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## POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

### On Fire

Christopher Check's review of W.G. Simms' *A City Laid Waste: The Capture, Sack, and Destruction of the City of Columbia* ("Total War," September) was an excellent consideration of that volume's importance in current topical terms. If Southerners were allowed to know the true story of the invasion and burning of the civilian South by U.S. troops, then maybe they would be the first to question invasions elsewhere today. That is another reason why Southerners especially should read Simms' account of the burning of Columbia and the civilian atrocities committed there. Dr. Brian Cisco's new book, *War Crimes Against the South* (Pelican), is a good volume to supplement Simms. It corroborates on a large scale the truth of what Simms writes.

—James Kibler  
Athens, GA

No moral person could defend raping, burning, and looting Columbia, as described by Christopher Check in his review of *A City Laid Waste*. However, South Carolina herself had sown the seeds of the destruction of her capital.

It was South Carolina Rep. Preston Brooks who caned Sen. Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts abolitionist, in 1856. In 1861, South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union and also captured Fort Sumter, the first overt military act in what became a long and bloody four years. Without excusing Union general Sherman and his troops, it was fortunate they laid waste to a small town, not Charleston.

Sherman was not the first proponent of total war. For example, it was Scipio Africanus who razed Carthage and sowed the ground with salt in 149 B.C. Mongolian Genghis Khan and his sons practiced particularly brutal total war in the 13th century.

—Mark G. Michaelsen  
Madison, WI

### Mr. Check Replies:

My thanks to Professor Kibler for his kind

words and for his recommendation of Dr. Cisco's book.

Thank you, also, to Mr. Michaelsen for his apt comparison of General Sherman with Genghis Khan, although, for pure military genius, I am going with Genghis Khan. I did not suggest that what we today call "total war" began with Sherman. On the contrary, I noted that the Peace of Westphalia and the ideas of theorists including Hugo Grotius were efforts to restrain the increasing brutality of warfare. The Jacobin ideas of the French Revolution ended any hope of even lip service being paid to just-war theory in the modern world. Not for nothing has the Holy Father questioned whether a just war can be fought today at all.

Scipio Africanus did not practice anything like total war. After Scipio defeated Hannibal at Zama, Carthage remained independent, and Hannibal was not surrendered. It was in the Third Punic War that Scipio Aemilianus, or Africanus Minor (whom Scipio's son had adopted), occupied and destroyed Rome's deadliest enemy. It was not the best day for the pagan republic, but unless we are willing to adopt pagan morality, equate the Punic Wars with the Civil War, and regard Christian Southerners as baby-murdering idolaters, the parallel is entirely irrelevant.

Acting alone, Preston Brooks caned Charles Sumner with a hollow cane that broke during the event. The medical reports that immediately followed declared that Sumner was not badly harmed. The *Boston Post*, a day after the assault, reported, "The despatches from Washington yesterday afternoon were that 'Mr. Sumner was better, and would be able to occupy his seat in a day or two.'" Sumner's three-year "recovery" (which he spent on holiday in Europe) was a stage-managed political stunt to foster sympathy for the abolitionists. What provoked Brooks? Sumner's infamous "Crime Against Kansas" speech in which he insulted Brooks' uncle, Sen. Andrew Butler, and called the state of South Carolina a "brothel." The *Boston Courier* deemed the speech "exceedingly insulting." The *Detroit Free Press* called it "atrocious [and] filled with libels and insults, gross and vulgar, which their author had conned over and written with cool and deliberate malignity, and repeated before the looking-glass, night

after night, in order to find the appropriate grace with which to spit them.” The *Washington Star* found it “little more than a tissue of personal accusation and assault, and charges against all his opponents without the slightest effort to sustain their truth.” The *Cincinnati Daily Inquirer* thought Sumner had asked for it: “[W]e would suggest that those who provoke attacks of this violent description are not without great blame.” The people of Columbia did not ask for their city to be sacked. They surrendered on terms expecting better treatment than Eastern Europeans received at the hands of the Mongol hordes.

## On the Blue-Eyed Coulter

Robert Stacy McCain’s main point in his review of Ann Coulter’s *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (“Is Ann Coulter Among the Prophets?” September) seems to be that those of us who are not blonde and blue-eyed should not envy those who are. (“But we all cannot be blue-eyed blondes, and, in the Age of Media, many must toil in thankless obscurity while a favored few reap fame and fortune.”)

The question is not whether *Chronicles* editors and contributors sit around pouting because they are not called upon to be pundits on television. The question is why such people as Coulter, with scant credentials, receive such fortunate attention, while others who are well established do not—and, indeed, would “toil in thankless obscurity” or be forgotten altogether, were it not for *Chronicles*.

