart and I have always referred to them the Upanis-ts and no, I don’t expect this *mot* to go anywhere other than soaring over the empty heads of some 750 million Hindu suicide bombers and their craven liberal apologists.) Excremental. The sheer credulity of people once again does not fail to astound.

Yes, there have been setbacks in our great struggle against Islamic fascists, but that will not dent our resolve. We shall fight them on the blogs and we shall fight them on “Hardball with Chris Matthews.” We shall fight them in *Vanity Fair* and we shall fight them at *Huffington Post*. No matter the collateral damage, no price is too high! As the much maligned Donald Rumsfeld quipped to me over lunch not long ago, these days you can’t make an omelet

without killing a hundred thousand civilians—a sacrifice I, for one, would not hesitate to make all over again. *Écrasez l'infame!*

[*Swig, pause, vomit*]

There are many indications that the invasion of Iraq is bringing democracy not just to Mesopotamia but to Africa, Burma, and all of China. Some might call it as a miracle, but it's not as incredible as it sounds, for it is just as Ahmad Chalabi prophesied and preached. Skeptics and backsliders won't like it, but the signs and wonders are all plain to the true believer!

[*Ahmad Chalabi in Tinkerbell drag appears in a burst of glitter over Hitchens's shoulder.*]

For as it was written, the Army of the Petreaus doth everywhere smite the infidel and so promoteth democracy with the selfsame smiting!

[*Chalabi/Tinkerbell waves wand in a tinselly flash.*]

For the Kurd layeth down with the Sunni, and the Shi'ite doth lay with the twain, as it was foretold by us, and there is peace, but for a dozen car bombs each week!

For verily, look unto the wondrous success of Afghanistan, where the liberal pluralist state doth spring up as if by unseen hand, and there is peace and prosperity free of corruption and the Taliban is gone forever! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

[*Chalabi/Tinkerbell vomits on Hitchens.*] ■

—As witnessed by Chase Madar

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— OLD AND RIGHT —

I WISH SOMEONE would offer a prize for a good, simple, and intelligible definition of "Government." What is it? Where is it? What does it do? What ought it to do? All we know is that it is a mysterious personage; and, assuredly, it is the most solicited, tormented, overwhelmed, admired, accused, invoked, and provoked of any personage in the world.

The hundred thousand mouths of the press and of the platform cry out all at once: "Organize labor and workmen. Do away with egotism. Repress insolence and the tyranny of capital. Make experiments upon manure and eggs. Cover the country with railways. Irrigate the plains. Plant the hills. Make model farms. Found social workshops. Colonize Algeria. Suckle children. Instruct the youth. Assist the aged. Send the inhabitants of towns into the country. Equalize the profits of all trades. Lend money without interest to all who wish to borrow. Emancipate Italy, Poland, and Hungary. Rear and perfect the saddle-horse. Encourage the arts, and provide us with musicians and dancers. Restrict commerce, and at the same time create a merchant navy. Discover truth, and put a grain of reason into our heads. The mission of Government is to enlighten, to develop, to extend, to fortify, to spiritualize, and to sanctify the soul of the people."

The oppressor no longer acts directly and with his own powers upon his victim. No, our conscience has become too sensitive for that. The tyrant and his victim are still present, but there is an intermediate person between them, the Government—that is, the Law itself. What can be better calculated to silence our scruples and which is perhaps better appreciated to overcome all resistance? We all, therefore, put in our claim, under some pretext or other, and apply to Government. We say, "I am dissatisfied at the proportion between my labor and my enjoyments. I should like, for the sake of restoring the desired equilibrium, to take a part of the possessions of others. But this would be dangerous. Could not you facilitate the thing for me? Could you not bring up my children at the public expense? or grant me some prizes? or secure me a competence when I have attained my 50th year? By this means I shall gain my end with an easy conscience, for the law will have acted for me, and I shall have all the advantages of plunder without its risk or its disgrace!"

As it is certain, on the one hand, that we are all making some similar request to the Government, and as, on the other, it is proved that Government cannot satisfy one party without adding to the labor of the others, until I can obtain another definition of the word Government, I feel authorized to give my own. Who knows but it may obtain the prize?

Government is the great fiction, through which everybody endeavors to live at the expense of everybody else.

—Frédéric Bastiat, "Government," 1849