

Fall to Your Knees: Perverting Religion as a Defense Against Perceived Terror

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Religion is often framed as a unifying institution connecting people to those of their civilization. I use Samuel Huntington's definition of civilizations here, which are "differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion."¹ However, religion can also be a devastatingly divisive institution in which one religion, or atheism, criticizes another as baseless or not the one true religion. As we become more interconnected and hence more susceptible to outside ideas, global leaders turn to religion as an effective manipulation tool to shape national unity and moral order. This phenomenon is pronounced within the neoconservative ideology of the United States against the radical Islamists of Muslim nations. People in these nations are siloed in separate civilizations because of the religious order imposed by politicians and religious fundamentalists. Both parties weaponize their respective religion as a strategic response to societal fears, fabricated and otherwise. Neoconservatives in the United States and radical Islamists pervert their religions not as an act of genuine faith but as a response to societal fears and as a rallying call for defensive aggression against perceived terrors.

Both the neoconservatives and radical Islamists pervert religion not just as a spiritual guide for the people but as a strategic tool for spreading democracy or the Qur'an. Neoconservatives rejected Henry Kissinger's philosophy of an allied global society since it supported the questionable liberal policies at the time that the neoconservatives considered ineffective. There was severe rioting, mass protests, and rising disillusionment in the government, particularly after the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Liberal policies designed to lower crime rates and enforce civil peace failed. The intellectual Leo Strauss, who

1. Samuel P Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 72 (1993): 25.

taught students who eventually founded neoconservatism, asserted that the American value of individual freedom led to conflict since people advanced on their selfish interests and “undermined the shared moral framework”² in the process. To solve the social disintegration crisis, Strauss proposed that the people of the United States needed to be united through a shared purpose, the purpose of America as a “unique nation whose destiny [is] to battle against evil in the world.”³ Democracy, therefore, would spread in the process. This proposed American agenda contradicts Kissinger’s dream of alliance since we must dominate those who fight against democracy. Consequently, this agenda supported the neoconservative’s aim since citizens could set aside their desires for the good of the Nation. The neoconservatives now had to find a way to convince the majority of Americans of this inspiring agenda.

In fighting against the moral and cultural decay present in both cultures, neoconservatives skewed Christian tenets for their political agenda, whereas radical Islamists remain faithful to the Qur’an. That is, neoconservatives and radical Islamists manipulated religious identities and thus turned fear into a unifying yet divisive tool. The United States, at its conception, had “no origin or mythical authenticity”⁴ nor any “past and founding truth,”⁵ so, consequently, it had no religious claim. Hence, the United States adopted a cheapened form of Christianity to give legitimacy to its divine creation. The word of God was instated in the pledge of allegiance,

2. *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear* (United Kingdom: British Broadcasting Company (BBC), 2004), pt. Baby It's Cold Outside, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yK3wz-OyR1U>.

3. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

4. Jean Baudrillard, “Utopia Achieved,” in *America*, trans. Chris Turner, 2nd (London: Verso Books, 2010), 76.

5. Baudrillard, “Utopia,” 76.

inserted in all presidential speeches, and made visible in the thousands of churches nationwide. Because of its vast spread into American households, neoconservatives seized the means of Christianity to drive their aggressive political aims. This form of Christianity is cheapened since its goals are not aligned with the word of God. Instead, it becomes an effective weapon of hate. However, radical Islamists remained faithful to their text in the context of contentious geopolitics with the United States. Sayyid Qutb and intellectuals after him advocated a fight against the plague of Western ideologies by strictly following the Qur'an, by pure faith: "either willing submission; or payment of the jizya [...] submission to the authority of Islam; or the sword—for it is not right to let [an infidel] live."⁶ America never would compromise her relationship with Christianity by willful submission; thus, the only cure—as commanded by Allah—is death. The neoconservatives cheapened religion, whereas the radical Islamists returned to the fundamentals of theirs. However, it is of the same fight: of faith that the other is dangerous. Both parties successfully sowed fear in their citizens based on a perceived threat.

Neoconservatives seized the means of Christianity to propagate their American agenda since they could effectively frame the issue of this doomed and amoral society in simplistic religious imagery. The neoconservatives and Republicans (specifically, the Conservatives sub-party) were politically weak and comprised primarily of intellectuals. They wanted to tap into the apolitical fundamentalist Christian population to give legitimacy to their philosophy and power in office. Irving Kristol, the founder of the neoconservative movement, posited that the solution to the morality problem lies in religion: "This notion that a purely secular society can cope with

6. Osama bin Laden, "Moderate Islam Is a Prostration to the West," in *The Al Qaeda Reader: The Essential Texts of Osama Bin Laden's Terrorist Organization*, ed. and trans. Raymond Ibrahim, 1st (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2007), 19–20.

the terrible pathologies that now affect our society [...] has turned out to be false.”⁷

Fundamentalist preacher James Robinson denounced communism using religious rhetoric: “I take a personal and public stand as a minister a stand against communism, [...] to wipe it from the face of the Earth because believe you need these people are dedicated to the destruction of [...] America and freedom.”⁸ Robinson dramatized the seriousness of communism as if Lucifer himself was taking charge against America with language such as “to wipe it from the face of the Earth” and “dedicated to the destruction.” Framing the issue of communism in religious imagery was effective, and the neoconservatives could now apply this same paradigm against the Islamist issue. Christianity became the practical vessel in which the neoconservatives attempted to solve the social and moral decay in Americans while simultaneously launching violence against Muslims.

