

with Rev. Jeremiah Wright and Arafat's former press secretary, Rashid Khalidi, its influence has endured.

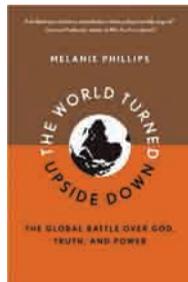
Third Worldism abroad, like its American cousin Black Power, suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding. Breaking out of European colonialism and American racism meant more than liberation from an oppressive order; it also meant the opportunity to participate in the economic life that allowed the West to grow wealthy. But to the extent that Third Worldism/Black Power assumed that wealth was merely a matter of seizing the mechanism of government to enhance one's allies, it produced outcomes ranging from harmful to disastrous. Like much of the Arab world, Third Worldism wanted transformation without change, wealth without new cultural habits. It was a fantasy.

Obama has come out of the two worlds in America where that fantasy was most likely to be indulged: Chicago and academia. Nowhere in his banalities about Chicago politics—home to Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan—does Remnick try to come to grips with a functionally segregated city in which a powerful black political presence is entirely consistent with a murder rate three times that of New York, and where a mayoralty controlled by Democrats since 1931 has produced an economy in which the largest employer is the federal government, the second-largest is the failed public-school system, and the next largest, in order, are the city government, the transit authority, the county government, and the park district. In academia, Obama simultaneously absorbed the postmodern view, in which words are reality, and a politics of racial and gender grievance.

Remnick is constitutionally unable to come to grips with Obama's parochialism, since he shares its assumptions. There is, however, an interesting book to be written about Obama, using a bridge as a metaphor. It would describe Obama as the bridge between the liberal paternalism of Hyde Park, the University of Chicago neighborhood where he lived, and the Third World-like poverty of the black neighborhoods that surround it. It would be the story of how Black Power, which supposedly rejected liberal paternalism, came to live comfortably with it even as neighborhoods like the South Side of Chicago were left to suffer from its illusions.

# The Light of Reason

GEORGE WEIGEL



*The World Turned Upside Down: The Global Battle over God, Truth, and Power*, by Melanie Phillips (Encounter, 486 pp., \$23.95)

MELANIE PHILLIPS, whose column in the *Daily Mail* has made her the *bête noire* of the British Left, has written a feisty polemic against a new world disorder of irrationality in which “reality [seems] to have been recast, with fantasies recalibrated as facts while demonstrable truths [are] dismissed as a matter of opinion at best, or as evidence of some sinister ‘right-wing’ plot.” Her targets are well chosen and their mendacities duly fileted: apocalyptic greens, cooking the empirical books; fact-challenged critics of the second Iraq War; Israel-haters and their journalistic, academic, and ecclesiastical accomplices; scientists posing as metaphysicians; apologists for jihadism; intolerant gay activists determined to destroy those who oppose their agenda; and the new anti-Semites, in whose passions Ms. Phillips finds the apotheosis of what she calls the “disenchantment of reason.”

The originality of Melanie Phillips's argument lies in her ability to demonstrate how these various forms of *gauchiste* political correctness, which imagine themselves the heirs of the Enlightenment's determination to replace the imbecilities of priestcraft with the light of

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reason, share a common, debilitating flaw: the willingness to jettison reason and evidence in the name of ultramundane ideologies embraced with a radical fideism. This corruption of intellect and will is what glues together what Ms. Phillips neatly dubs the “Red-Black-Green-Islamic Axis” which, among other things, has managed to shift anti-Semitism from the fever swamps of the Right to something perilously approaching the center of the European Left.

The flaw in the argument lies in Phillips's seemingly uncritical adoption of one facet of the Whig theory of history. She writes that “the 18th-century Enlightenment ushered in the modern age by breaking the power of the church to control the terms of debate and punish heresy.” A few paragraphs later, she describes that-which-the-Enlightenment-overcame as a “religious totalitarianism” exemplified by “medieval Christianity,” which, she writes, “like contemporary Islamism, stamped out dissent by killing or conversion.” The roots of such wickedness run deep, for, the author informs us, “the New Testament accuses the Jews of deicide and curses them for all time.”

To be as candid as Melanie Phillips always is in her columns, this is embarrassingly flat-footed. There is no wholesale condemnation of Jews in the New Testament, neither the Jews of the time of Jesus nor the Jews of all time; nor does the word “deicide” appear in the canonical Christian Scriptures. As for Ms. Phillips's missing the rich pluralism of medieval social, cultural, and intellectual life, well, let's just say that no one familiar with the history of the European university (which was the creation of the Catholic Church), and with the public debates over *quaestiones disputatae* that were a staple of European university life in, say, the 13th century, could possibly suggest that “debate” in Europe began with the Enlightenment. There was a lot more genuine debate between defenders of the received neo-Platonic and Augustinian theology of the day and men like Thomas Aquinas, who wanted to bring Aristotle to bear on Christian self-understanding, than there was between Voltaire and his sparring partners.

