

Return Of The Strong Gods- RR Reno

“But one thing is indisputable: in the vacuum of lockdown, blood cried out from the ground. After a long season of turmoil and confinement, the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion seemed ineffectual. It was replaced by strident demands for retribution, reparation, and punishment. ‘No justice, no peace’. This is the slogan of a strong god.”

“In early June 2021, a woman named Aruna Khilanani revealed her ‘fantasies of unloading a revolver in to the head of any White person that got in my way, burying their body and wiping my bloody hands as I walked away relatively guiltless with a bounce in my step.’ Khilanani is not an anger-addled street-corner crank but a psychiatrist, and her words, uttered in a lecture at the Yale School of Medicine, expressed more than political correctness. She was there to worship the strong god of vengeance.”

“Only yesterday, multicultural managers and HR bureaucrats spoke solemnly of diversity and inclusion, vague notions that serve the gods of weaking. Today, however, the same managers and bureaucrats add ‘equity’, a term that signifies a change in direction...diversity is a feel good word. Equity topples statues.”

“Put simply, to love wrongly is dangerous, but however debasing, it is human. By contrast, to fail to love is inhuman. The deepest failure of the postwar consensus, then, is that it trains us to be loveless and therefore to be something less than human.”

“ ‘I see a world of open borders, open trade, and , most importantly, open minds’”- Bush

“Popper theorized the progress of science in formal, procedural terms, trying to encapsulate it in the principle of falsification... In that sense, our [political, sociological, etc.] theories are always tentative, never known as truth strictly speaking, but only held as not-yet-falsified beliefs.”

“Whether inspired by Popper or not, After World War II that species of liberalism moved in the direction of empiricism combined with a rhetorical defense of democracy and freedom that resolutely avoided their metaphysical foundations.”

“At the same time, the new pop psychology of ‘growth’ and self-realization, following Popper, remained scrupulously anti-metaphysical, not explicitly but as part of the larger and increasingly powerful postwar consensus...Just what we were to grow toward remained vague, as it must be when metaphysical questions are held at bay.”

“...anyone who has read Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* gets the gist of Lippmann’s argument. The public interest’ was a term much favored by postwar liberals, who imagined it to be an empirical concept, the content of which can be filled in by social-scientific studies. But the public interest is first and foremost an ethical-political concept, not an empirical one.”

“In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Germany was the center of socialist thought, which Nazism adapted. While its goals were nationalist, not those of international socialism, it imagines, as did Marxism, that human reason was capable of mastering the complexities of modern industrial economies, reconstructing them so as to attain greater efficiency and unity of purpose. In the ideology of National Socialism, society is a vast machine that can be reengineered to better serve the ‘destiny’ of the German people [this is wrt how Hayek formed his political thoughts]”

“Buckley was not criticized [for his book, *God and Man at Yale*] for his free-market views, nor was he censured for his traditional beliefs about the divinity of Christ. What irked the liberal establishment was his assertion of those views and beliefs as solid truths.”

“He [Buckley] intuited, at least in part, that he could engage in public life only if he adapted his arguments to the growing postwar consensus in favor of the open society. That meant no strong gods—no large truths, no common loves, and no commanding loyalties...Over time, the tactic became a strategy, and in American conservatism the open society and free economy overwhelmed whatever was solid and permanent.”

“The cultural scene is very different in the twenty-first century. Few recent college graduates can name a living poet. We now turn to social psychology, brain science, evolutionary theory, and economics to understand our lives and our society. Science provides the tools to diagnose problems and formulate solutions, much as Popper had hoped. Devoid of transcendence, these ways of thinking are materialist, not in the moral sense of encouraging greed and consumption (though some do that too) but in the metaphysical sense of reducing human reality to instincts and biological processes.”

“The management model of life and society operates widely today, especially in the artificial environment of the university, where a great deal of effort goes into establishing a bright line of consent to distinguish rightful from wrongful sexual relations. This effort to impose discipline reflects a desire to find a ‘no’ that does not erode the general ‘yes’ implied by the sexual revolution”

“The consensus was in favor of openness; conservatives and liberals different not about whether to loosen up but about how much.”

“There was nothing inevitable about the 1960s. It is simply false to assert that. Given the choice, human beings will opt for what is immediately pleasurable. Throwing off social norms and cultivating ‘individuality’ are not natural impulses... Neither inevitable nor natural, the trend toward liberation from traditional cultural norms took hold because it was mandated by the leading ideas of the postwar error.”

