

The Menace of the Religious Left

by Murray N. Rothbard

A menace to America and even to the rest of the world, not only of our time but of the last few centuries, is the deadly threat of the "Religious Left," a left which began, in the Middle Ages and even earlier, as a hellish Christian heresy, and by now can only be considered "Christian" in the most remote and twisted sense. This menace, which reached its most influential early form in the views of the charismatic and highly



influential late-twelfth century Calabrian Abbot, Joachim of Fiore, is "postmillennial": that is, it struggles to bring about, either immediately or as quickly as possible, a thousand-year Kingdom of God on Earth, a "perfect" and sinless world, a world which would be Communist, collectivist, and egalitarian, although that "equality" would be supposedly assured by the totalitarian rule of a cadre or vanguard of "saints," presided over by a self-proclaimed Messiah or proto-Messiah, whose reign would supply the pre-conditions for the eventual Second Advent of Jesus Christ. Private property would be stamped out, and all "heretics," that is, any dissenters from this messianic rule, would be slaughtered.

After Joachim, there came waves of these heretics, including the Amaurians, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and the left-wing of the Czech Hussite Revolution. But before the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church was able to contain this plague successfully. Say what you will about the Reformation, even Martin Luther came to acknowledge that he had opened Pandora's Box, that he had unleashed, perhaps forever, the furies and crazies of fanaticism and horror.

In 1520, young Thomas Muntzer, a Lutheran pastor in southern Germany, unleashed upon Western Europe the scourge of what came to be known as Anabaptism: the imposition by force and terror of an alleged Kingdom of God on Earth, with a cadre of rulers, headed by himself, communizing all persons and property and killing all "heretics" who might dissent from his rule. For a brief but frenzied fifteen-year period, there was a real danger of Germany and Holland falling sway to groups of Anabaptist fanatics. Fortunately, when Muntzer urged Luther to join him in this messianic crusade, arrived at

by alleged divine revelation, Luther immediately saw the deadly danger; at the end, the Anabaptist movement was crushed by an alliance of Catholic and Lutheran princes.

Movements can be stamped out, but ideas, good or bad, often keep marching on, and the same was true of the idea of imposing a totalitarian Kingdom. In troubled times, the idea popped to the surface: among the Familists, the Diggers, the Ranters, and the Fifth Monarch Men during the English Civil War of the Seventeenth Century; and before and during the French Revolution. By the early and mid-nineteenth century, the main carrier of a Communist Kingdom was the burgeoning "socialist" or "Communist" movement in Europe. (In those days, before the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, the two concepts were considered by all adherents to be identical.) What is little realized today is that at the time of the flourishing of Karl Marx as a socialist-Communist leader, at least half of the Communist movement was heretically Christian, the other half following Marx's atheized version of the search for an apocalyptic and secular Kingdom. The victory for Marx's atheist version was not preordained; it was touch and go, until Marx's superior organizing ability and the dispersals following the failed revolutions of 1848 led to the complete triumph of Marxian atheism within the socialist-Communist movement.

Indeed, the Marxist Communist utopia is virtually a replica of sixteenth-century Anabaptism: once again, private property is stamped out, all resources – and people – are owned in common by a cadre of "saints," a vanguard headed by a messianic leader, and all dissent to this collective organism is crushed. Marx's theoretical problem was that since he could not rely on God, Providence, or some mystical force to bring about the allegedly inevitable Kingdom, he had to seek out "material forces" – the class struggle, productive forces, the "dialectic" of history – to constitute the inevitable engine of social change.

But the idea of messianic, Christian Communism never disappeared, and during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries it showed up in various forms: as Christian Socialism, the Social Gospel, and other variants of left-wing Christians and Christian leftists. Perhaps most fascinating and most blatant was the widely beloved East German Stalinist Ernst Bloch, whose widely known three-volume *The Principle of Hope* was translated into English in the late 1980s. Early in his lengthy career, Bloch – in common with many other Marxists – wrote a laudatory study of Thomas Muntzer, whom he hailed as magical or "theurgic." The inner "truth" of things, wrote Bloch, will only be discovered after a "complete transformation of the universe, a grand apocalypse, the descent of the Messiah, a new heaven and a new earth." For Bloch, mystical ecstasies and the worship of Lenin and Stalin went hand in hand. Thus, Bloch's culminating work, *The Principle of Hope*, contains such remarkable assertions as: "Ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem" ["Where Lenin is, there is Jerusalem"] and that "the Bolshevik fulfillment of Communism" is part of the "age-old fight for God."