Ann Coulter was just another East Coast lawyer when, in 1996, for some reason, she got her first gig on the fledgling MSNBC as a “legal analyst.” What influential paper had she written on law, or what famous case was she part of that merited this promotion into the world of celebrity punditry? Her vaulting into prominence over people who have far more distinguished legal careers strikes at the heart of the popular conservative argument that hard work and talent are all it takes to achieve success in society.

Coulter belongs to a group of “conservative” celebrity pundits who emerged in the 1990’s on cable television and talk shows. They used personal, family, and celebrity connections to get jobs as writers for well-known conservative publications or as fellows at think tanks, or to become regular guests on Sunday-morning

news programs. And, while these people were enjoying their newfound fame, such scholars as M.E. Bradford, Murray Rothbard, Samuel Francis, and Paul Gottfried were ignored.

McCain claims that Coulter’s notoriety enables her to reach many thousands who would never read a Berkeley law professor’s book, let alone anything by Joe Sobran or Peter Brimelow. At this moment, thousands who have access to the internet can order a book by Joe Sobran or Peter Brimelow or read their articles on the web. It’s not as though such works are kept hidden in vaults away from the general public. What gives Coulter notoriety is a general media culture that affords her every opportunity to put outlandish statements in print or to say them on the air (like claiming, after September 11, that Al Qaeda was planting nukes in Manhattan), which generates more notoriety, which creates more demand for her talk-show presence and her books. The idea, as McCain says, that a “friendly editor would take the time to talk her out of the most egregious of her excesses” is silly. Miss Coulter would undoubtedly tell the editor to go to hell, as she did *National Review*’s editors, because she knows full well that such “egregious excesses” provide her with the publicity that she craves.

—Sean Scallon  
Arkansas, WI

Whether or not one concurs with Robert Stacy McCain’s appreciation of Ann Coulter, we must agree that the icon is wrong. Miss Coulter should not be displayed in the modest robes of the maiden who is the Mother of God but as the icon she has chosen for herself—in a leather vest with a golden cross dangling in ample cleavage. Such “cross in the cleavage” Christianity better conveys the sense of religion as ornament. It is not that I object to the ornaments of religion; indeed, as one who loves Christian art, I recognize the connection between the cosmos and the cosmetic, between ornament and order. Nevertheless, a religion that is entirely cosmetic calls for no conversion; it is entirely a matter of denouncing one’s enemies—except, of course, the enemy one sees in the mirror.

McCain is correct that Coulter identifies some serious targets. Given the nature of political liberalism, the game is simply too easy, and too overworked. Further, it is not the most important game in town,

even if it is the most profitable. The liberals who identify themselves as such are not really the problem anymore. Rather, it is the liberals who call themselves “conservatives,” neo- or otherwise, who pose the real and present danger. Critiquing them requires some self-examination, however, just as authentic Christianity does. Coulter and the high-decibel talk-show hosts (if a term connected with *hospitality* can really apply) critique all liberalism but their own and their party’s. The task of self-examination has been relegated to a few cultural outliers, such as *Chronicles* and the *American Conservative*.

In the kinky Christianity of Coulter, the small cross dangles among, er, larger concerns and is subordinate to them, both visually and actually. Now that’s good iconography. Miss Coulter’s cover-art icon accurately conveys her true concerns, and we, as conservative gentlemen, ought to respect the lady’s wishes.

—John C. Médaille  
Irving, TX

## Mr. McCain Replies:

I entirely sympathize with the concerns of both Mr. Scallon and Mr. Médaille.

Perhaps I did not make it sufficiently clear that—in referencing the fact that Miss Coulter’s telegenic bloneness has aided her rise in the Age of Media—I was lamenting the way in which ideas are not judged on merit but by the camera-readiness of the ideologues. Some good ideas do not reduce easily to 30-second sound bites, and some admirable thinkers do not come across well on TV. And I hope that Mr. Scallon understands that there was some self-deprecating humor involved, as I myself have the proverbial “face for radio.”

As for Mr. Médaille’s concerns about Miss Coulter’s display of the cross amid her cleavage—well, this is how fashionable young women dress today, and Miss Coulter does not consult me about her wardrobe choices. Nor do TV producers consult me about the rancorous “shout show” format, which is a terrible way to present ideas; for some strange reason, it is very popular with audiences.

At any rate, if I failed to distill my review into a thesis, I will now: It is good when a popular and prominent conservative figure dares to fraternize with us rogues who don’t blindly follow the Movement herd.

## Pope Benedict and Islamic Intolerance

The Muslim rage at Benedict XVI's citation of a late 14th-century Byzantine emperor who condemned Muhammad's call to spread Islam through war has obscured the numerous cultural implications of the Pope's learned speech. One of them is the unique importance for Western civilization of classical thought, in general, and Greek thought, in particular—as preserved and transmitted by Christianity.

