

Does Faith in God Up the Murder Rate?

By David Marshall

In 2005, Gregory Paul published an article in the journal *Religion and Society* suggesting (tentatively) that theism and disbelief in evolution correlate to a wide variety of social ills. Paul compared "developed democracies," primarily the major states of Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. He claimed that American culture shows much higher levels of disfunction, especially as defined by murder rates, but also by sexually transmitted disease, youth pregnancies, divorce, and mortality. Americans are also far more likely to believe in God, attend church, and make religion a central part of their lives. By contrast, taking a dig at Pope John Paul, Paul argued:

"Only the more secular, pro-evolution democracies have, for the first time in history, come closest to achieving practical 'cultures of life' that feature low rates of lethal crime, juvenile-adult mortality, sex related disfunction, and even abortion. The least theistic secular developed democracies such as Japan, France, and Scandinavia have been most successful in these regards."

In 2006, sociologist Gary Jensen published a follow-up article in the same journal called "*Religious Cosmologies and Homicide Rates among Nations*." While pointing out weaknesses in Paul's methodology, and offering a far more ambiguous (and sophisticated) reading of the evidence, in the end Jensen affirmed a correlation between murder rates and "dualistic" faith, by which he meant faith not only in God (which by itself correlated to more "healthy" societies), but to belief in the devil as well. He admitted, on the other hand, that disbelief in God seemed to correlate to high rates of suicide. (Crediting Emile Durkheim for first noticing both correlations.)

I will argue that Paul's paper is indeed deeply flawed. These flaws are barely ameliorated by claiming only correlation, rather than causation. (There would be no point to the paper were some sort of causative argument not implied.) While Jensen shares some of the same weaknesses, his discussion of "dualism" elucidates interesting ideas about the relationship between religion and social health.

Paul's errors, I will argue, fall into three categories. First, his sketch, like a group Poliburo portrait, appears to be largely the result of careful cropping. He frames the data in time and space so as to achieve desired results: when we look at a larger picture, radically different results appear. Secondly, as Jensen points out, Paul neglects to consider alternative explanations. Some of the variables he ignores explain the data without need for his hypothesis.

And thirdly, he overlooks evidence even within the societies he studies that disconfirms the claim that strong evangelical belief encourages murder.

Problems With Framing

1. Essentially, Paul's study is a comparison of present-day Western Europe and Japan with the United States. He assumes that because the population of these regions runs to the hundreds of millions, his survey therefore constitutes a "vast Darwinian global experiment" by which to tease out the influence of religion on society.

But should we compare individuals, or civilizations? If the latter, then Paul's study includes only three data points: Western Europe, Japan, and the US. Paul accurately assumes that societies can evolve distinctly in a corporate manner over time. Given the interconnection of social institutions in Western Europe (in terms of social welfare, state churches, history, and geographical proximity), in essence Paul makes use of just three samples, a sample size from which it is hazardous to generalize.

2. Paul fails to expand the available data by considering the state of American or European societies at earlier times.

During the 1960s and 70s, the American murder rate, along with other forms of violent crime, increased dramatically in the United States – from about 4 per 100,000 people in the late 1950s, to a peak of 10 in 1980. Was this increase caused by an increase in faith in God? Obviously not.

Paul points out that the murder rate "a few hundred years ago" was much higher than in America today. Stark claims, however, that Europeans were no more pious in the Middle Ages than presently. (*Secularization, RIP, Sociology of Religion* 249-73) By limiting his study to a few years in the lives of civilizations that have lasted for centuries or millennia, Paul again restricts the value of his study.

3. Paul excludes murder by government, without explanation.

4. Were Paul to back-peddle a few decades, extend his study to the east, and include murder by government employees, results would change dramatically. During the 20th Century, two enormous movements inspired by Darwinian ideas (Nazism and Marxism-Leninism), specifically atheist in the latter case (Aikman) were responsible for tens of millions of domestic murders. (To say nothing of warfare.) Include these murders, and the history of evolutionary and atheistic thought appears dramatically different. The overall European murder rate would be close to 2,000 per 100,000. At

the present rate, it will take all American murderers -- theists, agnostics, Black Muslims, Satanists, and skeptics combined -- a thousand years to match Joseph Stalin's total alone.

