Anti-secularism and Modern Terrorism

Antagonism toward Secular Modernity as the Factor of Modern Terrorism

This chapter argues and demonstrates that anti-secularism, i.e., the antagonism to and reversal of secular modernity, is a major factor and predictor of modern, notably religious, terror. Most contemporary, especially religiously founded and rationalized, terrorism has been and is likely to be the product and expression of the hostility and revolt against secular, conjoined and mutually reinforced with the antagonism to liberal-democratic, Western modernity. Simply, it follows from and reflects anti-secularism as another facet, alongside and in interconnection with anti-liberalism and anti-democracy, of anti-modernism as the principal, overarching determinant and predictor of contemporary terrorism.

Contemporary terrorism mostly can be attributed to and hence explained and predicted by the adverse reaction toward modern Western secular society, politics, and culture, in conjunction and mutual reinforcement with the opposition to the project and system of liberal democracy and modernity. This reaction includes opposing and eventually reversing the process of secularization, as part of the composite and intertwined processes of liberalization, democratization, and rationalization, as well as of economic, political, and cultural globalization, in contemporary societies (Gorski and Altinordu 2008; Juergensmeyer 2003; Inglehart 2004; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Ruiter and Tubergen 2009). Comparatively, the process of secularization or the institutional condition of secularism as the target of religiously sanctified terrorism, has been especially manifest, salient, and probably irreversible in Western Europe, notably Scandinavia becoming a sort of “post-Christian” (Inglehart 2004) society during recent times, and to a lesser extent and in more complex and ambivalent ways in America.

In particular, while remaining the most religious, “godly,” and fundamentalist or evangelical Western society (Edgell et al. 2006; Inglehart 2004; Lindsay 2008; Lipset 1996), notably the last Puritan nation (Munch 2001) and in that sense the “only remaining primitive society” (Baudrillard 1999) within the Western world, America has also experienced the process
of increased, though relatively secondary and limited, secularization during recent years. For instance, this is indicated by the growing numbers of Americans (around 20 percentage) without formal religious affiliation, yet unlike in the “old world”, along with and partly in response to the revival of fundamentalism cum evangelicalism or the “religious right” with extreme theocratic and generally anti-democratic coercive-repressive political ambitions and actions (Davis and Robinson 2009; Hedges 2006; Hout and Fischer 2002; Owens et al. 2010). Contrary to rational choice and neo-conservative vehement denials of and assaults on secularization as, like liberalization and implicitly democratization, “foreign”, “European”, and un-American”, by the early 21st century Americans with “no religion” have become the fastest growing (non) religious category. This has occurred in addition and counter-balance to rapidly expanding extreme evangelical sects and cults, including “Christian warriors”, challenging and supplanting mainline Protestantism (Hout and Fischer 2002; Madsen 2009; Martin 2002; Vaisey 2009) to become the dominant religious denomination in contemporary America. The above indicates increasing liberal-democratic secularism even in America and as a sort of oasis or island in the “desert” (Baudrillard 1999) or “paradise” of a “godly” growingly evangelical society, including evangelicals’ aspiration for and penetration into the “power elite” (Lindsay 2008) in the theocratic “Bible Belt” and beyond.

No doubt, secularization in contemporary America finds itself in the midst of and as the secondary alternative to revived and expanded primary evangelicalism and sectarianism. Thus, it faces the anti-democratic compound of Puritan-inspired theocratic anti-secularism and anti-liberalism (Juergensmeyer 1994; Kaufman 2008; Munch 2001) with its design and partly realized system of “American theocracy” (Phillips 2006), i.e., “Christian fascism” (Hedges 2006) cum “faith-based” society, as explicitly designed and almost fully implemented in the “Bible Belt” and beyond (theocratic Mormon-ruled Utah, etc.). In passing, estimates for the share of evangelicalism and thus Protestant cum “Christian” fundamentalism (Davis and Robinson 2009; Hicks 2006; King 2008; Somers and Block 2006) in America today range from at the minimum one quarter or third based on formal affiliation (Keister 2008; Hout and Fischer 2002; Lindsey 2008; Madsen 2009) to no less than almost three quarters on the basis of expressed personal religious views of the Bible as the “actual word of God and is to be taken literally” (Edelman 2009; Edgell et al. 2006) and conceivably Bible-inspired individual actions, “words and deeds”. The second estimate