

New Secular Religion and the Clash with Neotraditional Great Religions

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Abstract

The United States in 2020 is in the midst of its greatest crisis since that of the Great Depression and the Second World War. This crisis is the result of large numbers of Americans, especially elite Americans, abandoning the traditional American religion, which was originally based upon Reformed Protestantism, and replacing it with a new secular religion, which is global progressivism. The determined efforts of these elites to promote this secular and postmodern religion on a global scale have produced a determined resistance, also on a global scale. This global resistance is mounted by several neotraditional religions and their civilizations, which are the contemporary heirs of such ancient and traditional religions as Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Keywords

American Creed, Axial Age civilizations, globalization, global progressivism, neotraditional civilizations, public theology, Reformed Protestantism, secularization, secular religion, Western civilization

The United States in 2020 is in the midst of the greatest crisis since the 1930s and 1940s, which was the result of the Great Depression and the Second World War. The roots of the current crisis go back several decades, fundamentally to the 1960s, when large numbers of Americans began to abandon the Christian religion—the “faith of their fathers”—and to replace it with a new religion, that of secular humanism.

In the ensuing decades, secular humanism steadily developed into a more and more complex and articulated religion.¹ In politics and policies, it went from being liberal to being progressive. In scope, it went from being internationalist to being globalist. In its animus, it went from being secular to being actively anti-Christian. By the 2010s, this new secular religion had become what can be termed global progressivism. It saw its moral imperative, its greatest commandment, to be “social justice.”

By this time, global progressivism was the faith of most of the elites—the establishment—of the United States. This included the political elites, especially those of the Democratic Party, but also much of the leadership of the Republican Party; the economic elites, especially those engaged in the global economy; the bureaucratic elites, especially the career civilian officials in the federal government; the media elites; and virtually all of the academic and educational elites. At the commanding heights of the American establishment was the administration of President Barack Obama, which very much represented the vision and the values of the new religion. One might even say that it was the *de facto* public theology of the United States.

Because the United States has been the leading power—indeed “the sole superpower”—since the end of the Cold War in 1989–1991, the American establishment has promoted this new religion of global progressivism throughout the world. By the 2010s, it had been doing so for more than two decades, and it had come to believe that there was no other way to order the world and its future. And, in the 1990s, there had indeed been no effective resistance anywhere to the grand United States project of globalization and its accompanying religion, whose central elements were often described as liberal democracy, market economy, open society, and universal human rights.

However, at the beginning of the 2000s—and the beginning of the twenty-first century and also of the third millennium—the first substantial resistance to this grand United States project and new religion appeared, and it appeared with a big bang, that is, the attacks by Islamist terrorists on the

¹ Joshua Mitchell, “A Godless Great Awakening,” *First Things*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/07/a-godless-great-awakening>.

World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. This Islamist resistance was later joined by resistance from a reviving Russia, and then from a much more formidable rising China. As different as these three sources of resistance have been, they all reject the American way of globalization and its religion of global progressivism. And they have often legitimated their resistance with appeals to their particular traditional, historical religions. In the case of Islamism, this is of course, Islam; in the case of Russia, it is Eastern Orthodoxy; and in the case of China, it is “Asian values,” or modernized elements of Confucianism. These are “neo” versions of older religions.

Then, in 2016, substantial resistance to the globalization project and global progressive religion appeared in the United States itself. This was realized in the election to the office of president of Donald Trump, who represented the substantial number of Americans who had been left behind and marginalized by economic globalization (industrial workers and small businesses) or who had been berated and marginalized by religious progressives (e.g., Evangelical Protestants and traditional Roman Catholics). However, although Trump was elected, the combined resistance of the US elites—those on top of the sectors of politics, economics, bureaucracy, media, and academia—made it almost impossible for him to govern.

Thus, at the beginning of 2020, the United States political system was almost completely polarized and dysfunctional. It seemed that the 2020 presidential election itself could produce a grave political crisis. Then came the uniquely deep and disruptive crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, or more accurately, a succession of medical, economic, and political crises that unfolded within the overall coronavirus crisis, making it into a coronavirus catastrophe.

In this essay, we will discuss the original American religion, which was Reformed Protestantism and which provided the original American public theology. We will see how this original American religion was transformed over time into its complete opposite, the new American religion, first of secular humanism and then of global progressivism. We will then discuss how this new religion has provoked the increasingly effective resistance of the contemporary heirs to several of the traditional great religions, especially, Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Confucianism.

What America will be like after it has experienced the full impact of the coronavirus catastrophe is known only to God, who superintends the rise and fall of the nations. But just as the new American religion of global progressivism brought an end to the reign of the traditional American religion of Reformed Protestantism, so too the resistance of the neotraditional

heirs to the older great religions will bring about an end to the reign of this new American religion.