5. Neither does Paul discuss the influence of skeptical ideas on abortion. The question of whether the unborn should be considered "human" is, of course, highly contentious. But the legalization of abortion was sponsored for the most part by secularists. In addition, abortion rates today are highest in post-communist states, where atheistic and Darwinian propaganda have dominated the public sphere for several generations. While involved discussion of this issue might not be in order, since Paul brings up the subject, it seems intellectually dishonest to suggest (as he does) that disbelief in God fosters a "culture of life" and lowers the rate of abortion, without mentioning these facts

6. Similarly, Paul makes no mention of euthanasia in Holland. Some studies suggest that the actual murder rate in Holland, when the involuntary killing of the aged, ill, and "defective" children are taken into account, may exceed the murder rate in the United States. Again, euthanasia has been largely a cause championed by secular thinkers.

7. Singapore and Hong Kong are comparable to Japan in many ways. Neither is entirely democratic. But both are advanced, wealthy, technologically savvy, and educated East Asian countries. Were these two nation-states included in the study, results would appear dramatically different.

Both Singapore and Hong Kong have far more vibrant religious activity than Japan. Singapore is about 13% Christian; Hong Kong, almost 10%. (Compared to less than 1% in Japan.) The vast majority of Christians in both cities – even Anglicans – are evangelical. Chinese sects, Pure Land and Zen Buddhism, and both philosophical and popular Taoism are immensely popular among the non-Christian Chinese population, along with Buddhist "televangelists" like Xing Yun, Qing Hai, and Lu Shengyan. Among the Malay and Tamil populations of Singapore, Hinduism and Islam draw large crowds.

Neither city shares the isolated, and highly controlled, social environment of Japan, which is an island, and therefore can easily regulate guns. Singapore is ethnically diverse. Yet the murder rate in both city-states are among the lowest in the world. (1.7 in Singapore, 1.2 in Hong Kong.)

In South Korea, which has an even higher proportion of enthusiastic and mostly evangelical Christians (about 30%), the murder rate is 1.6 per 100,000. It is far higher in Taiwan (8.1), a diverse island-state where purely

monotheistic religion is relatively rare. If religion explains anything at all about murder rates in the "four tigers," the connection is obscure. It seems more likely that the murder rate is higher in Taiwan in part because the country emerged from civil war and remains highly militarized in defense against her communist rival (as, in fact, the US was during the 1960s and 70s), and in even larger part to a history of organized crime and corruption with roots both in civil conflict, traditional secret society activity in southern China, and conflict between mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, Hakka, and aboriginal populations that followed the occupation of Taiwan by KMT forces.

8. What about the post-communist states of Eastern Europe? Young Eastern Europeans were drilled intensively in atheistic beliefs for between four and seven decades. Religion was bitterly attacked and ridiculed in public education and the media, and the religious were subject to sanctions up to and often including death.

Even today, belief in God is often quite low. Estonia (49%) and the Czech Republic (54%) have among the lowest rates of belief in God in the world. Atheism or agnosticism is also abnormally common in Slovenia (35%) and Russia (24-48%), while 44% of Ukrainians claim "none" for religious identification. (Zuckerman)

Does Paul exclude these states from his study because they are not "modern democracies," or because they so powerfully disconfirm his thesis? These remain among the most disfunctional societies in the world by almost any measure. In several of these countries, the murder rate is significantly higher than in the United States. In one study, the murder rate in Estonia ranks 8th among about 70 nations surveyed. Russia was 5th, the Ukraine 11th, and Moldova 15th. (Eastern European states may be even more deeply suicidal than homicidal, ranking near the bottom on surveys of happiness, near the top in alcoholism and suicide.)

In summary, just as many independent "Goldilocks" variables must be optimized for life to appear on a given planet, so Paul's theory gains vitality only by fine-tuning "just right" sociological constraints by the careful selection of useful data.

Overlooked Alternatives

Even if we ignore other cultures and agree with Paul that it is legitimate to focus mainly on Western Europe, Japan, and America, can we legitimately conclude that religion causes America's higher murder rate? The second set of problems with Paul's analysis involves his failure to consider other explanations for the data he chooses to focus on.

Civilizations evolve in different directions under the influence of a wide variety of cultural, historical, legal, ethnic, and religious influences. It is, of course, quite possible that other factors besides religious belief account for the difference between Europe and America.

