

Is it 'Revolutionary Millennialism'?

Writing about Charles Dicken's *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of Eighty*, Myron Magnet digs into one of the deeper impulses that animates man: The desire to be God.

Magnet uses the term "revolutionary millennialism" to describe what happens when that individual desire is found on a mass scale. The term itself is actually borrowed from the historian Norman Cohn and his book *Pursuit of the Millennium*.

Essentially, millennialism represents a deep frustration with the human condition and the inability to overcome our limits. It is an "overcharged self-cherishing" that is convicted of the "immaculate holiness of one's own impulses coupled with a certainty that one was incapable of sin". Oddly enough, the ultimate manifestation of this uncorked rage is not in a great act of creation, but rather great acts of destruction. The end of revolutionary millennialism is a lashing out at everything that may tell us that we are not God.

Why destruction? Because "millenarian movements belong to a long tradition of popular protest against the irreducible unfreedom of the civilized condition." To free ourselves to be God, we must destroy any limits placed upon us, including those by civilization and even our own soul and reason. We can only be free when our passions are freed.

As Myron Magnet explains,

"Virtually by definition, millennialism is antipolitical: the wish to establish the City of God on earth displays an exhausted patience with the City of Man. Indeed, what the millennial kingdom chiliastic sects seek to create is a realm which has superseded the need for government on any level, including the individual's government of himself.

For the millenarian revolution proposes to rectify the human condition, abolishing man's chronic unhappiness by making absolute the freedom of each individual and sanctifying his every impulse. This revolution will bring about a world not new but, instead, identical to man's primitive condition before such fallen, corrupt institutions as the state and the organized church arose to constrict human life.

Central to the ideology of revolutionary millenarianism ... is 'a self-exaltation that often amounted to self-deification.' Such representative millenarians as the heretics of the Free Spirit, finding God in everything and everything a part of God, did not hesitate to extend these principles to themselves: they needed only to become conscious of their essential divinity, they held, 'to surpass the condition of humanity and become God.'...

But what chiefly followed from such overcharged self-cherishing was a conviction of the immaculate holiness of one's own impulses coupled with a certainty that one was incapable of sin."

There is something there to ponder as we watch ourselves in the modern West. The desire to make oneself into anything you want is now celebrated, even if it goes against not only civilization but even nature and reality. And when we cannot make ourselves into anything, we escape to imaginary worlds in which we either forgot ourselves, try to see ourselves in someone else, or create a world that we can play God. And if all else fails, we rage against whatever may restrain us.

(Image: BlueNationReview.com)