I. *Protestantism versus All Other Religions*

As Alexis de Tocqueville and numerous social analysts since have observed, the identity of Americans, especially the original Anglo-Americans, was greatly shaped by their particular religion. This was, of course, Protestantism, and especially Reformed Protestantism. As we shall see, this product of the epic struggles of the Protestant Reformation was a distinctive and unusual religion indeed. This has made the American view of the rest of the world—and particularly of other religions and civilizations—distinctive and unusual too.²

Protestantism was a protest, a protest against the form that the Christian religion had taken in the Roman Catholicism of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Protestant Reformation was an effort to reform the Christian religion back to the original faith expressed in the New Covenant or New Testament of the Bible.

All religions are unique, but Protestantism is unique in more ways than any other. No other religion is so critical of hierarchy and community, or of the traditions and customs that go with them (and therefore critical of much of what makes up a traditional civilization). Indeed, most other religions are based upon hierarchy or community (in addition to Roman Catholicism, also Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, and even, to a degree, Buddhism). At its doctrinal base, however, Protestantism is anti hierarchy and anti community. The Protestant Reformers therefore sought to remove hierarchy and community so that the individual Christian believer could have a direct relationship with God. (More accurately and subtly, so that the individual believer could have a relationship with God directly through the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, and so that he could receive salvation from God directly from the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.)

The removal of hierarchy and community, traditions and customs—of any earthly intermediaries between the individual and God—strips away, at least for the most important or spiritual purposes, any local, parochial, cultural, or national characteristics of the believer. In principle, grace, faith,

² Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

and salvation can be received by anyone in the world; they are truly universal or catholic, in the original sense of the latter term. The Protestant Reformers saw the vast variety of other religions and cultures, and they did so from a universal perspective, one that was even more universal than that of the Roman Catholic Church. This put them on a collision course with most of the other religions and therefore with the civilizations which these religions had produced.

II. *From Reformed Protestantism to American Creed to Universal Human Rights*

In the three centuries after the Reformation, the Protestant rejection of hierarchy and community in regard to salvation spread to their rejection in other domains of life as well. In the new United States the secularizing of the Protestant Reformation gave birth to what by the early twentieth century would become known as the American Creed.³ The fundamental elements of that secular creed—liberal democracy, free markets, constitutionalism, and the rule of law—were already fully in place in the United States by the early nineteenth century. For many Americans, the Protestant creeds would be replaced by the American Creed, which reached its fullest articulation in the first half of the twentieth century. This American Creed definitely did not include as its elements hierarchy, community, tradition, or custom. Although the American Creed was not itself Protestant, it was clearly the product of a Protestant culture and was a sort of secularized version of Protestantism. The American Creed was the core of what Louis Hartz and others have called the liberal tradition in America, but this liberal tradition was also very much a sort of secularized Protestantism.⁴

Ultimately, in the second half of the twentieth century, the American Creed (and the liberal tradition) would themselves be replaced by a new and universal creed, such as universal human rights, or more accurately the elements of the American Creed would be generalized into universal norms. Under the hegemony or leadership of the United States, the American Creed first became the core ideals of Western civilization, and then universal human rights became the core ideals of what is now the contemporary global civilization. Its religion is what we have called global progressivism.

³ James Kurth, *The American Way of Empire: How America Won a World—But Lost Her Way* (Washington, DC: Washington Books, 2019), chapter 2; Huntington, *Who Are We?*

⁴ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

III. Postmodern Global Progressivism versus Ancient Great Religions

The Christian religion was fundamental in the origin and development of what became Western civilization.⁵ In a similar way, other religions were fundamental in the origin and development of other civilizations. Leading examples have been Hinduism and Indian civilization, Confucianism and Chinese civilization, Eastern Orthodoxy and Russian or Slavic civilization, and Islam and the civilization of Muslim peoples. Now, in our own time, there is an emerging global civilization, a civilization that self-consciously has rejected all previous religions, especially Christianity, and claims to have gone beyond religion altogether. Led by the United States, this global civilization is now confronting a variety of other, regional, civilizations which are the heirs of religions whose origins lie in distant, even ancient, times. This is producing what indeed is a clash of civilizations, one that warrants our examination.⁶ The rest of this essay will focus upon this clash of civilizations, and upon the clash of the religions which these civilizations embody and represent.

IV. The Axial Age Civilizations: The Great Religious Transformations

One of the premier scholars of comparative civilizations in the late twentieth century was Shmuel Eisenstadt, an Israeli sociologist who taught for many years at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, right at the center of repeated clashes of religions and their civilizations. Eisenstadt, and before him, the distinguished German philosopher Karl Jaspers, proposed an important and fundamental way of thinking about civilizations.⁷ Eisenstadt argues that the origins of most of the great civilizations of today lie in a particular period, the “Axial Age,” which occurred two-and-a-half millennia ago (i.e., around the sixth century BCE). It was at this time that several regions of the world (e.g., China, India, Persia, Israel, and Greece) each underwent a great religious transformation. The new religions became the basis for new civilizations. The legacies of these religions and civilizations persist even today, and they continue to shape the great conflicts (and also the modes of cooperation which often are parallel and interacting with these conflicts)

⁵ James Kurth, “Western Civilization: Our Tradition,” *Intercollegiate Review* (Winter/Spring 2004): 10–18.