9. Jensen mentions variables Paul has overlooked, such as economic disparity, welfare, civil war and new government.

10. One factor that neither take into account is race. A majority of murders in the United States are committed by racial and cultural sub-groups that are almost totally absent in Europe. According to the FBI, in 2004, out of 11,218 murders committed in the United States for which the perpetrator's race was known, 5,339 were committed by whites, 5,608 by blacks, and 271 by "others." It is untenable to compare American and Western European societies without taking into account the different ethnic make-ups of the regions, especially when these differences have such an enormous impact.

11. Neither does Paul take into account the difference in availability of firearms. Most murders in the US (66.7% in 2002) are committed with firearms. Guns are much less available in most Western European countries. For example, while 29% of American families own a handgun, only 6% of French families, and 7% of German families. Paul takes no notice of these enormously important differences.

12. Yet another relevant factor is age. Most crimes are committed by young men. Compared to the US, the European population is somewhat older. (The US has about 5% more men in the age groups most at risk than France, as a percent of the total population.)

Failure to consider these three demographic issues alone renders Paul's argument highly dubious. If the murder rate in the US was 5.5 per 100,000 (in 2004), then the murder rate among white Americans would be about 3 per 100,000. This figure is considerably closer to the 1.1 per 100,000 figure in France, or 1.2 per 100,000 in Germany. The difference in availability of firearms alone probably goes much of the way towards explaining it.

13. Nor does either man mention the influence of changing sexual mores. This is every bit as peculiar as the failure to mention race. Why did rates of violent crime increase so dramatically in the US in the 1960s and 70s? Some have suggested that social ills in the US, such as drug abuse, violent crime, unwed pregnancy, abortion, and murder, can be traced to the breakdown of the family in vulnerable ethnic groups in particular, and in

American society in general. Children from a broken home are far more likely to get into trouble. Considering the timing of this upsurge in murder, before most fatherless children reached adolescence, a more plausible explanation might be that loose sexual arrangements tend to be more violent than stable marriages, and such relationships increased during this period. It is odd, when discussing homicide, that when Jensen writes of "passion," he refers only to religious passion.

Christianity teaches people to stay married, be faithful to your spouse, love your children, and care for your family by physical labor.

By contrast, at the same time, leading secularists attacked the idea of family. (Mead, Wells, Russell, Fletcher, Kinsey) While it might be difficult to trace the influence of these ideas directly to the sub-groups among whom the above social ills are most flagrant, it seems odd to blame the breakdown of the family on a religion that preaches monogamy, and say nothing of a generation of secularists who denounced marriage and family, and argued that it was optional.

14. Christians uniformly preached against the second member of the 60s Trinity, drug use, as well. Timothy Leary, Alan Watts, and Aldous Huxley taught a generation to experiment with drugs; their voices were amplified a thousand-fold by popular musicians, including one English star who, having inspired quasi-religious passions, declared his music group more popular than Jesus Christ. The debate over drugs pitted preachers against rock stars. Studies have shown that church-going cuts crime and drug-use dramatically. (*Books and Culture*, June 14, 1999, Tim Stafford, *The Criminologist Who Discovered Churches*) About 7% of American murders involved gang warfare over distribution of drugs.

It could be argued that the American solution to the drug problem was inferior to, say, the Dutch solution, that strong religious institutions made the criminalization of drugs easier, and gang warfare more likely. I doubt this rather complex argument would withstand careful analysis of religion and drug policy, but in any case, Paul says nothing about the issue either way.

15. Paul also ignores the effect of class and education. College life makes students both more employable, thus less likely to live dysfunctional lives, and somewhat more likely to become "secular." Given that university study at other times and places has made graduates more religious (or at least more Christian), it is simplistic to assume that secularism is what makes college-educated young people less likely to commit crimes. Better prospects might do that.

This is especially important given the low rate of crime in the Asian cities mentioned above. In Singapore and Hong Kong, the likelihood of embracing the Christian faith dramatically increases according to how much education a person receives. The correlation is much stronger than the correlation between secularism and higher education in the United States.