“Even our selfish goals—to look thin or dress for success—get analyzed as social constructs, serving, perhaps, to sustain patriarchy, ‘late capitalism’, or cisgender dominance. At every turn, we analyze ‘down’, beginning our critique of social reality with things that might attract our loyalty and devotion and analyzing downward to the low, the ugly, the base. What is today called ‘critical thinking’ amounts to a thoroughgoing therapy of disenchantment.”

“To be an educated person today means acquiring the virtue of disenchantment. At this juncture young people arrive at universities with very little cultural knowledge for teachers to disabuse them of. Still, the imperative remains. The rising generation should be guided toward what Philip Rieff calls ‘deconversion’, the condition of critical knowingness that makes us ‘faithless’, not in the sense of believing nothing but of not believing anything strongly, which is to say ‘uncritically’.”

“The cultural imperatives follow. Artists need to cultivate transgression! Corporations must celebrate diversity! At every turn, strenuous effort is put into weakening consolidating institutions and convictions. Religious faith, patriotism, the marriage covenant—responsible, establishment people believe that their duty as citizens in an open society to ‘problematize’ these traditional loyalties.”

“In our public affairs, we must renounce our desire for great things and transcendent vistas, seeking instead only ‘little worlds’: decent health, a modicum of wealth, and ordinary pleasures. The free society requires going small.”

“The primordial fall, Camus suggests, occurs when we seek to rise in loyalty to higher ideals. When we love something greater and nobler than our own little, private worlds we ascend to a ‘summit’, betraying our shared humanity in the lowlands. We risk becoming moral monsters, imagining ourselves servants of something greater. Camus consistently implies that this is the true source of totalitarianism... Camus portrays all forms of

transcendence as a moral betrayal, whatever their sources. We must accept that we're prisoners in a disenchanted, meaning-vacant world.... The encounter [the priest who insisted that Camus was almost a secular saint] baffled me at the time. But I can now see that Camus played an important role in the postwar era, a time in which Catholicism, too, worked to relax its strictures and make itself more open, 'smaller', and more ordinary."

"Milton Friedman shared Camus' antipathy for high ideals and, like Camus, he believed in the moral importance of focusing on the quotidian."

"Aristotle, held a similar view, though he drew conclusions quite different from those of Friedman and the classical liberal tradition. Aristotle saw that a free society requires well-trained citizens who are habituated to seek what is just. The more virtuous the populace, the less coercion will be needed."

"Friedman's political ecumenism reveals an important commonality between the postwar right and left. The postwar right emphasizes economic deregulation and the need to open up more space for free economic choices, while the postwar left focuses on cultural deregulation, Camus's concern. But they are united in the pursuit of an open society, differing only in focus and emphasis."

"Yet as he detailed what he took to be the suicidal weaknesses of Western liberalism, Burnham implicitly endorsed qualities found in abundance in 1960s communism. He argued for firm convictions (communist version: dialectical materialism) rather than mealy-mouthed relativism, affirmation of hierarchies (communist version: dictatorship of the proletariat) rather than an unworkable egalitarianism, hard-nosed realism and philosophical clarity (communist version: Marxist orthodoxies) rather than aimless pragmatism and the plastic rhetoric of the open society."

"Vattimo argues that we can no longer believe in the 'metaphysics of presences.' (It is a signal characteristic of 'hermeneutic philosophy' to say we can no longer believe in something rather than arguing that it is false.")

"Having come of age before 1914, Heidegger, like Max Weber, regarded disenchantment as a cold, hard fate. The retreat of the strong gods from the culture of the West leaves a dangerous vacuum. Spiritually inarticulate, abandoned, and vulnerable, those living in a god-abandoned world seek the narcosis of spiritual self-deception, busyness, and—most tempting of all—technological mastery, a mentality that promises empowerment but turns everything into resources at hand for exploitation and control."

"Without the anchoring, abiding power of Being, we become interchangeable agents and subjects of endless manipulation—workers, consumers, buyers and sellers in the marketplaces of 'identity'. We engineer our lives, even choose our sex. But this freedom is exercised within the terms set by mass culture and the globalized economy. Professors market critiques. Artists sell transgressions. But these critiques and transgressions are integral parts of the postwar consensus, not 'countercultural' at all, as is obvious when they are championed by elite institutions and rewarded with prestigious fellowships and prizes. Disrupting nothing other than what remains of the memory of the strong gods, they contribute to the weakening of Being, which is thought always to be morally salutary and necessary for an open society."