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁷ Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial-Age Civilizations* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986); Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and the Goal of History* (London: Routledge, 1953).

of our own time. These several religious transformations were of course different from each other in many important ways. But they generally shared several characteristics which set them apart from the worldviews and ways of life which existed before the Axial Age, which continued to exist for millennia in other regions of the world (e.g., Africa, pre-Columbian America, and, in an anomalous way, even Japan) and which, as we shall controversially argue, have reappeared in much of the modern, and now postmodern, global civilization of our own time.

Recapitulating Eisenstadt, we observe that the great religious transformations of the Axial Age comprised three component transformations or shifts of societal focus: (1) from human needs to divine norms; (2) from adaptive rationality to introspective self-reflection; and (3) from human or societal purpose to human, including personal, freedom. Together, these three shifts of societal focus in effect amounted to raising a society up and realigning it on an entirely new axis, a great transformation indeed.

It is, however, natural (in several senses of the word) that after a time a society, or at least important elements within it, will be drawn back to the old ways of looking at the world and of doing things, that is, to become less focused on the transcendent and more upon the imminent, to become less reflective and more instrumental, and to become more collective or societal and less personal or individual. In other words, it is common for many elements of a society to fall away, to again become worldly, and indeed to revert to the natural man. However, other elements of the society will resist and contest this natural (and naturalizing) process and will seek to recall the society to the grand transcendent vision of its earlier great religious transformation. Thus, all Axial Age civilizations have developed fundamentalist movements within their core religions, and within their core states, which are the principal earthly powers within these civilizations. These movements continually resurrect their religious traditions, and, in doing so, they continually restructure their core states.

This process of continual resurrection and restructuring is shaped by the creative tensions between four contrasting polarities or priorities: (1) the transcendent versus the mundane; (2) the universal versus the particular; (3) the totalist versus the pluralist; and (4) the orthodox versus the heterodox. These creative tensions are not just expressed in contrasting intellectual (and theological and ideological) conceptions; they are embodied in contesting elements or groups within the civilization and within its core, or civilizational, state. This core, or civilizational, state serves as the central and hegemonic state within the civilization, usually providing the political and military power to protect, promote, and project the civilization.

Adding to Eisenstadt, we can also observe that most of the Axial Age religions had the following features:

(1) Texts, usually sacred scriptures (“In the beginning was the Word”). The learning of these *texts* was accompanied by *tests* (in a process known popularly as “tests and texts” or “TNT”), most famously in traditional China beginning with the Tang dynasty.

(2) Interpretation of the texts by a literate, learned group, that is, a rabinate (Judea), scholar-gentry (China), or priesthood (as would later develop in Christianity). This resulted in a perpetual tension between the sacred *word* and the actual *world*, that is, between the transcendental and the mundane.

(3) This in turn resulted in institutionalized tensions between the following: (a) the priests versus the princes (who claimed to be the rulers of earthly life); (b) the priests versus the prophets (who claimed that they had a more direct revelation of the divine than did the priests); and (c) the priests versus the people (whose conditions of life were very different from the priestly elite and who naturally developed very different perspectives). In short, in almost all of the Axial Age civilizations, there were institutionalized tensions between different centers of power. (However, an important exception to these particular kinds of institutionalized tensions, each of which involved priests, was Classical Greece and Rome, where priests were not very central to the society.)

Each of the new Axial Age religions, of course, created some kind of new theology. However, most of them did not create anything like a public theology. Therefore, our own idea of public theology would have been incomprehensible in those civilizations. However, there were two exceptions to this generalization. One was the civilization of Classical Greece and Rome. Indeed, it was this civilization that invented the idea, indeed the very word, of public, as famously expressed in “republic,” or “the public thing.” However, any theology of Classical Greece and Rome, with all their many, all-too-human, gods and goddesses, was very thin and primitive.

The other exception was ancient Israel. In it was created the most innovative and profound theology of all, that presented in the Bible. And with it was created a covenantal people, the Israelites. And so was created the first public theology. The public theology of ancient Israel should remain a model for public theology, right down to the present day. And for much of American history, some version of this Israelite public theology was indeed the operating public theology of the American people, right down to the 1950s. A prime example is how the political order ordained in Deuteronomy 1 is recapitulated in the political order established by the United States Constitution.

V. *The Origins of Western Civilization in Ancient Greece and Rome*

The principal origins of the Western civilization lay in an earlier one, which was the civilization formed by ancient Greece and Rome and which has often been termed the Classical civilization. Greece itself did not provide a core state for the Classical civilization, although Athens aspired to that role during the Peloponnesian War, and Macedonia aspired to it under Alexander the Great. Instead, it was Rome that eventually became the core state for Classical civilization. Indeed, the Roman achievement in this role was so successful and impressive that Rome and its empire set the standard for what a core state and empire should be, especially in the minds of its successor states in both Western Europe (or the lands of Roman Catholicism) and Eastern Europe (the lands of Eastern Orthodoxy) and for a millennium-and-a-half after the final fall of Rome (the Western Roman Empire) in the fifth century Common Era.

