

# The Anti-Western Faith

Faith is not easily lost. Such an assertion might seem absurd in light of the Western world's recent experience—Europe's old national churches and America's mainline denominations are in steep decline, while the Catholic Church and evangelical denominations are facing their own difficulties in retaining adherents and winning more. But the drift away from traditional religion is not entirely the same thing as a loss of faith: more often it means a misdirection or outright perversion of faith. The spiritual is turned into the temporal, and salvation becomes a worldly concept. This not only warps humanity's understanding of its higher nature by confusing it with the lower; it also creates longings in political and social life that cannot be fulfilled. This degrades our worldly practices as well as the human spirit, as the means of politics and economics are misapplied toward ends they can never achieve.

Western civilization was once Christendom. It is still shaped by faith, and in large part still by Christianity. But alongside Christianity, a secular universalism has taken shape. This is often called liberalism, though some of its manifestations are dis-

tinctly illiberal, and liberalism as an ideology is only one possible expression of a deeper psychological and historical current. "Social justice," with its complex mythology of victims and oppressors—saints and sinners—is a cutting-edge development of this secular

universalism. It takes from Christianity a certain feeling for guilt and expiation, but atonement is not to be made to God, or even to humanity as a community of brothers and sisters under a Father. Instead, only political and other public rituals can purify: denouncing nonbelievers and heretics on social media, for example, or silencing the voice of error by enforcing the right “community standards,” as devised by corporations eager to demonstrate their acceptance of political morality. Every society has a public orthodoxy and codes of etiquette. What is remarkable is not that there is today some private policing of speech—and, by implication, thought—but the unforgiving and uncharitable political nature of the orthodoxy. The new faith does not respect conscience. How can it if moral truth is found only in one’s conformity to the correct attitudes held by others, and not in one’s relationship to anything beyond humanity?

The new faith is parasitic upon the old. It relies on attitudes formed by Christianity yet now divorced from it and channeled into practices of social and political power. Pity for the poor and suffering, and the long Western Christian emphasis on reflecting upon one’s own sinful nature, has been depersonalized (including by removing the person of God from the picture) and applied instead to political and social history. In this way, Western civilization comes to be seen as a centuries-long failure, which only now is beginning to discover the right ethical formulas for dealing with all categories of people. Moral progress is accomplished by

revolution, not the refinement of tradition. Even today, the West is so deeply stained by its immoral past that affirmation of anything distinctly Western or distinctive of particular Western nations is sinful. The irony that this supposedly enlightened and universalistic outlook on morality can be applied only to the West is simply something to be ignored. Applying the new faith’s standards to any other civilization would show that, in fact, whatever its flaws, the West does a better job of living up to its particular standards, even as those are understood by progressives, than anyone else does or ever has done.

The consequences of the new faith are dire on the spiritual and practical domestic levels. But they may be lethal in the long run on the global stage. Other civilizations with greater self-confidence and a stronger sense of themselves, whether in their explicit creeds or implicitly in their practices, will grow and gain power as the West—the vehicle for the new faith as well as for all that survives of the old—sacrifices itself to a false idol. Secular universalism calls for weakening nation-states relative to the world as a whole; that is, it calls for scrapping the most successful political form that has yet been discovered in the quest to create a global order that remains at best speculative, and at worst a pure delusion. While the United States and its European allies pursue a fantasy, other great powers pursue their interests. Eventually the West’s great reservoirs of strength will run dry, because they have been wasted.

—*Daniel McCarthy*