"In the place of traditional loyalties to 'God, king, honor, country' and 'a sense of absolute duty or an exalted vision of the meaning of history,' liberalism 'proposes a set of pale and bloodless abstractions.' We are told to rally around 'dialogue', the United Nations, 'progress', and this or that program of the modern welfare state. Is it then surprising, he asks, that some people say 'Better Red than Dead'? Only a fool dies for small things and 'little worlds', for greater utility or procedural goods such as 'free and open debate.'"

"Just as the progressive literary professor exposes the textual devices by which patriarchy or heteronormativity is made to seem like a normal and natural feature of society, so the postmodern architect shows how the motifs

of the classical, Gothic, and other traditions are decorative gestures that hide, disguise, and distract. They are not components of a unified aesthetic that arises out of a shared, harmonious way of life. A postmodern building says to the viewer, ‘style is arbitrary—just like justice and truth’.”

“Our built environment since 1945 does not tell us a story about where we have come from and who we are. It inculcates a negative piety, urging us to affirm Vattimo’s ‘destiny of weakening’, which is why it can be international.”

“This pedagogy—paradigmatic for our late phase of the postwar era—replaces the student’s warm love of James with a cooler expertise in critique. He may become more academically sophisticated, but his devotion to Henry James will be weakened, refocused on the patterns of power and injustice that his work exemplifies rather than the truth and beauty it embodies.”

“Our center-left leadership class will promise to subsidize working-class consumption, but it won’t reorient the global economy toward their employment. It all but explicitly announces that many people in the West have no place in the open economy of the future.”

“Moreover, ‘diversity’ is hopelessly ill-defined. Diversity with respect to what? But these and other liabilities are of no moment. The rhetoric of diversity took hold because it evokes openness and expresses the ideals and aspirations of the postwar consensus.”

“Any who imagines that such questions matter mistakes multiculturalism for a principled outlook. Like diversity, it is another post-1945 open-society therapy. Multiculturalism focuses on disenchanting the Western tradition because it alone has a hold on our spiritual and political imagination and provides us with a home. So, for example, progressives in Europe attack strong expressions of Christianity but accommodate rigid and illiberal forms of Islam. They do this because Christianity is a strong god of the West whose return must be prevented. Islam is not, and so need not be feared—or so they imagine. The logic of multiculturalism, therefore, is paradoxically Eurocentric. It exists only to address our particularly Western nightmares of concentration camps and lynchings.”

“When racial tensions increased during Obama’s eight years as president, commentators assumed the cause was white backlash. This is always the pattern of the postwar consensus: social problems stem from closed-society vices. Our leadership class is unable to countenance the obvious explanation: they are dysfunctions of an open society.”

“It is not unimaginable that the European Court of Human Rights, in the not so distant future, will declare a Hungarian or Polish election invalid because the winner is insufficiently devoted to diversity or some other shibboleth of the open society.”

“One strand, however, stands out as remarkably constant. For more than fifty years, voters in Europe have told their leaders that they don’t like the cultural changes caused by immigration and they don’t want more immigrants. The politicians consistently promise to reduce the inflow. But they never do.”

“Formed by the postwar consensus, the leadership class in the West sees its fundamental duty in historical terms: to prevent the return of the strong gods.”

“So she knows their ways, which include returning to Tunisia or Algeria during the holidays to visit relatives. They are explicit, she said, in how they describe these trips. They are cherished opportunities to ‘go home’”.

“More and more voters in the West sense this strange inability among our leadership class to affirm their loyalty to the people they lead.”

“Those who fought and suffered during the harrowing years of Hitler’s rule tolerated former Nazi party members in public roles in Germany after the war. Curiously enough, as time passed and the actual dangers receded, anti-fascism strengthened.”

“In its classical definition, a republic is not merely a system of government. It is that which is held as a common good among a particular people, a *res publica*. The *res*—the common thing that is the object of a shared love—is often many-sided.”

“The project of peace without love cannot go on much longer. Man was not created to be alone. We do not desire calm, not even when satiated by countless pleasures. We yearn to join ourselves to others, not only in the bond of matrimony but in civic and religious bonds as well. The ‘we’ arises out of love, a ferocious power that seeks to rest in something greater than oneself.”

“The ‘we’ is never concocted out of shared choices. It is always a gift conferred by shared loves. The objects of our loves in a real sense choose us, not we them.... We need to learn to speak again of the loves we share, not the injustices we reject or the exclusions we renounce.”

“There is a political component to this restoration. Tax and employment policies can have an effect on the margins. It might be worth revisiting no-fault divorce. But cultural politics are more important.”

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