

Defending Western civilization

By Marsha Familiaro Enright and Gen LaGreca | Published: 11:27 AM 09/08/2010

OPINION



As September 11th approaches, Americans remember the morning in 2001 when the World Trade Center turned to rubble. It is a fitting time to consider the nature of the civilizations that collided that day—and how to defend ours.

In their quest to establish a worldwide caliphate, radical Islamists invoke morality, claiming they have God's sanction for performing their barbarous acts.

To defend Western civilization, we, also, need to invoke morality. But although the world envies the prosperity we've achieved, it is widely seen as the product of soulless materialism, of unbridled "greed," of unscrupulous self-indulgence.

What moral claim, then, can we make for our way of life?

To understand the moral values of the West, let's turn to its beginning. In her prescient 1943 work of political philosophy, "The God of the Machine," Isabel Paterson chose as the symbol of Western man a figure from Ancient Greece: Pytheas. This enterprising merchant left his homeland to explore Britain and beyond, seeking tin to make bronze. Insatiably curious, Pytheas also discovered the relationship between the moon's phases and the tides, and was the first to describe the aurora and other phenomena.

Pytheas epitomizes the Western spirit: a self-directed man whose free will determines his life's course, a thinker who employs reason and science to understand the world around him, and a producer who seeks to sell goods in peaceful trade.

From its founding, America was intended to be the country where Pytheas could flourish—the first nation established to protect the life, liberty, and property of the individual. It did so by curbing government power over the peaceful activities of its citizens.

In this, the contrast between America and radical Islam could not be greater.

Whereas Thomas Jefferson exhorts us to "question with boldness even the existence of a God," militant Islam kills people for apostasy.

Whereas James Madison proclaims that man has “a right to his property” and equally “a property in [all of] his rights,” Palestinian Islamists strap suicide belts on five year-olds, seizing their young lives for the sake of ancient vendettas.

Whereas the Declaration of Independence affirms America’s devotion to life, Osama bin Laden declares: *We love death. The U.S. loves life. That is the difference between us two.*

“The excellence of the West” lies in its “respect for the human being, the recognition of his individuality, the liberty it has granted him,” observes Saudi Shura Council member and Muslim reformist Ibrahim Al-Buleihi.

“Humans are originally individuals,” he continues, “but cultures (including Arab culture) have dissolved the individual in the tribe, sect, or state.” It is only “with the diffusion of philosophical ideas from [Ancient] Greece” that “the human being became an individual of value for himself . . . and not merely a means for others.” (Profile of Al-Buleihi, The Aafaq Foundation, July 6, 2010)

Thus, in our civilization, a person is born free to live for his own sake and to pursue happiness. In radical Islam, a person must obey a central authority and sacrifice his life to its aims. Which society is better?

Granted the West’s superiority, why is radical Islam advancing? Author Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim, cites “an active propaganda campaign” in which “the Saudis invested at least \$2 billion a year over a 30-year period to spread their brand of fundamentalist Islam.” (*Wall Street Journal*, August 18, 2010)

Why aren’t *we* passionately defending *our* civilization? Certainly, money isn’t the obstacle. Is it because we don’t understand the nobility of our individualist foundation, including the virtue of private advancement and profit?

We must never forget that we’re the country of Pytheas: a people of free will, free minds, and free enterprise. Our spectacular prosperity is not our dishonor, but the *glory* of our liberty.

It is said that Ground Zero is “sacred ground.” In truth, *all of America is sacred ground*—because *the individual is sacred here*.

We must assert the moral superiority of our civilization—or lose it to our enemies.

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