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The Death of the West

Patrick J. Buchanan

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Is it possible simultaneously to be a successful political figure, aspiring to the presidency of the United States, and at the same time a serious writer on social and cultural issues? The question almost answers itself. Those who have read Patrick Buchanan's books know that he certainly is a serious writer. What is doubtful is whether honest and open thinking isn't inherently a disqualification for political success. "Truth-telling" would lead to popularity only in a world where truth is valued above special interests and above the desire people have to the confirmed comfortably in the views they already hold.

Here, fortunately, we are concerned not with Buchanan the politician, but with Buchanan the philosopher and social critic.

The significance of Buchanan's writing stems in large part from the topics he chooses. He doesn't shy away from any subject he considers vital to the well-being or survival of Western civilization or its American derivative. His recent book *A Republic, Not an Empire* (reviewed in these pages in the Summer 2000 issue) explored the risks of the United States' self-proclaimed mission in world affairs (since the great turn-about of 1898) "to make everybody's business our business." The danger of a well-intended interventionism was made crystal clear by the horrors of September 11. A world-wide Social Gospel sought to be impressed by a powerful nation manages to incur much resentment and fierce animosity.

That book is now followed by *The Death of the West*, which has perhaps an even more sweeping vision. Buchanan makes a powerful case that the West is permitting itself to die. Like the exoskeleton of a dead or dying insect, the corpus of the old civilization is coming to be occupied by new life: a multicultural, heavily Third World population. Already, the West is much different than it was even so recently as forty

years ago; in the near future, it will be hard to recognize, except by the remains of its historic architecture.

Buchanan's discussion centers on several "clear and present dangers" to the survival of Western civilization (which are in addition to the danger from world interventionism he described in his preceding book):

1. *A radical decline of the existing population.*

A drastic decline in population through aging, mortality and a far-below-replacement birthrate is occurring everywhere in the West except in Muslim Albania. Whereas demographic experts say that there needs to be an average 2.1 children per woman for a people simply to maintain its existing population, fertility rates in Western countries have fallen well below this for several years. The number is now 1.4 for European women in general. Without immigration, Europe's population is expected to fall from the present 728 million to 600 million in fifty years. "Of Europe's 47 nations, only one, Muslim Albania, was, by 2000, maintaining a birthrate sufficient to keep it alive indefinitely."

Buchanan gives the following statistics by country: He says that Australia's birthrate is "below replacement," but he doesn't cite a figure. Germany, 1.3 for the past ten years. Great Britain, 1.66. Italy, 1.2. Russia, 1.17. (Russia's President Putin is prompted by this to warn his countrymen that "if the present tendency continues, there will be a threat to the survival of the nation." It is worth noting that Russia will over time be subject to increasing pressure from the burgeoning populations of the Muslim countries to its south and of China. Millions of Chinese are already settling in Siberia, radically changing the demographics of that vast expanse.) Spain has the lowest birthrate with 1.07. Even Japan, not a Western power but one of the advanced societies, is among the nations with a below-replacement birthrate. Buchanan says, "she, too, has begun to die. Japan's birthrate is half what it was in 1950."

Buchanan, taking a long view, is no doubt right about the danger this poses to the West. Nevertheless, the projected 600 million for 2050 is still considerably larger than the population of Europe was through most of its history. Taken just by itself, the decline in population, which is not necessarily subject to extrapolation into the indefinite future, does not deprive the civilization of the people it needs to exist and to thrive. The danger would seem to come, instead, from the combination of this decline with the second factor Buchanan discusses: the enor-

mous demographic invasion that the rapid influx of immigrants from the Third World represents. Europe, the United States and Australia have for a third of a century allowed a vast wave of Third World immigration, some of it “legal” and some “illegal.”

2. *A host of people from different cultures
and a regnant ideology of “multiculturalism.”*

Buchanan tells how “mass immigration has already begun. In [the single year of] 2000, England took in 185,000 immigrants, a record. In 1999 [again, a single year], 500,000 illegal aliens slipped into the European Union, a tenfold increase from 1993.” At the same time, the United States insists on the admission of Turkey to the EU, a membership that would allow its citizens to migrate throughout Europe. It is no wonder that Buchanan says “the day of Europe is over... As their populations become more Arabic and Islamic, paralysis will set in.”