VI. *The Union of the Classical and the Jewish Civilizations: Christendom*

This core state of the Classical civilization, Rome, famously and utterly destroyed the core state of the Jewish civilization, Judea, in 70 CE. However, there soon came about a union of the two civilizations (in other words, the union of Athens/Rome and Jerusalem) in the extraordinary form of Christianity. This new religion eventually formed the Christian civilization, which until the eighteenth century was often termed Christendom. As a union of two civilizations, Christendom was in many ways unique among the great civilizations. The union of elements of the Classical and the Jewish civilizations certainly incorporated yet another creative and distinct tension within the new Christian civilization.

In contrast to the *union* of the Classical and the Jewish civilization within the Christian civilization, there eventually came yet another new religion which represented the *supersession* of both major portions of the Christian civilization and surviving remnants of the Jewish civilization, as well as of earlier pagan (i.e., pre-Axial Age) societies within the region of Arabia. This supersessionist religion was Islam, and it soon conquered not only the eastern and southern peripheries of the Christian civilization but also the core of the Persian civilization.

VII. *The Evolution of the Christian Civilization*

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Western or Latin Christendom never had a real core or civilizational state. The Holy Roman Empire, as its name proclaimed, aspired to be this, but its repeated failures over many centuries simply added another creative tension to the Christian civilization, this one being between priests and princes (at the highest level between the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic papacy), which would eventually mature into the distinctively Western tension between church and state.

Then, after a millennium of widely and deeply dispersed power centers and of myriad tensions which attended this dispersal, Latin Christendom during the Reformation split into two religions—Catholicism and Protestantism, with the latter in turn splitting into many denominations. This splitting of Latin Christendom into different religions accelerated and accentuated the splitting of the civilization into many states and eventually—after the Wars of Religion, which culminated in the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648)—the development of the concept of a balance of power between these states. All of this splitting, and also what there was of any balancing, resulted in even more tensions being incorporated into what remained of the Christian civilization. But, because of this extensive and dynamic ensemble of tensions, this civilization was now on the verge of another great transformation, one that would eventually prove to be as fundamental as the great transformations of the Axial Age. Indeed, as we shall argue, this new great transformation would go far to reverse the epic achievements of the Axial Age.

VIII. *The Modern Civilization versus the Axial Age Civilizations*

Eisenstadt and others termed our contemporary global society the modern civilization. This modern civilization began with the scientific and technological revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g., Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, and Newton) and the “Enlightenment” of the eighteenth century. This Enlightenment (which in many ways lives on today, especially in the United States and Europe), consciously sought and still seeks to *reverse* the major innovations and great transformations of the Axial Age; that is, it seeks a shift of societal focus in at least three fundamental respects: (1) from divine norms back to human needs; (2) from introspective self-reflection back to adaptive rationality and practical intelligence; and, in the Marxist and nationalist versions of the Enlightenment, (3) from personal

freedom back to societal purpose. For example, out of the Enlightenment there issued the Jacobinism of the French Revolution. And out of Jacobinism, there eventually issued both Communism and Fascism, each of which certainly sought to subordinate human freedom to human purpose. In this respect, however, there have been important and consequential differences between the French and Continental version of the Enlightenment and the British and American, or “Anglo-American,” version; the latter has always put more emphasis on preserving personal freedom.

The Enlightenment also removed the Christian priesthood from what had been the Christian civilization. In doing so, it removed one of the pillars of that civilization and therefore the basis for one of its previous creative tensions. Moreover, the Enlightenment removed the sacred texts or the Word from the civilization, progressively replacing it with many diverse words (until now in the Information Age, we are flooded by and immersed in an ocean of words). More fundamentally, the Enlightenment also represented a sort of return to the *pre*-Axial Age, indeed, a return to a sort of *paganism*. Seen in this way, the modern civilization was actually a new pagan civilization.

By the 2000s, the modern civilization had progressed to the point that it was more accurately seen as the postmodern civilization. And by then, this new pagan civilization was on a giant, global scale, the goal of the grand project of globalization promoted by the US elites. It is not surprising, therefore, that the remaining remnants of the Axial Age civilizations—China, India, Iranian (Persian) and Shiite Islamists, Sunni Islamists, and even Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians—have rejected and reacted against this postmodern civilization. They are now engaging in new versions of the continually recurring fundamentalist movements which have characterized the Axial Age civilizations, that is, movements against the continually recurring tendencies to “fall away,” to become “worldly,” and to revert to “the natural man,” which have also characterized the Axial Age civilizations. However, these new versions of fundamentalist movements can now also use Jacobin-like methods—i.e., modern-style methods—to achieve their aims. That is, they can combine the fundamentalist religious ideals and ends of the Axial Age civilizations with the modern and post-modern means of the postmodern civilization.

IX. From Modern Western Civilization to Postmodern Global Civilization

During the long modern era (which can be roughly dated from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the twentieth century), the modern

civilization self-consciously saw itself as the enlightened successor to Christendom and eventually called itself Western civilization. Western civilization more or less existed from the Enlightenment down to recent decades (i.e., over a period of about two centuries). The Western civilization in turn comprised two successive eras—the European one, which largely corresponded to the nineteenth century, and the American one, which corresponded to much of the twentieth century.

