

WHY AMERICA IS IN TROUBLE

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Bill Donohue, *Cultural Meltdown: The Secular Roots of Our Moral Crisis* (Sophia Institute Press, 2024)

The principal reason I wrote my new book is to address why America is in trouble. We live in a topsy-turvy world and most people, especially older adults, can't seem to make sense of it. It is my hope that after reading *Cultural Meltdown* the reader will have a better handle on how this happened.

We are a country torn between two conflicting visions of man and society. There are those who accept the religious vision and there are those who accept the secular vision. These perspectives are not only different, they are irreconcilable.

Right now everything is in flux. As someone who favors the religious vision, I see signs of optimism. But not always. At some point one side will win. We can't go on indefinitely living as if we are living in two different worlds.

The religious vision acknowledges belief in God, truth, human nature, the natural law, moral absolutes and Original Sin. It recognizes the limitations of the human condition. While it believes in progress it manifestly rejects the idea of human perfectibility.

The secular vision promotes exactly the opposite view: God does not exist; truth is a mirage; human nature can be changed; there is no such thing as natural law; there are no moral absolutes; and the idea of Original Sin is fanciful. Furthermore, as the secular vision considers the human condition to be infinitely malleable, it champions the idea of the perfectibility of man.

Left-wing intellectuals epitomize the secular vision. They are

the ones who have had the greatest influence on the young, liberals, Democrats and the well educated. As survey research shows, these are the most secular people in our society.

The Catholic Church epitomizes the religious vision. We are made in the image and likeness of God. Men and women are biologically different but they possess equal dignity. We are expected to conform our behavior according to the tenets of the natural law. The faculty of reason is important, but it should complement faith, not oppose it.

Those who ascribe to the religious vision reject the moral relativism that secularists promote. Moral relativism holds that what is moral is a matter of opinion and that there is no such thing as an act which is inherently immoral. Intellectuals very much believe this to be true. So did Hitler.

I mention Hitler because he rode the waves of moral relativism right into office. There were political and economic reasons why he succeeded, but it was the moral collapse of German culture during the Weimar Republic (between the two world wars) that left the masses without a clear understanding of right and wrong. He capitalized on this cultural meltdown.

Secularists are fond of saying that as long as two people agree on what constitutes proper moral behavior, that's all that matters. It all boils down to consent. Those who believe in the religious vision know this to be false: it could justify incest. Without an understanding that God has given us commandments to live by—and the moral absolutes they entail—all kinds of monstrosities are possible. History has shown exactly that.

If there is one intellectual strain that is creating mass confusion it is postmodernism. For this we can thank French intellectuals in the 1960s. It is the most extreme expression of the secular vision. At bottom, it regards truth to be a

fiction. Once this idea takes hold, look out. Here's how postmodernism plays out in real life.

David Detmer is a philosopher who knows how absurd postmodernism is. He interviewed one of its practitioners, fellow philosopher Laurie Calhoun. He asked her a simple question, one that any pre-school child could answer. Are giraffes taller than ants? "No," she replied, it is "an article of religious faith in our culture."

In an earlier time we would house people like her in an asylum. Today they are working in the academy.

There is a chapter in the book on libertinism, or sexual license. Normal people regard people with perversions as sick and in need of help. Many left-wing intellectuals—who do not want to be regarded as normal, and who indeed reject the idea of normalcy—not only disagree that perverts are abnormal, they want to celebrate them.

In 2022, Indiana University erected a large bronze sculpture of Alfred Kinsey, the zoologist-turned-sexologist. School officials celebrated his years of work there; there is also a Kinsey Institute on the campus. They are proud of his writings and research on sexuality. They shouldn't be.

As I point out, Kinsey was "a scientific fraud, a pervert, a voyeur, an exhibitionist, a masochist, a gay-bar-hopping homosexual (even though he was married), and a child abuser. Oh, yes, he also had sex with animals." Guess which institution he hated? The Catholic Church.

The secular vision, especially postmodernism, explains the existence of transgenderism, or gender ideology. If truth does not exist, then it is entirely possible for boys to think they are girls and vice versa. It does not matter what our chromosomes are—all that matters is what we feel is real.

The tenets of Christianity and transgenderism are polar

opposites and cannot be reconciled. Pope Francis understands this as well as anyone. He calls gender ideology “one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations” of our time. “Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs the differences and the value of men and women.” So upset was he with this ideological madness that he once called it “demonic.”