How is all this seemingly bizarre stuff relevant to the present day? My contention is that, bizarre and weird and horrifying as all this may be, we are not dealing merely with erratic oddballs or with irrelevant history. My contention, ever since the Clintonian Democrat convention in New York in 1992, is that the Clintonian movement is not "centrist," or simply erratic, confused, or evasive, but that it is in essence a dedicated movement of the "Christian" or religious left. It is an attempt to impose, not immediately as in the case of Muntzer or Lenin, but over a period of years, and as quickly as politically possible, a Kingdom of God on Earth, at least in the United States. The horrifying New York convention had very definite religious and even messianic overtones. The Kingdom, of course, is not the orthodox Christian Kingdom: it is collectivist, egalitarian, multicultural, and "multi-gendered"; it deliberately overthrows and "transvalues" our entire structure of traditional or "bourgeois" Christian values and principles.

It might be thought that one crucial difference between the current left and the medieval or post-Reformation heretical Christian left is that the current movement of course trumpets the glories and even the superior morality of various sexual what used to be called "perversions," but are now worthy and even morally superior "alternative families" or "alternative lifestyles." But that isn't new either. The Anabaptists, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and the rest were aggressive "antinomians," that is, claiming to be saintly, quasi-divine or even divine and therefore without sin, they believed in publicly demonstrating and even flaunting their alleged sinlessness by committing all manner of sins imaginable, including adultery, theft, and murder. The Clintonians have nothing on these older "Christian" movements.

The Clinton Inaugural was, of course, a horrifying display of a neopagan, multicultural, New Age religious left at work, a fact, which was only discerned by the liberal but highly perceptive New York humorist Fran Lebowitz, who struck a delightfully sour note, saying that even watching the Inaugural orgy of religious leftism on television had driven her to "a new planet of fury." Then, in the crucial early months of the Clinton administration, Michael Kelly wrote an insightful and quickly famous article in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (May 23, 1993), entitled "Saint Hillary," replete with a painting of Hillary on the front cover dressed as Joan of Arc, significantly wearing a sword but not a cross. After a lengthy and discerning interview with Hillary, the article, which was carefully neutral in tone but all the more effective, pointed out that Hillary thought of herself as leading the charge for "something on the order of a Reformation: the remaking of the American way of politics, government, indeed life." Hillary, the article explained, had set out "to make things right," to "make the world a better place," to install a "politics of virtue" or "politics of meaning."

Hillary was converted to her current grandiose stance, first by her hometown Methodist preacher, who introduced her to "alienation," the Social Gospel and Paul Tillich, and then to the admonition of that

other trendy left Protestant theologian of our century, Reinhold Niebuhr, that we must never be reluctant to wield Power in the service of The Good. An admonition that the power-mad Hillary took to as a duck takes to water. Hillary's most recent guru, of course, is the socialistic pro-war (Gulf War that is) peacenik, Michael Lerner, editor of the pretentious glossy magazine *Tikkun* and notorious coiner of the phrase "the politics of meaning."

Armed with an all-encompassing ideology, and with what many interviewers have noted as her arrogance and complete self-assurance and self-righteousness, Hillary was now ready to wield total Power in the service of her own hellish conception of The Good.

It was reported that Hillary and her camp in the White House were furious at the Kelly article and its important revelations, and since then she has said not a word about the importance of remaking all of America by wielding State power. But the goal and the means are, unfortunately, still there.

And Slick Willie, too, Hillary's co-president and ideological puppet, underlying his continuing stream of lies, evasions, and tactical changes to front, is deeply committed to the very same goal. Considering his rotten character, does the Slick One's commitment to *anything* seem improbable? But consider two points. First, each and every one of his programs, regardless of attractiveness of label, whether it be "crime" or "welfare reform," is designed to increase the power of the State, that is, the federal government, and to diminish the liberties and the property rights of every American.

And finally, ponder this: Remember that weekend in August when Willie began his frantic and febrile, but unfortunately successful, drive to reverse his House defeat on the crime bill? He gave a speech in Maryland before the grandiosely named Full Gospel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. What the media reported Clinton to proclaim was odious and blasphemous enough: that "God wants us to pass the crime bill," and that his, Clinton's "ministry" (!) was devoted to that task. But he said something else in that speech, of far greater purport, that received almost no publicity. He said that the goal of his "ministry" was to bring about no less than the "Kingdom of God on Earth"! Yes, he said it, he actually said it! Now I have no idea how Clinton's "parishioners" reacted to this phrase, or what the almost uniformly secular media people thought they were hearing. Maybe they thought they were merely hearing a grandiloquent metaphor for improving society.

But *we* know what he said, and it is our business to inform America of its import before it is too late. *We* know that William Jefferson Blythe "Clinton" IV, that Monster in the White House, was at last revealing, perhaps in a typical moment of unguarded vainglory and exuberance, the cloven hoof, the face of pure evil, the unholy mission of

himself and his Lady Macbeth. *We* know the truly diabolic nature of the Kingdom that the Clintons are trying to put over on an unsuspecting America.

And still the liberal media wonder: *Why* do so many people hate this charming and wonderful couple and with such intensity.