At the end of the twentieth century, the modern Western civilization transformed itself into the postmodern global civilization. This postmodern civilization represents the extension of what was the Western civilization to the furthest regions of the globe, far beyond its original core in Western Europe and its later core in North America. But, because of this vast extension, the global civilization is also a civilization which represents a new set of central ideas and creative (and also destructive) tensions, which have displaced many of the earlier ideas and tensions that characterized the Western civilization. The most important of these new tensions are probably those between postmodern ideas and values and Axial Age ideas and values.

X. The American Construction of the Postmodern Global Civilization

America was always a leader of modernity and therefore of any civilization of modernity. Indeed, Samuel Huntington long ago declared that “America was born modern.”⁸

Beginning in the 1960s (if not before), the United States began to spread the civilization of modernity beyond the West itself to the rest of the globe. In doing so, it became the principal creator of a new global modern civilization. In the 1960s, a principal vehicle of this spread was American multinational corporations. In the 1970s, the Carter administration added the ideology of universal human rights. The particular definition of these supposedly universal human rights largely corresponded to an updated version of the American Creed. This was soon advanced by both Democratic and Republican administrations. In the 1980s came both the ideology and the reality of the Information Age, which quickly and easily promulgated the ideas of modernity and then postmodernity throughout the globe. And, in the 1990s, all of these elements were gathered up and integrated into the grand US project of globalization and its accompanying religion of global progressivism.

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), chapter 2.

During this period, the American business, intellectual, academic, and media elites ceased to be Western in their self-identification but instead became global and universal in their ideas and ideals. Their worldview became truly worldwide in its breadth (and also worldly in its depth, or rather in its lack of spiritual depth). By the 1990s, therefore, the United States had become the core state, the civilizational state, for the new global civilization. This global, now postmodern civilization had a particular (and, from the perspective of the Axial Age civilizations or its remaining remnants, a peculiar) core of beliefs, which in effect serves as its religion. This religion, of course, was no longer Christianity but was instead a new version of the Enlightenment, which was actually an anti-Christian and anti-Axial Age religion.

In some respects, the Enlightenment worldview of the global civilization was still like the Anglo-America Enlightenment, which had included an emphasis on free markets and the limited state. In other respects, however, it was like the French and continental Enlightenment, which had included an emphasis on a universalist ideology, military interventions, and Jacobin methods. Even more, however, it was like the French post-Enlightenment, that is, like postmodernism, with its emphasis on deconstructing all traditional (and therefore all Axial Age) ideas and ideals and on promoting relativism, the equal validity of all ideas and ideals. This postmodern ideology was of course reinforced by the great communication advances brought about by the new technologies of the Information Age and the Internet.

XI. The Axial Age Resistance to the Postmodern Global Civilization

Of course, it should not be surprising that the remnants of the Axial Age civilizations have reacted against and rejected this American-led postmodern global civilization. As we have seen, these principally consist of China, India, Iranian and Shi'ite Islam, and Sunni Islam (which unlike the others, has no core state). These remnants of the Axial Age civilizations are obviously rather large and substantial. Indeed, they are large and substantial enough for each to be able to convincingly claim it can now offer an alternative vision of what a civilization should be, a vision that is different from the American one.

Thus, in the view of some (especially the business, intellectual, academic, and media elites of America), the United States is the civilizational state of a new and universal civilization—the postmodern global civilization. However, in the view of others (especially the political, religious, and cultural elites of the Axial Age civilizations), the United States is indeed a great

state, but it is not a *civilizational* state. Rather, many of them see it as an *anticivilizational* state, a state without a true civilization, one which is sort of monster, pagan state and which is the adversary of true civilizations, such as themselves.

XII. Losers and Winners in Globalization

During the past three decades (roughly corresponding to the period of the full operation of the United States globalization project), several of the great religions have undergone a revival and transformation into political religions, which enables them to better resist globalization and the United States. Especially strong in their resistance have been revivalist Islam and neo-Confucianism (sometimes referred to as “Asian values”). Also resistant have been revivalist Hinduism and Eastern Orthodoxy. These neotraditional versions of the great religions see the globalization led by the United States to be closely connected with secularization and therefore a threat to themselves. These four sources of religious opposition correspond to four large countries or areas. Two of these have been losers in the new global economy, and two have been winners.

1. Russia and, More Generally, Most Countries with an Eastern Orthodox Religious Tradition

For a variety of reasons, countries with an Orthodox tradition have been unsuccessful in making the transition from a communist regime to a liberal democracy and market economy able to adapt well to an open society and global economy (e.g., Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia). Conversely, most countries with a Roman Catholic or Protestant tradition have been successful in making this transition. This contrast among ex-communist countries, between the more Western and the more Eastern, between the Roman Catholic or Protestant and the Eastern Orthodox, means that the political and economic developments since the 1990s have revived and reinforced a historic divide, one that corresponds to the great schism between Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity and even to the ancient division between the Latin and the Greek halves of the Roman Empire. Today, in Russia and the other Orthodox countries, there is substantial resentment and resistance directed at the United States and its global project and secular religion.