This historical myopia is unhappily reminiscent of the new atheists whom

Phillips rightly dismisses for the intellectual charlatans and *in vitro* authoritarians they are. That is doubly unfortunate, and indeed a little bizarre. For, as other facets of her book make clear, and as she underscored in a recent article in the British journal *Standpoint*, Phillips fully understands that reason detached from the Jewish and Christian sources of Western civilization—and especially from the idea that God impressed a certain rationality on creation, thus rendering it intelligible—has become the parody of reason that is postmodernism: the witches’ brew of metaphysical nihilism, epistemological skepticism, and moral relativism that underwrites the political correctness Phillips correctly deplors.

Melanie Phillips’s reputation for courage in going against the grain of received political wisdom in Great Britain has been well-earned, and hard-earned. Still, more than courage in facing the politically correct mendacities of the present is going to be necessary if the West is to recover its commitment to reason, and thus its civilizational and cultural morale. Courage in rereading the past, and in building a much more nuanced historical narrative about the relationship between faith and reason, religious conviction and intellectual exploration, is also required. Thus Ms. Phillips would have strengthened her argument if she had explored how the West is suffering from a false story about itself—a distorted narrative built in large part on certain black legends about Christianity—and then set about correcting the record by reference to the best of contemporary historical scholarship.

Does publicly assertive religion lead inevitably to wars of religion? The most recent study of the Thirty Years’ War, which was an indisputably ghastly business, nonetheless demonstrates that its slaughters had far more to do with dynastic politics and the formation of modern nation-states than with contending theories of the theology of justification.

Do Islamists and self-loathing members of the Western chattering classes continually harp on the cruelties of the Crusades? Then perhaps they should be reminded that the most sophisticated current scholarship on that period demonstrates that, for all their mismanagement and brutality, the Crusades

were a legitimate response to Islamist aggression and were primarily motivated by religious devotion and self-sacrifice, not by the testosterone-driven aggressiveness of second and third sons with nothing better to do with their lives under the laws of primogeniture then prevailing in Europe.

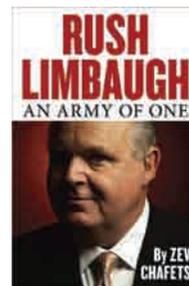
Do scientists imagining themselves a new clerisy look down their noses at religious believers? Then perhaps they could be challenged to explain why what we know as the scientific method arose only in cultures formed by the Bible: Is it a coincidence that this method emerged only in an intellectual climate that accepted the Biblical conviction that God created a world of inherent intelligibility?

Ought Christians to feel ashamed of the Inquisition? Yes, for using coercive state power to enforce doctrinal claims is always an offense against the God who wishes to be adored by people who are free. By the same token, however, the most recent Inquisition scholarship (often produced by Jewish scholars) demonstrates beyond reasonable dispute that Communism killed more men and women in a slow week than the Inquisition in its various forms did over centuries. Moreover, the Catholic Church, led by John Paul II during the Great Jubilee of 2000, has publicly repented of this ill-becoming alliance with state power; when will the contemporary European Left, which Phillips skewers with such relish for its stupidities and authoritarianism, publicly repent of the Gulag, the Ukrainian famine, or the fact that Pol Pot (in percentage terms, perhaps the greatest mass murderer of a century of mass murder) was trained at the Sorbonne in the days when a self-confident secularism was in flood tide?

Meeting the challenge of 21st-century authoritarian political correctness thus requires going on offense, not just playing good defense. Moreover, playing good defense means recognizing that the Whig narrative of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the modern freedom project is flawed, and that the deepest taproots of the civilization of the West run into soil cultivated by Biblical religion. That recognition is an essential part of the reconnection of faith and reason for which Melanie Phillips calls in this bracing, but occasionally mistaken, book. **NR**

# A Boswell For Rush

JAY NORDLINGER



*Rush Limbaugh: An Army of One*,  
by Zev Chafets (Sentinel,  
240 pp., \$25.95)

**Z**EV CHAFETS has written many books on many subjects, and he has a very juicy subject in Rush Limbaugh. “El Rushbo” has figured hugely in the political culture of this country for the past 20 years. And he offers a highly interesting personal story. Chafets’s book grew out of a piece he wrote about Limbaugh for the *New York Times Magazine*. That was in the summer of 2008. The subject cooperated for the article, and he cooperated again for the ensuing book—“cooperated” meaning that he sat for interviews and permitted his family, friends, and associates to do the same. Chafets had an excellent opportunity, and he didn’t waste it. *Rush Limbaugh: An Army of One* is a spiffy, instructive, and absorbing read.

Chafets was born and raised in Pontiac, Mich., outside of Detroit. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he moved to Israel. There, he was director of the Government Press Office (no less). And he started to write his books. In 1986 came *Heroes and Hustlers, Hard Hats and Holy Men: Inside the New Israel*. (This book was known to some as “the four-H book.”) If I may speak personally for a second, the book in question had a considerable influence on me. I had been afflicted with an anti-Israel virus; I thought Israel existed mainly to oppress Arabs. Chafets’s book helped to teach me about the country, and to humanize it for me. One of his later books was *Devil’s Night: And Other True Tales of Detroit*. It is the only honest book I have ever read about Detroit (in whose