Counterfactuals in American Society

Along with disingenuous choice of data and failure to consider alternative explanations for the data he does give, Paul also fails to consider evidence within American society against his thesis. In general, he takes a "bird's eye" view of culture and crime that is often contradicted when one looks more closely at what actually occurs, very like a police officer who arrives late at the scene of a crime, and arrests an assertive victim rather than the criminal.

16. My attempt to find prison data that sheds light on Paul's claims was not entirely successful. US prisons generally do not amass figures about the religious beliefs and practices. One study, much touted on skeptical web sites, showed that only a miniscule percentage of inmates called themselves "atheists." (Though almost 20%, it seems, either did not answer or said they had no religion.) This study may be of some value in determining the religious beliefs of American inmates, but is too vague to determine lack of belief.

A study in Great Britain indicated that 41.7 % of inmates described themselves as "Anglican," 17.5% as "Roman Catholic," 17% as "Muslim," 1.5% as "Buddhist," 1% as "Hindu," and a small fraction as belonging to Baptist, Presbyterian, or other minority Protestant denominations. 28.7 % indicated "no religion." Compared to the general British population, this would yield a percentage of professed "Christians" about 10% lower, and of "Muslims" 15% higher, or 800% of the percentage predicted by the latter's weight in the greater population. The percentage of unbelievers would appear, at first glance, to be some 5% higher than the general population. But probably this is meaningless; controlled study, with rigidly defined terms and careful protocol, might show that the number of unbelievers in prison is either significantly higher or lower. (A "Protestant" terrorist from Northern Ireland once told me that among his crowd, the word "God" was used exclusively for cursing; which illustrates how meaningless religious "tags" that correlate to polarized communal groupings can be.) The statistics suggest that evangelicals may not be particularly well-represented in UK prisons, while Muslims are.

17. In addition to all this, one must also consider the possibility that even if murder and Christianity can be positively correlated (which seems increasingly dubious), the relationship may be the inverse of what Paul proposes. I have met hundreds of fervent Christians who were once gangsters, drug addicts, or prostitutes, before experiencing dramatic conversions. And others may turn to God out of fear of crime. Perhaps the low crime rate in Western Europe is a cause of the lack of serious religious faith, rather than an effect. Christians find warrant for this interpretation in the words of Jesus.

To summarize, Gregory Paul's conclusions are not just tentative, as he admits, but ephemeral and completely meaningless. He focuses on three civilizations over a short period, drawing conclusions from a limited sample of societies. He ignores the direct influence of Darwinism and atheism on two ideologies that largely defined 20th Century history, and inspired tens of millions of murders. He makes no mention of abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia. He makes no attempt to explain the surge in violence that occurred in America in the mid-to-late 20th Century, and that created the data that furnishes the basis of his argument. He ignores even higher murder rates in the most secular European countries. He focuses on the highly secular East Asian nation of Japan, overlooking the fact that similar states in East Asia that are far more religious, have a similarly low murder rate. Paul ignores other possible contributing factors, such as race, age, gun laws, class, education, history, or popular culture. He also ignores the certain fact that crime often brings people to God, rather than the other way around.

"Religious Cosmologies and Homicide Rates among Nations"

Gary Jensen offers a far more subtle, and in some ways more productive, argument. Unlike Paul, he does not attempt to blame either "theism" or "anti-evolutionary thought" for higher murder rates. Rather, he proposes that "cosmic dualism," belief in both God and devil, encourages higher murder rates. (Though he notes at the same time that secularism seems to encourage rates of suicide that are even higher.)

Jensen begins by noting: "Much of the literature suggests that certain forms of religiosity are likely to contribute to high rates of homicide." I see nothing in this statement to take issue with; I have made the same point myself, worded more strongly. (Marshall, 2002) I would only add, again, that certain forms of irreligiosity have contributed to even higher rates of murder. Jensen also admits that lack of religious faith seems to contribute to high rates of suicide. The obverse is also true: some forms of religion clearly

contribute to high rates of suicide – such as Jim Jones' New Age cult, or the heavily patriarchal Yali religion. (Richardson)

The form of religiosity that Jensen focuses on is "cosmic dualism." He notes that in *When Religion Becomes Evil*, Charles Kimball "Proposes that religious belief systems tend to become destructive when they are characterized by absolute truth claims, notions of a cosmic struggle between God and the Devil (cosmic dualism), and rigid dichotomies between good and evil." In effect, Jensen seeks to translate that generalization into a specific proposal about the influence of "dualistic" cosmologies on the murder rate.