2. The Middle East and, More Generally, Most Countries with an Islamic Religious Tradition

Most countries with an Islamic tradition have also been unsuccessful in establishing a viable liberal democracy and market economy that would enable them to adapt well to an open society and global economy. For those that experienced the heady years from 1973 to 1985, when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) seemed to be a world power, a long decline in oil prices deepened their sense of failure and their alienation from globalization. Here, too, there is widespread resentment and resistance, whose most obvious representatives are militant organizations based upon the Sunni branch of revivalist Islam, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Another source of resentment and resistance is the Islamic Republic of Iran, the representative of the Shi'ite branch of revivalist Islam and the heir to the civilizational state of Persia.

The religious and cultural elites of the Sunni branch of Islam have an unusual problem. There is no clear and obvious core civilizational state for Sunni Islam. (The closest approximations are Turkey and Saudi Arabia.) However, the Sunni elites see themselves and their civilization as being the very opposite of the United States in several important respects: (1) Sunni Islam is a civilization, even a great civilization, but one without a state, whereas the United States is a great state, but one without a civilization; (2) Sunni Islam represents an ideal waiting to become real, a spirit waiting to become flesh (in particular, the restoration of a true Caliphate), whereas the United States represents a mere material and mundane reality, from which the ideal and spiritual have departed; and, as a consequence of (1) and (2), (3) Sunni Islam is today in a condition of both great vulnerability and great promise, whereas the United States is today in a condition of great power but little promise.

The Sunni Islamists seek to bring about the realization of their religious ideal with the use of modern means (e.g., terrorism using modern weapons), by bringing down what they see as their opponent, the anticivilizational state that is the United States. For them, there is a great calling to fulfill, which is to create a great state, the Caliphate, for a great civilization, Islam. We should not be surprised that they judge it permissible, even imperative, to use any means possible against a state that they see as a monster, pagan, anticivilizational state.

Conversely, there is growing opposition to the United States even from some of the winners in the global economy. These include:

1. *China and, More Generally, Most Countries with a Confucian Tradition*

Most Chinese, both in China itself and among the “overseas Chinese,” see their economic success as resulting from their own culture or “Asian values,” from engaging in the global economy in their own way. This conception was reinforced by their interpretation of the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s. The countries with the most open currency markets (South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia) suffered the greatest disruptions and declines. Those whose currency markets were most regulated (China and, ironically, Taiwan) experienced little disruption and continued their economic growth. And in the 2000s and 2010s, the East Asian countries, or those with a Confucian tradition, continued to enjoy great, even spectacular, economic success.

2. *India*

The entry of India into the global economy has been recent, and its benefits have been unevenly distributed. It has occurred, however, at the same time as the growth of Hindu nationalism, the development of Indian nuclear weapons, and increased confidence in rejecting certain Western ways.

The external sources of opposition to globalization led by the United States are thus very disparate. But together these sources of opposition comprise a vast region, really all of Eurasia and more, which stretches from Russia and Eastern Europe, through the Middle East, through South Asia, to China and East Asia. In this vast region are found the four great civilizations that Huntington identified as most likely to oppose the West in “the clash of civilizations.” These are, in his terms, “Slavic-Orthodox,” Islamic, Hindu, and “Sinic-Confucian” civilizations. In this region, too, are four nuclear powers—Russia, Pakistan, India, and China, each of them seeing themselves as the center of their civilization. Singly or collectively, they have now developed the capacity and the will to disrupt and contain the American way of globalization.

XIII. *Creation, Revival, and Secularization*

The birth of a new religion is an awesome event. The spiritual world enters into the material one and releases enormous energy. It is, in a way, analogous to the biblical story of the creation itself. It is also analogous to the scientific formula for the conversion of energy into mass, $E=mc^2$. This release of enormous energy was what happened with the creation of Christianity and its later revival in Protestantism. However, something with the appearance of this process also happened with the creation of such religions as Buddhism,

Islam, and Mormonism. Each of these very different new religions then created a new authority, with new laws and new forms of obedience (the original meaning of *religious* means *binding*). It also created a new communion, and therefore community, of believers. These new forms of authority and community became a new form of society.

For the next generation of believers and for succeeding ones, therefore, there were available more-developed material and external forms of the religion than for the first generation, but less-immediate spiritual and inner experiences. In regard to the religious authority, there was, in the words of Max Weber, the “routinization of charisma.” In regard to the religious community, there was the ritualization of communion. In the words of the German theologian and Weber’s contemporary Ernst Troeltsch, the sect became a church. Eventually, the religious community may calcify into being merely an ethnic community.

On occasion, however, the religious community experiences a revival, a moment when once again the spiritual world enters into the material one, when the routinized and ritualized forms of religious authority and community are revived and reformed. This happened most dramatically with the Protestant Reformation. It also happened, as a sort of reflection of the Protestant Reformation, with the Catholic Counter-Reformation. But religious communities have continued to experience revivals right down to the present time (e.g., Evangelical Protestantism, revivalist Islam, and revivalist Hinduism).