Anti-science transgender activists are among the most intolerant people in our society. They believe there are more than two sexes (which they falsely call genders) and anyone who disagrees with them—which is to say most normal people—is dismissed as a bigot.

For example, when the famous British atheist Richard Dawkins said the obvious, “sex really is binary,” he was slammed by fellow atheists. But Dawkins is a biologist, not a pundit. His critics nearly fell off the cliff when he offered this pedestrian definition of a woman: “A woman is an adult female, free of Y chromosomes.” They accused him of being “transphobic.”

The damage being done to young people—80 percent of those who “transition” to the opposite sex are girls who want to be boys—is incalculable. The long-term physical and psychological problems that they will experience has yet to be determined. We already know that puberty blockers, chemical castration and genital mutilation have created enormous suffering. Indeed, this is the greatest child abuse issue of our day.

The last two chapters seek to explain why we are so divided as a nation. To take one example, we are treating racial and ethnic groups as if they were different tribes, pitting one against the other. Robin DiAngelo, the author of the best-selling book, *White Fragility*, likes it that way. “People of color need to get away from white people and have some community with each other.” They teach this racism—in the name of combating it—in many corporations and the colleges.

No doubt the Klan would agree with her. So does Harvard. That is why it designated “an exclusive space for Black-identifying audience members” when an adaptation of Macbeth was performed in 2021.

Welcome to the world of the “new apartheid.” The much condemned South African practice of separating the races is now very much in vogue in the United States. We have separate dorms on college campuses based on race, as well as separate graduation ceremonies.

Part of the problem is the tendency of left-wing intellectuals to compare the tenets of the American Creed—the belief in freedom, equality and rule of law—to existing conditions. Inevitably, we come up short. But the Creed is the ideal; it is not reality. It gives us something to shoot for—holding out the potential that some day we will make good on this promise. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood this. Why can’t intellectuals?

When I taught a college class on Social Problems, I gave the students one of the standard textbooks. It focused on how unequal social and economic conditions were, especially with regards to race, sex and class. The conclusion that students were invited to draw—how unfair America is—was baked into the game plan. But I didn’t stop there.

I spent a great deal of time showing what conditions were like for minorities, women and the poor in the past—fifty, a hundred, and two hundred years ago. I also compared current conditions in the United States for minorities, women and the poor to current conditions on these three categories in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

What makes more sense? Comparing social conditions to some mythical ideal, or to real-life historical and cross-cultural conditions?

Alienated intellectuals who have rejected God find themselves

searching for transcendent meaning in some secular universe of ideas. They do not believe in Original Sin, maintaining that there are no limitations to the human condition. As such they believe they can craft a utopian society. Ironically, the word "utopian" means "no place."

From a Christian perspective, all of this is nonsense. As the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr said, there is no possibility of creating a perfectly moral social order; we are imperfect and fallen.

If these secular ideas were confined to the classroom, it may not matter much. But they are not. Attempts at utopia were tried by Hitler, Stalin and Mao, yielding a death toll of approximately 150 million. So not only are secularists wrong about their view of man and society, they are a menace to both.

If we are to see a restoration of the religious vision, the Catholic Church is going to have to lead the way. The clergy sexual abuse scandal hurt us, but there have been incredible improvements. The damage done is real but it is not terminal. Besides, who else are we going to turn to for leadership?

It behooves traditional Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Evangelical Protestants, Orthodox Jews, Muslims and Mormons to put aside their theological differences and join hands in the culture war. We share a similar religious vision, and on cultural issues we are in even more agreement. This is especially true of sexual issues. None of these faith communities wants anything to do with the insanity of transgenderism.

We are at a crossroads. We have a self-identified devout Catholic president who may believe in God, but who nonetheless rejects the existence of human nature. The belief in human nature entails the belief that we are either male or female. Our president clearly does not share this perspective.

Our cultural meltdown is a serious matter but it is folly to think that we cannot change course. There is no iron law of history. It is up to us to make the case for the religious vision and to resist top-down measures that seek to subvert our Judeo-Christian heritage.

It is my hope that after reading this book you will encourage others to read it as well. It is not a history book, so after reading the Introduction, feel free to jump to any chapter that interests you.