Is Social Dualism Orthodox?

Orthodox Christianity would seem to be in the crosshairs of these arguments. Christianity seems to make "absolute truth claims," speaks of a "cosmic struggle between God and the Devil," and differentiates categorically between good and evil.

However, the orthodox Christian position is more subtle than this portrait may imply. Christianity makes "absolute" truth claims, in the sense that Christians believe their faith tells the ultimate truth about reality. It would be a profound error, though, to conclude that Christian truth is "absolute" in the sense that it renders all other claims entirely invalid and erroneous. While it may be the assumption of some believers this has not been the mainstream Christian tradition down through the centuries. (Chesterton, Tillich, Marshall, Pelikan)

18. Secondly, Christians do posit a struggle between the forces of good (God) and evil (the devil and his minions). But the term "dualism," again, implies things that orthodox theologians have long been at pain to deny. Cosmic forces are not equal. Nor is the struggle with Evil physical: "we wrestle not against flesh and blood."

19. Thirdly, for Christians, the distinction between light and darkness is indeed stark. "In Him is no darkness at all." The apostle John, in particular, makes subtle use of "light" and "darkness" throughout the Gospel of John, and in his Epistles, and all canonical writers make the same distinction in their different ways. But here, too, Christian orthodoxy makes a distinction. A fundamental Christian insight is that (as Alexander Solzhenitsyn put it) the line between good and evil does not run between classes, parties, races, genders, or nations, but through every human heart. For this reason, social (as opposed to cosmic) dualism is a profoundly anti-Christian heresy.

20. Jensen found that the best religious predictor of high murder rates is

widespread belief in the devil. (+ 0.566) A belief that God is important was almost as significant (+ 0.524), while mere belief in God was much less so (0.301). Belonging to a religion was a meager indicator indeed. (+0.024)

Jensen noted that since beliefs are highly correlated, these figures may be misleading. Regressing homicide rates on religious variables, he found that intense belief, and belief in malevolent beings as well as God, predicted well for high murder rates. Belief in a benevolent God alone, by contrast, predicted even better for low murder rates. Homicide rates were lowest in countries with high levels of belief in God alone, slightly higher in "secular" countries (though even there, Jensen pointed out, most people believed in God), and dramatically higher in "dualist" and "high dualist" countries.

Jensen considered further whether these differences might be caused by non-religious variables: institutional imbalance caused by strong market forces, income inequality, welfare funding, Latin culture, civil war, newly established government, or "cultural diversity." (Left undefined.) He found that two economic variables, Latin culture, civil war, new government, and cultural diversity were significant contributing factors to high murder levels. However, "the measure of passionate dualism is a strong positive correlate while the benevolence score is a strong negative correlate."

This is much more cautious and interesting than Paul's analysis. However, some of my previous objections remain. What is cause and what, effect? Living among drug addicts and gangsters might, after all, make belief in the devil easier. In Taiwan (as in other places), it was traditionally believed that those who died violently became malevolent spirits. More violent deaths would thus increase the population of dangerous spirits.

Like Paul, Jensen wrote mostly about the United States. He noted that Paul's exclusive focus on murder rates could be "badly misleading:" other measures of social disfunction put America in a relatively better light. "Paul's analysis generates the 'desired results' by selectively choosing the set of social problems to include to highlight the negative consequences of religion." Jensen further admitted that his own study "does not allow a conclusive determination of the fundamental source of the high rate of homicide in the United States." He failed, however, to mention the factors mentioned before, such as race, gun laws, or change in murder rates over time. He suggested that "some of the results are remarkably consistent with Durkheim's passion hypothesis about religion and homicide and contrary to over-generalizations about religion as a barrier to crime." He further argued: "It is plausible to propose that religious and moral dualisms may coincide with other forms of dualism at the individual level." Inequality may encourage an "us versus them" view of life, and "tendencies to blame

external forces for interpersonal problems.”

What typifies America, Jensen suggested, may be the emphasis Americans place on family and faith. (As measured, in particular, by the World Value Survey.) America may be “dominated by strong in-group / out-group distinctions” and “extreme moral vigilance” associated with “familial, religious, and moral dualisms.”