In the United States, there have been “waves of Mexican immigrants” since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965. The threat Buchanan sees from this does not result from some narrow xenophobia, or from an animus against the immigrants as human beings, but from the danger that is posed to the continuity of American civilization: “Unlike the immigrants of old, who bade farewell forever to their native lands when they boarded the ship, for Mexicans, the mother country is right next door. Millions have no desire to learn English or to become citizens. America is not their home; Mexico is; and they wish to remain proud Mexicans.” He observes that “with their own radio and TV stations, newspapers, films, and magazines, the Mexican Americans are creating an Hispanic culture separate and apart from America’s larger culture. They are becoming a nation within a nation.” There is even a movement called “the reconquista” that aspires to a separate “mestizo nation.”

This is reenforced by the ideology that the American Left, dominant within American institutions and followed implicitly by the professional classes, has embraced since World War II. This ideology marries the alienation of the American “intelligentsia” to every unassimilated or disaffected group, replacing the “Old Left’s” desired marriage of the intelligentsia with the “proletariat.” The resulting “multiculturalist” ideology is advanced under the name of the traditional American ideals of equality-before-the-law and of the dignity of each individual person, and thus has had an irresistible moral appeal, but has been far more than that. The result has been what both sides call “the culture war.” In

the struggle over the soul of America, the majority becomes increasingly dispirited and confused, while year by year the Left is strengthened by the rapidly changing demographics.

3. *The destruction of American memory; an "adversary culture" at war with mainstream American society.*

Buchanan gives considerable attention to the culture-war for its own sake. By itself, it would be changing the face of America even in the absence of reenforcement from the demographic revolution.

He gives the clearest explanation I have seen of the more recent roots of the adversary culture as they are found in the "Frankfurt School" made up of the leftist theoreticians Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and their followers. This school has been central to the Left's "march through the institutions" of Europe and the United States. The Left has come to occupy virtually all the West's opinion-forming high ground. The remainder of the population – hundreds of millions of people – occupy a silent majority with little voice and only relatively inaudible whimpers of protest.

A criticism of Buchanan's explanation, which centers on those particular thinkers, would be, of course, that the intellectual and cultural "march" through the institutions of an otherwise "bourgeois" civilization has been going on for much longer than the explanation suggests. The Frankfurt School is simply a highly influential twentieth century manifestation of it. It can be traced back as far as Rousseau in the mid-eighteenth century. In his prize-winning essay on *The Origins of Inequality*, Rousseau declared his alienation from all advanced civilization, saying that private property is the root of most if not all social evil. Rousseau has had tens of thousands of followers in the literary-artistic subculture during the ensuing 250 years. This became especially evident with the rise of the world Left beginning in approximately 1820. The alienated critique of "bourgeois culture" has provided the steady drum-beat of modern art, literature and ideology. (This is not to say that that is all there has been; a great many creative people have worked outside its channel; but it has been a movement of vast and varied dimensions, constituting one of the major forces in modern life.)

The condition of the existing culture in the West as Buchanan describes it, although in no way exaggerated, would befit Jonathan Swift's description of his fictional Yahoos. He speaks of "a popular culture that is saturated with raw sex and trumpets hedonistic values," and says "the moral code... has been overthrown. The culture is dying." (The

preference for sexually explicit movies, television and dress is often attributed to the preferences of the young, but it is worth observing how shallow that explanation is. The very young don't write the screenplays or the scripts for TV sitcoms; nor do they set the fashions that are marketed in the stores and trumpeted in commercials. Adults do those things, and it is adults who are choosing to take the culture in those directions.)

Those who think in secular terms will tend to downplay the religious aspect, but to Buchanan the attack on Christianity which he sees as the fundamental core of Western civilization looms as a fact of major importance. He speaks of "the de-Christianization of the West." He sees moral relativism as having taken the place of a fixed moral code based on religious belief. Buchanan is perhaps best known to people who have not read his books for his opposition to abortion and championing of Christian belief. There is no question but that this informs his outlook. *The Death of the West* has much to say, however, to Christian and secularist alike.

This review has highlighted Buchanan's main themes. The book itself, of course, is recommended for a much more thorough discussion.

Dwight D. Murphey

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