

Why the Rest Hates the West: Understanding the Roots of Global Rage

Meic Pearse

What follows is an excerpt from a featured "Book of the Day" at the Urbana '06 Student Mission Convention in St. Louis. To learn more about Urbana and to order copies of this book, see www.urbana.org and www.ivpress.com.

The truth is that Westerners are perceived by non-Westerners (if we can make such a huge generalization about a truly global phenomenon) as rich, technologically sophisticated, economically and politically dominant, morally contemptible barbarians. That is a hateful combination of feelings and assessments, in the sense that the one who makes them will, as often as not, be filled with hatred for the objects of such contemplation.

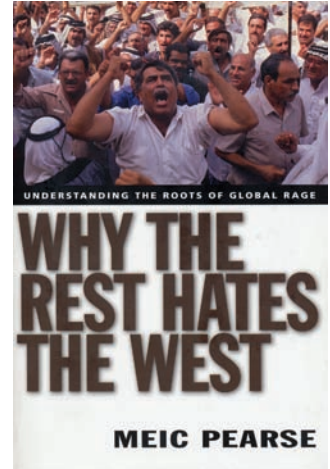
Why barbarians? For despising tradition, the ancestors and the dead. For despising religion, or at least for treating it lightly. For the shallowness and triviality of their culture. For their sexual shamelessness. For their loose adherence to family and, sometimes, also to tribe. For their absence of any sense of honor. These are massive charges, of course, and it will be necessary, in what follows, to say something about each in turn.

For the moment we simply note that they do, in point of fact, generate resentment – a resentment that can, as with the man driving the truck-bomb, amount to hatred. That is not to deny that many Western attributes and trappings are found desirable by non-Westerners. But precisely that desirability compounds the problem. Western culture, the very source of offense to traditional cultural sensibilities, has a habit of finding out the weak spots of the guardians of tradition and undermining them from within. The allure of heightened sexuality; or of status clothing, furnishings and possessions; or of personal independence: one would have to be superhuman not to feel the pull of these things or to be tempted by them. That is why many anti-Western movements, notably Islamists, wish to banish the very presence of the Western temptations, to take a separatist line, or at least to limit contacts with Western people and institutions to what can be dictated on their own cultural terms. As one Iranian leader of Ansare Hezbollah put it, "When you see some people here dressed in American-style clothes, you are seeing the bullets of the West."

Far more people than just Islamists, however, wish to modernize their countries without at the same time Westernizing them. Samuel Huntington has argued at length that that is the task in which much or most of the non-West is now engaged. The extreme difficulty of such an enterprise lies in the fact that the West is the historic source of modernization and its principal present agent. Modernizing without Westernizing is a near impossible task of extrication. The Internet (to take only the most obvious example) knows no boundaries. To accept the technology is to accept the presence of pornography, advertising, commercial values and freedom of speech. In response, the Taliban in Afghanistan (admittedly one of the most extreme cases) did not shy away from banning virtually all aspects of modernity in their determination to sweep their collective house clean of Western contamination.

Very many, especially Third World, people have the sensation that everything they hold dear and sacred is being rolled over by an economic and cultural juggernaut that doesn't even know it's doing it ... and wouldn't understand why what it's destroying is important or of value. That is why the defenders of traditionalism and advocates of cultural retrenchment in the non-West are perceived by Westerners as "fanatics," "fundamentalists" – the epithets that express a refusal to understand. Why? Because they fly in the face of what, to Westerners, is "common sense."

And the worst of it is that Westerners themselves are hardly aware of what they are doing, or of the very existence of the things they are destroying. Many non-Westerners feel that they have some understanding of Western culture; with television and pop music, to say nothing of the high-status



artifacts on sale to those who can afford them, it would be strange indeed if they did not. But if the amount of understanding transmitted through those channels is likely to be superficial (life in the West being construed as somehow effortlessly prosperous), the level of understanding in the reverse direction – that is, of others by Westerners themselves – is almost negligible. After almost a decade of coverage of the Balkan wars on television, most Westerners are still unsure of the identities of the principal protagonists, and even news announcers occasionally betray the fact that they do not understand the meaning of the term “the former Yugoslavia.” Survey after survey shows the embarrassing ignorance of even educated Americans about the most fundamental features of the world outside their own country. Supporters of tradition in the non-West have the sensation that they are being rolled over by a juggernaut that does not even know they exist.