The monetary corruption public officials and people in Muslim countries fell to forced Islamists to break the “spell of American ideology”⁹ violently and reconcile their social disintegration. Western capital flooded into countries like Egypt, which created a healthy middle class and bankrolled politicians.¹⁰ For example, former President Anwar El-Sadat of Egypt complied with Kissinger’s plan for peace negotiations with Israel, a notorious enemy of Arabs and Muslims.¹¹ Intellectuals among the likes of Sayyid Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri denounced the actions of those corrupt like Sadat since they sold out their people for Western gain. They are

7. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

8. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

9. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

10. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

11. *Power*, Baby It's Cold Outside.

not looking after their citizens' best interests and, therefore, betray Allah. Since they are not Muslim anymore, they can justifiably be murdered by the principles of jihad. However, even though Islamists murdered these corrupted politicians to set an example, citizens still adopted Western ideologies. That is, the people were not scared back into submission to Allah. Islamists then started assassinating their people since they viewed them as too corrupt and, hence, not Muslim. The Islamists were religious fundamentalists and followed the will of Allah to solve the moral decay issue instead of creating an inspiring agenda like the United States. Islamists capitalized on the death and fear they caused to protect their people from the infection of American ideals.

Seeing the moral corruptness originating in the West and permeating into their countries, radical Islamists turned to Islam as a cure to correct this infection. Karl Marx identified that money, the shadow of the cheapened God that America worships, weakens social connection and enforces a bartering mindset: "Money degrades all the gods of mankind and converts them into commonalities [...] His [the Jew's] God is only an illusionary bill of exchange."¹² Capitalism is an unsatiated industry that pursues unlimited growth and profits at the expense of the workers and developing countries the United States exploits, which is contradictory to the Christian values of love and equality this Nation supposedly follows. Our social interactions are transactional, like bartering, where we exchange favors or information regularly. Hence, religion in America has become cheapened to allow the true God of capitalism and money to run amok. However, Western ideals of liberty, justice, and capitalism itself are byproducts of a secular government (which is different from a majority Christian nation) that are ineffectual in a

12. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, "Mind of the West," in *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (Penguin Books, 2005), 102.

religious state but are incrementally infecting Muslim countries. These countries denounce democracy itself: “Popular sovereignty was wicked because it denied God’s rule.”¹³ States of Islam operate under sharia law, or the rule of God. They view human-constructed laws as flawed since people themselves are flawed. We must, therefore, require the guidance of an all-knowing, all-powerful being to keep the people in check. Muslim countries view the United States as amoral since our hubris and relentless drive for excessive greed furthers legislation that directly harms their citizens and other nations. Hence, radical Islamists such as Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri call for jihad against the infidels, that is, the death of those in opposition to Allah and institutions of liberty, justice, and capitalism. American politicians indirectly adopt a similar tactic to the radical Islamist’s use of jihad in which they leverage the fear of external terror to justify preemptive action for political gain.

Neoconservatives exploited fear in the American people on unfounded claims of unknown terrors as a means for preemptive action to solve the moral decay issue. The limiting power of liberalism weakened the moral compass in the American people according to neoconservatives.¹⁴ No laws could fix rising crime levels and disillusionment in government because there was a disconnect in the Nation’s values. As a result of this disillusionment in the people and wanting to return to simplicity, “politicians shifted from granting dreams to protecting and rescuing their citizens from the unseen dangers abroad.”¹⁵ The neoconservatives needed to overcome the ill effects of liberalism by adopting the precautionary principle: The government of the United States has a preemptive duty to protect its people; that is, action

13. Buruma and Margalit, “Mind,” 121.

14. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

15. *Power*, sec. Baby It's Cold Outside.

without evidence of a looming threat is justified.¹⁶ Fear is an effective motivator when getting a population to submit, coupled with religious rhetoric, even more so. Although no attack from these Muslim nations happened until 2001, politicians were precautionary and sold Americans the nightmare that they would be a target. The neoconservatives of the United States heightened tension internationally, gained tremendous influence in political offices, and resolved themselves of all personal benefits by selling the fear of a surprise attack from the morally corrupt and violent Islamists.

In this geopolitical chess game of eradicating moral decay, neoconservatives and radical Islamists strategically manipulated Christian and Islam identities, respectively. They forged a false sense of unity while simultaneously sowing division in their adversaries. Understanding the implications of these parties is imperative, as they have been successful in inciting hate, mass casualties, and fear. In the genocide against the Palestinian people, Israelis argue that they have a religious claim to the land. The religious manipulation of this gross humanitarian injustice has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians and injured 77,000 more.¹⁷ The implications of co-opting religion for political means are severe, leading to tension, misunderstanding, and direct military conflict between nations.

16. *Power*, sec. The Rise of the Politics of Fear.

17. Lyndal Rowlands, "Israel's war on Gaza live: 34 killed in Gaza strikes amid ceasefire talks," *Al Jazeera*, April 30, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/4/30/israels-war-on-gaza-live-34-killed-in-gaza-amid-ceasefire-negotiations#:~:text=At%20least%2034%2C488%20Palestinians%20have,still%20held%20captive%20in%20Gaza>.

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