On the other hand, the process of routinization may continue until it reaches the point of secularization. The spiritual seems to have completely departed, and only the material seems to remain. However, the image of the spiritual remains in successive, but fainter, versions of social values and practices (rather like successive and fainter photocopies of an original text). These include conceptions of secular authority and community and also ideas about politics and economics. This prolonged process of routinization and secularization can be termed the declension of a religion. It clearly has characterized many versions of Christianity. But it also has characterized versions of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism.

XIV. *Varieties of Secularization*

Even where secularization has occurred, the result has not been one common, secular philosophy but rather a variety of different secularizations. Each religion has secularized in its own distinctive way, which has resulted in its own distinctive secular outcome. This suggests that even if globalization

brings about more secularization, it will not soon bring about one common, global worldview. We shall review the different secularizations that have characterized the modern world, beginning with the most pronounced secularization of all, that of Protestant Christianity.

The Protestant Reformation originated in Northern Europe. It quickly split, however, into two main branches, which were Lutheranism and Calvinism or the Reformed religion. (Examples of the Reformed churches were Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and a wide variety of “dissenting” churches.) Lutheranism came to dominate Northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries; the Reformed churches came to dominate the Netherlands, Scotland, and the United States and to be prominent in England.

1. *Secularized Reformed Religion*

The Reformed version of Protestantism, more than any other major religion, emphasizes the individual believer’s direct relationship with God. It has no place for intermediaries between the believer and God and therefore no place for a religious hierarchy. It also has no need for communal rituals to achieve salvation and therefore little need for a religious community. This rejection of religious hierarchy and community has had momentous consequences for the way that peoples with a Reformed tradition have dealt with the secular realms of economics and politics. The rejection of religious hierarchy and community gave rise to a rejection of secular hierarchies and communities as well. In brief, Reformed theology gave rise to liberal ideology.

In the realm of economics, Reformed peoples (as in Britain and the United States) have been especially inclined toward the ideas of capitalism and the free market: Weber famously analyzed this connection in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904). In the realm of politics, Reformed peoples have been especially inclined to the ideas of liberalism and democracy, particularly liberal democracy. De Tocqueville famously analyzed this connection in his *Democracy in America* (1845). In our time, all of this makes secularized once-Reformed peoples especially amenable to globalization.

2. *Secularized Lutheranism*

Lutheranism was the other main branch of Protestantism, and it protested against the Roman Catholic hierarchy which culminated with the pope in Rome. It also protested against the idea that salvation could be achieved through good works within the religious community. Unlike the Reformed churches, however, Lutheranism retained a religious hierarchy at the national level, which culminated in state churches led by a secular monarch. It also

retained some sense that the religious community was useful for a variety of religious purposes.

This attenuation but not rejection of religious hierarchy and community meant that Lutheranism gave rise to its own distinctive way of dealing with the secular issues of economics and politics. In the realm of economics, Lutheran peoples (as in Northern Germany and Scandinavia) have been especially inclined to the idea of state regulation and planning. In the realm of politics, they have been especially inclined to the ideas of social democracy. And Lutheran peoples too have been very amenable to globalization.

3. Secularized Roman Catholicism

The Protestant Reformation did not succeed in converting Southern Europe and much of Central Europe. Rather, the Catholic Counter-Reformation succeeded in establishing a revitalized Roman Catholic Church in these regions, complete with a highly articulated theology of papal hierarchy and parish community, forming a truly universal (the original meaning of *catholic*) church.

This accentuation of religious hierarchy, community, and universality meant that Roman Catholicism gave rise to a distinctive way of dealing with the secular realms of economics and politics, even if this led through the peculiar path of anti-Catholicism. In economics, secularized Catholic peoples (as in France, Italy, Spain, and much of the Habsburg monarchy) were especially inclined toward Marxist ideology. Its universal conceptions naturally appealed to secularized Catholics. In politics, they were especially inclined toward socialist (but not necessarily communist) parties. Their highly structured organizations, emphasizing both hierarchy and community, also naturally appealed to secularized Catholics. And in our time, secularized Roman Catholic peoples have been less accepting of globalization than secularized Protestant ones, and less successful operating within it.

4. Secularized Eastern Orthodoxy

The various Eastern Orthodox churches (Eastern Europe and Russia) have had yet another conception and configuration of religious hierarchy and religious community. Like Lutheran Protestantism but more so, they have emphasized a national religious hierarchy, culminating in a state church. Like Roman Catholicism but even more so, they have emphasized the local religious community, with intense communal bonds.

This accentuation of religious hierarchy, community, and nationality meant that Eastern Orthodoxy gave rise to a distinctive way of dealing with the secular realms of politics and economics (including the primacy of politics

over economics). In politics, secularized Orthodox peoples have been especially inclined toward varieties of communalism and populism. When dealing with wider social issues, some communalists and populists have turned toward ethnic nationalism. Others have turned toward communism.

These political attitudes, in turn, have had distinct consequences for economic behavior. They have generally inhibited the development of individual economic initiative. It is no accident that Eastern Orthodox peoples, even secularized ones, are relatively underdeveloped in regard to economic entrepreneurship. Indeed, in Eastern Orthodox countries, the entrepreneurs were normally found among the Jewish or Protestant religious minorities. This close correlation between ethnic identity and economic proficiency, and the resulting sharp contrast between the poor ethnic majority and the rich ethnic minority, have reinforced the communalist and populist politics of Eastern Orthodox peoples. All of this has made secularized Orthodox peoples quite resentful and resistant toward globalization.