21. Jensen offered data from 44 countries, but did not name them. This makes analysis of his argument more difficult.

22. Both Paul and Jensen took a “bird’s eye” view of society that can make it more difficult to find the true cause of a high murder rate. Suppose one applied the same method to ancient Rome during the rise of Christianity. One might note increased deaths by lions and gladiators, and conclude: “The growth of Christianity correlates with a rise in violent crime!”

A modern-day example of how misleading such analysis can be is Taiwan. One small segment of the Taiwanese population contains a high percentage of Christians: the ten or so non-Chinese tribal groupings that are colloquially called “mountain peoples.” (山地人) These tribes exhibit typical signs of social breakdown that aboriginal peoples experience around the world under the pressure of cultural integration: alcoholism, poverty, high crime rates. Christianity is not the cause, and crime the effect. Rather both are effects of the same set of causes: isolation from greater Chinese culture, poorer economic opportunities, a breakdown of traditional social structures. It would be absurd to blame “dualistic cosmologies” for problems whose social origins are known and familiar.

In their need, many tribal people embraced Christianity. I have met many who quit drugs or prostitution because of (and with the help of) their new faith, but none who plunged into a life of crime out of Christian conviction or obviously due to the psychological dynamics Kimball or Paul imagine. But looking at this population from above the way Paul or Jensen do, you might draw the same conclusion they do (or at least imply) about America: Christianity “caused” a high crime rate.

At the same time, some highly educated Taiwanese also come to Christ as evangelical and “dualistic” believers – Chinese intellectuals who speak English, have advanced degrees, and are much like fellows in Singapore and Hong Kong. Though statistics would be hard to find, it is highly unlikely that the rate of violent crime in this demographic is anything but miniscule.

In sum, one must look at individuals, and see who is doing what to whom

(to put it in Leninist argot) to connect religious cause to social effect in a valid way.

23. The best way of doing this might be to study actual murderers, analyzing family and spiritual backgrounds and motives. It seems that the dominating factors would be family makeup and breakup, then such things as cultural values, availability of guns, and economic inequality. Are passionate Christians more likely to murder? Are they prevalent in prisons? If religion is either to be implicated or praised, one must look at individual lives.

Another valid approach might be to study a particular society, say Yamonamo Indians, among a portion of whom conversion has taken place, and compare murder rates among converted and unconverted villages.

In addition, if the question is the overall effect of "theism" or "atheism" on crime, one should include government-sponsored or sanctioned domestic murder. (And also, perhaps, abortion, infanticide, and involuntary euthanasia.)

Jensen's paper does bring up two important issues, however: the effect of social pluralism, and of cosmic dualism, on murder.

State vs. Family and Church

24. What is the relationship between social pluralism, statism, and murder? Perhaps a high degree of social freedom correlates to high murder rates. It may be that countries where people are more introverted (Japan, UK, Scandinavia), or have experienced rigid social or governmental control (Singapore, China), enjoy low murder (but high suicide) rates. At least, so long as you focus on murder rates by individuals, as opposed to the state.

Jensen quotes Messner and Rosenfeld's claim that "dominance by family and religion generate crimes in defense of the immediate, parochial social order such as vigilantism, hate crimes and violations of human rights." Jensen suggests that the US may be "parochially organized and dominated by strong in group / out-group distinctions."

Another way to put this is that Burke's "little platoons" are particularly strong in the United States. Church, family, the press and other civic loyalties (ranging from the Klu Klux Klan to Kiwanis) greatly lessen the monopoly on power enjoyed by the state. Because Americans traditionally see government as one of many essentially grass-roots structures by which we govern ourselves, "vigilantism" is just the flip side of the "thousand

points of light" that offset the tremendous growth in state power across the world over the past century.

25. Murder may be highest where people are socially unrestricted, perhaps even psychologically less inhibited (Latin America), where clans and tribes retain a degree of autonomous power (sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq), where government or traditional social controls have broken down (Civil war, new government -- the Baltic states, Iraq), and to a lesser extent where freedom and social pluralism are a fiercely defended part of the social fabric (America in the 1960s and 70s, the Philippines).