Westerners are so accustomed to this effortless superiority that the real nature of its origins is lost on them. As Huntington points out, “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion ... but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.” Indeed, this obliviousness to reality persists, even when considering the present nature of international relationships. What to Westerners appears as “control of terrorism” or “maintaining free trade” bears quite a different face from the other side of the prosperity-poverty fence. Actions that, seen from a Western perspective, seem commonsensically altruistic – or at least neutral – appear riddled with double standards....

[T]he point is to see how these “justifiable” actions by Western powers look very different from a non-Western – that is, from a majority – point of view. From that standpoint, the continued exertion of Western power across the world – cultural, economic, military – appears to be transparently self-seeking. “Human rights” and “free trade” appear to be no more than mantras bearing no connection with disinterested altruism, let alone with an ethical foreign policy....

Violence is an unsurprising response to this predicament, a predicament that is experienced by many non-Westerners as humiliation. Quite obviously, violence is the only way to get the West’s attention....

Islamist movements were on the rise before the end of the Cold War. With the demise

(Continued on page 20)



(Continued from page 19)

of communism, however, their accelerated growth could have been predicted. The appeal of Marxist guerrilla movements across much of the non-Western world during the 1950s to 1980s had never lain in the nature of the Marxist creed itself. That had been, if anything, a handicap. Those in the know could see that it did not work; those not in the know (mostly Third World peasants) could hardly be expected to understand the full intricacies of its philosophy. The appeal had rested in the nature of antithesis: it was a weapon against the Western juggernaut. By the end of the 1980s, the socialist project was everywhere in ruins. Islamist movements have become the partial inheritors of Marxism's cachet. Obviously, this hardly applies in Latin America; in parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – or among urban blacks in America itself – it has nevertheless become the ideological vehicle for anti-Westernism.

Terrorism has been called the weapon of the weak; the weak can be relied upon to use such weapons as they have. Terrorism has the advantage of using the West's own distinctive features against it: an open society (to aid infiltration and hiding); instant and full news coverage (to maximize the political effect); a horror of death or of sustaining even small numbers of casualties (resulting from the absence of any deep-rooted sense of transcendence and also from the sheer comfort of Westerners' lives). After any action, the rule of law can make prosecution difficult, keeps sentencing mild and mostly rules out any kind of blanket retribution (though the September 11 attacks put that last point under pressure). Viewed in that light, the man driving the truck-bomb becomes easier to understand.

Taken from Why the Rest Hates the West, by Meic Pearse. Copyright © 2004 by Meic Pearse. Used with permission of InterVarsity Press (PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515) and SPCK Publishing (36 Causton Street, London SW1P 4ST, United Kingdom). www.ivpress.com

- ◎ Joshua Project now offers an "Unreached People of the Day" feed that provides a photograph and basic statistics for a different unreached people group each day. There is no cost, and the feed can easily be added to any website in a few minutes. For more information, see www.joshuaproject.net/upgotdfeed.php.
- ◎ "Selecting, Sending and Caring: A Training Seminar for Churches and Agencies" is slated for September 27-29, 2007 at the USCWM in Pasadena. Co-sponsored by Member Care International, Church Resource Ministries and Frontiers, this conference will ask, "Who is prepared to go as a cross cultural worker? How will we care for those we send?" Models and tools presented will include the Frontiers Church-Based Team Initiative, the Intercultural Readiness Assessment, and the CernySmith Adjustment Index. For further information on this event, contact

Michal Kras-selt at michal.krasselt@gracetogo.org

- ◎ The Knoxville Consultation on Ministry to Hindu Students (held November 14-15, 2006) has resulted in the formation of the Hindu Student Friendship Network. The inaugural training conference of the new network will be held in conjunction with the June 22-25, 2007 Rethinking Forum meetings in Portland. For more information, write to his-friends@uscibs.com.
- ◎ In addition, the Institute of Hindu Studies and the Rethinking Forum will present "The Hindu-Christian Interface" May 10-12, 2007 at the USCWM in Pasadena. Presenters will offer insights toward the birthing of Christ-centered movements among Hindus. To learn more, write to info@rethinkingforum.com.