5. Secularized Judaism

Historically, of course, Jews were always a minority within the European countries in which they resided. Perhaps this explains why secularized Jews have been inclined to a rather wide variety of different ideologies, often corresponding to the dominant ideology of the secularized Christians around them. It seems, however, that the commitment of secularized Jews to any particular ideology has often been more intense and extreme than that of the secularized Christians.

Thus, in Western Europe and the United States, secularized Jews have been especially inclined toward liberalism and indeed have been among its most consistent advocates. In Central Europe, secularized Jews were especially inclined toward Marxism and were among the most consistent advocates of it. In Eastern Europe and Russia, many secularized Jews were especially inclined toward Zionism, which can be seen as being strongly communalist, populist, and ethnic nationalist. Others, of course, were especially inclined toward communism and indeed were among its most consistent advocates (until Joseph Stalin, in the last years of his rule, turned against communist Jews).

6. Secularized Confucianism

Given the importance of China in leading the great-power resistance to the American way of modernization and globalization, we shall also say something about its own peculiar version of secularization, which has been secularization with Chinese characteristics. Confucianism is not quite a religion

in the sense of the others that we have discussed. It lacks a highly articulated conception of the spiritual world, that is, a theology. It does, however, have one of the most highly articulated conceptions of what hierarchy and community should be in the temporal world, that is, something like an ideology.

Like almost all other religions, Confucianism has emphasized both hierarchy and community. In these respects, it probably has been most similar to Roman Catholicism. In addition, however, it also has emphasized individual achievements within strict hierarchical and communal norms, that is, through the learning of the Confucian texts demonstrated in written examinations (“texts and tests,” or TNT), leading to advancement in the state bureaucracy, and through economic effort and initiative that benefitted the local community as well as the individual. In these last respects, Confucianism has been curiously similar to Judaism, which emphasized the learning of the Torah and the Talmud and also emphasized economic entrepreneurship.

This accentuation of hierarchy, community, and constrained individual achievement has meant that Confucianism has given rise to its own distinctive way of dealing with the secular realms of politics and economics. In politics, Confucian peoples have been especially inclined toward state authoritarianism. In economics, they have been especially inclined toward state-guided capitalism.

Most peoples adhering to the other major religions (Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists) have not undergone a process of secularization to anywhere near the degree of what has occurred in Europe and the Americas (among Christians and Jews) and in East Asia (among Confucians). If and when the peoples of these religions become secularized on a large scale, however, they will retain their own distinctive conceptions and configurations of hierarchy and community. These, in turn, will have implications for their patterns of authority, the family, and the individual. And these patterns are likely to make them feel that American-style globalization is alien to them and their identity.

XV. Varieties of Globalization

Thus, the American way of globalization has now provoked a new kind of globalization, that is, a resistance to globalization which is itself on a global scale. That resistance is composed of many peoples who have been the losers from globalization, even in the West itself. But the core of this resistance is found in the heirs to the great non-Western religions, especially Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Even in their

secularized versions, they represent ways to modernization greatly different from the American and Western way. Indeed, at least two of these religions—Islam and Confucianism—have each given its heirs a vision of globalism created in its own image. Although very different from each other, Islamism and China now each proclaim their own way to globalization—that is, either to a globalization in submission to Islam or to a globalization with Chinese characteristics. Thus, as we go further into the twenty-first century, and further into the era of globalization, we find that globalization has reached such a high degree of development that there is not just one but many globalizations. We seem to be approaching a world-historical clash of globalizations.

Conclusion

The new American religion of global progressivism is a religion of the elites, by the elites, and for the elites. It is a religion without God, or rather its god is merely human elites, that is, itself. Since it does not have a spiritual god, a *theos*, this religion does not have a theology, but merely an ideology.

Although global progressivism claims to advance the people through its program of social justice, in practice it sets different groups of the people—especially different racial and gender groups—against other groups. That is, it is really a new version of the classic elite strategy of divide and rule. Therefore, it does not produce a public, but rather it destroys the public. Since global progressivism has neither a public nor a theology, it cannot provide a public theology, but merely an elite ideology.

In this election year of 2020, this new American religion is intent upon achieving complete hegemony within the United States and over the American people. If it should do so, it will redouble its efforts to eliminate all traditional and neotraditional religions, both at home and abroad. But this will in turn drive these religions toward greater resistance to what they rightly see as a monster, pagan religion.

In the end, the upward and outward progress of global progressivism will culminate in a great storm and a great fall. Then, in the ruins of both the old American republic and the new American religion which destroyed it, will be found a remnant, a remnant of the original American religion of Reform Protestantism. Out of this remnant there will then come a new public theology. But this new public theology will look very much like the oldest public theology of all, that given to the ancient Israelites in the Bible. For such has been, is now, and ever shall be the enduring basis for a public theology of a people in covenant with God.