26. If a high rate of crime (compared to Western Europe or Japan) may be a price we pay for social freedom, it is worth remembering the price often paid for lack of it. Government, that has so often murdered on a colossal scale, is a jealous god, and jealously protects its monopoly on murder or the sanctioning of it (by a designated elite, such as medical doctors).

Social Dualism

27. Rene Girard has long argued for a particular relationship between "violence and the sacred." He believes "scapegoating" is a universal human activity, justified in myth and history. According to Girard, it was the Gospel of Jesus that set the world on a better course, encouraging humankind to care for the weak and helpless, and to see through justifications of religious violence.

In *Jesus and the Religions of Man* (2000), I argued that one form of religion, which I called "social dualism," tends to exhibit a complex of qualities. Among these qualities is the "Us vs. Them" construction of social reality that Jensen describes.

According to Girard, scapegoating occurs when society is in a state of crisis. A foreign army invades, a disease strikes. The village or state begins to unravel: people are at one another's throats. Dark omens mass: the sky seems about to fall. Society finds common cause by turning on some helpless victim: a foreigner, a cripple, the Jews, Koreans. By agreeing to a good, therapeutic murder, society finds unity.

Why did the rate of violence in American society more than double in the 1960s and 70s? Partly, I suppose, it had to do with looser sexual mores. But this was also a period of crisis and apocalyptic fear. Dualism was not merely cosmic; it was political. The Cold War pit two superpowers against one another. Nuclear war had become a possibility: the End of Days on ballistic wings. At any moment, the horsemen of the apocalypse could

thunder upon the clouds, and Wormwood (in the form of radioactive isotopes) poison the seas.

A variety of socially dualistic sects spread in the 1960s and 70s, encouraging a radical "us versus them" ideology. Jim Jones promoted an eclectic mixture of New Age and Marxist ideology that was only the most extreme and deadly of many sects. Marxist organizations expanded. Radical feminists taught that men are inherently evil. The Nation of Islam saw white people as "the devil." Environmental works like "The Population Bomb" warned of a secular apocalypse.

All of these were characterized by "absolute truth claims, cosmic dualism, and rigid dichotomies between good and evil," without the radical nuance Christianity includes as an essential part of its theology. Some, like Jonestown, certainly were responsible for an increase in murder.

28. Given the role of social dualism in such deadly ideologies as Naziism and communism, persecution of the Jews in Medieval Europe, rioting against Koreans after the Tokyo earthquake, witch-hunting, and so on, it would not be surprising if a higher murder rate were to follow a period of high tension and disunity. But social dualism can arise from any metaphysical system. (Compare, for example, the ideologies of Mohammed, a theist, Hong Xiuquan, who thought himself the younger brother of Jesus, Joseph Smith, a polytheist, and Karl Marx, an atheist.)

The data from Western and Eastern Europe, Japan and other East Asian societies, and the Americas, is thus far more complex than Paul or even Jensen seem to realize. No causative correlation between theism and murder is warranted. It may be that a correlation between secularism and suicide in Europe is possible, but closer study would be needed to establish that. A modified Christianity, a heresy, could one might suppose contribute to a form of social dualism, and therefore to higher murder rates. If any evidence is found for that, the best solution would be for Christians to embrace a fuller, non-dualistic orthodoxy: personal responsibility, the power and ultimate victory of God, love of one's enemies, and Christian sexual mores.

Conclusion

Jensen debunks Paul's theory that simple theism is responsible for a higher murder rate. A broader look at society at different times and places, in the context of race, age, and the legal and economic environments, cast even more doubt on Paul's critically flawed methodology.

Jensen's own theory of "cosmic dualism" seems to have some merit, when interpreted in light of previous theorists. It not only may help explain the rise in crime in the 1960s and 70s in America, "cosmic dualism" interpreted onto the social plane certainly also figured in the massive wounds to the human spirit introduced by jihad, witch-hunting, communism, and Naziism.

Christianity encourages neither family breakup, nor an "us vs. them" mentality. (Instead, "we're all bastards, but God loves us anyway," as Will Campbell summarized Christian theology.) On the contrary, orthodox Christianity provides salve for the wounds of both civilizations: suicidal European culture, whose very survival is presently threatened, for the third time in a century, and angry, divided America, full of social rage. The Gospel remains the center of sanity and health at the heart of Western civilization – whether we heed it or not.

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