

by Joe Sobran

## Creeds and Values

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon may have jarred American self-confidence, caused coast-to-coast panic, and even (we shall see) ignited World War III, but so far they have failed to put a dent in multicultural etiquette. President Bush and other government spokesmen have been at pains to stress that we are not at war with Islam or Arabs in general and to discourage any negative thought, word, or deed toward Muslims within our borders. Islam is a "religion of peace," and all that. After all, aren't *all* religions, by definition, religions of peace? Aren't Muslims, when you come right down to it, just Unitarians with camels?

At the same time, Benjamin Netanyahu, Norman Podhoretz, Charles Krauthammer, George Will, and the rest of what Patrick Buchanan dubbed "Israel's Amen Corner" have suddenly adopted a whole new party line, in flat contradiction to the traditional one. The attacks, they say, had nothing whatever to do with the United States' support for Israel. The idea that there is any such connection is a "dangerous myth," according to one State Department, er. expert.

According to the new line, Arabs and other Muslims don't hate America for supporting Israel; they would hate America just as bitterly if Israel had never existed. It's the other way around: They hate Israel only in a secondary way, because of its association with America. If this is so, it would seem not that the United States should rethink its support for Israel, but that Israel, for its own safety, should rethink its close ties to the United States.

For years, we have been told that the Arabs hate Israel with insane intensity because it is a Jewish state, that they will never rest until they have driven every last Jew into the sea, that they admire Hitler and deny the holocaust, and so forth. Well, never mind all that. They are merely annoyed with Israel because of the "values" it shares with America—democracy, freedom, etc. Ignore Osama bin Laden's *fatwa* calling on Muslims to kill Americans and Jews; ignore hot-headed slogans like "Death to the Jews!" You can't believe anything a terrorist says.

In sum, religious differences—and the

cultural differences stemming from them—aren't serious. All religions preach the same great truths, the virtues of peace and tolerance. We are all brothers under the skin. It is unfortunate, and paradoxical, that some fanatics have, from time to time, managed to wrest religion into the service of "hate," as a few pseudo-Muslims are doing now (and as Jerry Falwell would do if he could).

In multicultural cant, of course, "hate" is a broad concept. It can include even disapproval of certain sexual practices. And it does include the belief that religious doctrines matter—or, to paraphrase the endlessly repeated aphorism of Richard Weaver, that creeds have consequences. If you think your religion is "better"—truer—than other religions, you are intolerant and bigoted.

In other words, liberalism is the natural fruit and fulfillment of all religions. Nobody puts it quite that baldly, but that's what it comes to. I prefer to put it still another way: Multiculturalism is the negation of all cultures. It means that all cultural and religious distinctions are merely superficial.

Needless to say, this idea is as novel as it is preposterous. Until fairly recently, sane people took religion seriously. Set aside many centuries of religious wars, crusades, persecutions. Abraham Lincoln's political career was jeopardized early by his (earned) local reputation for freethinking. Al Smith's 1928 presidential candidacy showed that most Protestants wouldn't trust a Catholic in public office.

When John F. Kennedy became our first Catholic president in 1960, it proved chiefly that religious differences no longer mattered as much to voters, not that genuine tolerance had triumphed. Liberals trusted Kennedy because they knew he didn't take his own religion too seriously. Since the Second Vatican Council, we have learned that the same is true of much of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy.

It now comes as an unpleasant surprise to Americans to discover that our own liberal rot hasn't affected the Muslim world, which still takes religion seriously. It still believes that God has revealed himself to



some men and not others; that some things are true and others are false; that some men are saved and all others, damned. The ecumenical spirit has not caught on in Mecca, or among the billion or so people from Morocco to Indonesia who still direct their daily prayers toward Mecca.

Did anyone see this coming? Yes. In 1938, Hilaire Belloc predicted that dormant Islam would someday revive and pose a serious challenge to the West, as it had done from the seventh to the 17th centuries. At the time, when modern Europeans were preparing for another bout of mutual slaughter, the backward Muslim world appeared to have dropped out of history. But Belloc argued that the Muslims were deficient only in science and weaponry, a gap that could be closed fairly quickly; whereas the Muslim world had more spiritual vigor than the West, which had lost its Christian faith.

In the new collision between faiths—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—only the Christians (if you can even call them that anymore) are naive enough to believe that vague "values" matter more than real religions. One Christian conservative has also paraphrased Weaver in the vapid formula "Values have consequences." Many Muslims are ready to die for what they believe the Almighty actually said. How many Americans are ready to die for "values"? c

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# What Makes for Real Prosperity?

The Small Businessman and Regulatory Discontent

by Stephen B. Presser



Supreme Court Justice Rufus Peckham put it best, in the *Trans-Missouri Freight Association* decision in 1897. Broadly interpreting the Sherman Antitrust Act as a means to rein in large economic organizations that had spun out of control, Peckham acknowledged that bigger businesses, because of economies of scale, could occasionally reduce prices to consumers. He went on to state that

Trade or commerce under those circumstances may nevertheless be badly and unfortunately restrained by driving out of business the small dealers and worthy men whose lives have been spent therein, and who might be unable to readjust themselves to their altered surroundings. Mere reduction in the price of the commodity dealt in might be dearly paid for by the ruin of such a class.

Worse, it was in the power of any “combination of capital” in control of a commodity to raise the commodity’s price after it had driven its smaller competitors out of business, and, even though those driven out of business by trusts and others might eventually find employment with them, this was not good for the nation. “[I]t is not for the real prosperity of any country,” Peckham warned,

that such changes should occur which result in transferring an independent business man, the head of his establishment, small though it might be, into a mere servant or agent of a corporation for selling the commodities which he once manufactured or dealt in, having no voice in

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shaping the business policy of the company and bound to obey orders issued by others.

There was some difficulty in applying Peckham’s logic to the case at hand, involving the railroads, because his “Mom and Pop” business model might not have precisely fit the needs of capital-intensive intercontinental transportation of freight and passengers over tracks by steam locomotives, but the famously woolly-minded 19th century patriarchal judge had a point. His conception, essentially Jeffersonian in nature, of the yeoman local businessman—secure and independent, in command of his own modest farm, firm, or shop, interacting productively and morally with his similarly situated neighbors—remains idyllically appealing. Napoleon and Talleyrand derided the British as a “nation of shopkeepers,” but that community-building aspect of the British is part of our heritage as well, and defending the small business man is a staple of American politics, if not American culture. So important is small business to the success of America that there is a whole federal agency, the Small Business Administration (SBA), with an annual budget of approximately \$900 million and administering a loan portfolio of \$45 billion, devoted to it. Unfortunately, the rest of the trillion-dollar federal government often operates in a manner that favors “big business” and accomplishes precisely what Peckham feared.

Each year, federal agencies issue more than 4,000 regulations, and many of these are expensive, if not ruinous, for small-business owners. Many of these regulations directly impact small businesses’ bottom lines. The SBA estimates that the costs to small businesses of simply complying with the federal government’s paperwork requirements, are, as Ohio Senator George V. Voinovich described it, “a staggering \$5,100 per employee.” Paul N. Gada, a writer for the Commerce Clearing House (a publisher of commercial reporters) observed in a re-