Greek thought clearly informs the Christian sacred texts, particularly Saint John's Gospel, in language and content. It is not evident, however, in other monotheistic religions' sacred texts, such as the Koran or the Tanakh. As the Pope notices, when John writes, "In the beginning was the *logos*" (*Logos* means both reason and word"), he is adding to, and therefore, from the Christian viewpoint, completing the Revelation already present in the Old Testament. ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.") So the New Testament makes explicit that Revelation includes a Greek mode of understanding the sacred and the universe.

Although Benedict does not mention it, this mode of understanding goes back at least to Heraclitus of Ephesus in the sixth century B.C.: for Heraclitus' proto-monotheistic thinking (at times, he spoke of "*theos*," not of "*theoi*") the *logos* constituted the intelligible Law of the universe.

Christianity preserved and transmitted a good deal of classical culture after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. The best known examples of this salvaging effort are the Benedictine monasteries. Less appreciated is the role of the Christian Greek Orthodox Roman Empire—the Byzantine Empire—in the preservation and transmission of Greek culture. Muslims did not "preserve" or "give" to the West the texts of classical Greece, as is sometimes repeated. These Greek texts had been "there" all the time, preserved in the Byzantine Empire, cut off from the Latin West by the great division within Christendom between Latin Catholic and Greek Orthodox. When Muslims conquered the Middle East from the Christian Byzantines in the sev-

enth century A.D., they obtained some of the texts from the Christian Syrian scholars, who had translated them into Syrian. From Syrian, Muslim scholars translated them into Arabic.

So these preserved Greek texts and, indeed, Greek culture did not reach the West until the 15th century, brought over by Christian Greek scholars fleeing the Muslim onslaught. We will never know how much of classical Greece was lost in the three-day sacking and raping of Christian Byzantium by its Muslim conquerors in 1453.

Classical culture, at its best—that is, when not overcome by the political correctness that forced Socrates to commit suicide and Aristotle to flee—made open discussion possible. The *agora* was a tough marketplace of ideas, as Saint Paul found out when he preached to the Athenians.

Benedict XVI pointedly used the word *universitas* not too subtly to remind his probably religiously indifferent academic audience that the Catholic Church created the sort of institution where that audience worked. As heirs to classical culture, the medieval universities could, at times, serve as a forum for then potentially "offensive" questions—such as attacking the validity of arguments that "proved" the existence of God.

As shown by the debate mentioned by the Pope, between the Byzantine emperor and the Persian scholar, in the Christian Middle Ages, a Christian and a Muslim could fiercely argue the strengths and weaknesses of their religions. In the 21st century, they cannot. Muslim fundamentalists might kill both, or cause a major stir, as happened after the Pope's speech. Such a no-holds-barred debate—as opposed to nice let-us-find-what-we-all-have-in-common "ecumenical" gatherings—would also be unthinkable today even in a Western university, because bringing up certain issues can damage an academic career, prevent hiring or worse, and make even a powerful academic step down—as the case of a university president at Harvard illustrates.

Another statement by Pope Benedict offers more material for reflection:

"[W]e made up a whole." He referred to the situation among faculty at Regensburg during his time as a teacher. But his subtext may be again the Greek principle of rational organization—the *logos*—underlying Christianity's organic view of things. The *logos* is God and is with God. This equivalence makes rational whatever God creates. Therefore, the universe is rational, even if humans cannot fully understand its rationality. In fact, God cannot act against reason because reason is part of God. This viewpoint, the Pope remarks, stands in contrast to Islam, where Allah is not limited by anything, not even Himself, and can therefore conceivably be irrational. In the West, the holistic Christian viewpoint has been largely supplanted by ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical fragmentation. So the Pope's *universitas* has withered away, especially in the so-called humanities, which originate in the *studia humanitatis*, but which may no longer be properly called "the humanities." The Pope's statement also brings to mind the divisions within Christianity and some of their consequences, such as abandoning Byzantium to its fate and leaving Catholicism to fight without Protestant help the Islamic threat during the 17th century.

The Pope errs in placing Sura II—where the Koran asserts that there is no compulsion in religion—among the early Suras. It is a late one, though perhaps abrogated by the also late but less peaceful Sura IX. In any event, Sura II did not stop Islam from conquering the Arabian peninsula, the Middle East, Persia, Byzantium, the Balkans, North Africa, and much of Spain, among other places. So another possible implication of the Pope's speech is that, just as Christianity was once crucial in preserving classical thought and its rational strain, so the Faith may be the only hope of preserving them today. If this is true, then the abandonment of Christianity by Western Europe may already have left it ideologically defenseless against determinedly holistic systems stronger than the desire for material well-being, longevity, parliamentary elections, and the latest electronic device.