



Treason Against the New Order

by Thomas Fleming

I was doing my best to mind my own business on a very busy Saturday. My wife was in England, and after nearly two weeks of playing mother, I was catching up on the laundry, shopping for the dinner I would have to prepare, and, in between trips to the store, I had to take my elder daughter to her orchestra lesson. Then there was that registered letter, which probably contained a \$450 refund check I was expecting from a clinic that had scammed us on the insurance. It was tight, but I made it to the Post Office about 15 minutes before closing time, only to discover that the envelope contained not the check but a formal notification from the local “chief forester.” My hedges were, apparently, above the three-foot limit that had to be observed within 40 feet of any intersection, and one of my neighbors had filed a complaint. As I drove home, I noted that at least one house at every intersection was in violation of the same rule, and I began to fantasize about a campaign of soft terror against the nosy neighbors and local officials who knew how to mind my business better than their own. I could probably file a dozen complaints a week and keep the chief forester working overtime for the rest of his officious little life.

My irritation did not pass that evening, even after drinking a pair of very dry double martinis with dinner and a bottle of generic Chianti that was more than good enough after the gin. I lay awake much of the night, trying to convince myself that the retaliation I was planning was not only childish, but would, in fact, violate my cardinal rule of not interfering in the lives of strangers. So what, if the mayor, the sheriff, and the chief forester himself were all in the pay of local contractors and Mafia dons? They had wives and children; they had private

lives that I had no more right to disturb than if I were a telephone solicitor selling burial plots.

Eventually I slept, and when I awoke, it was to the sound of the ringing telephone. I dread the telephone and never answer it, if I can find a child to say I am not available. After five rings I picked up the receiver. The call was from a friend in London, wanting to know why I had not responded to his E-mail messages. I asked him what was so urgent that he had to get me out of bed. “Oh nothing, really,” he answered. “It’s just that The Hague Tribunal has decided to devote a special session to journalists. The charge is aiding and abetting the Bosnian genocide.” Sunday was already turning out worse than Saturday. Knowing the answer in advance, I asked who was named in the indictment, and he mentioned the usual suspects: a French telejournalist, a New York newspaperman and one in Texas, a leftist columnist, and, last and least of all, me.

Ever the optimist, I tried to find a silver lining. Better a hate crimes trial in The Hague than a week of cutting down hedges in Rockford, which reminded me that I had to get to work on the bushes after breakfast. After cutting down a half-dozen shrubs, our yard looked like it had been hit by a tornado. I went inside and fixed up a big sign: “This devastation brought to you by neighbors who cannot mind their own business,” before going up to my study to start work on my defense.

I wondered what good would it do to protest my innocence. I could say that all I had done was to tell the truth as I saw it. Even if I had made mistakes, they were honest mistakes. The simple truth is that I am innocent. Then I remembered Kafka’s Joseph K., who said the same thing to his prosecutor. “But

how do you know you're innocent, if you don't know what the charge is?" I retrieved the E-mail message sent from London and discovered that in substance, the indicted journalists were accused of writing propaganda that was part of the Bosnian Serbs' campaign to deprive the Muslims of their human rights. The style had changed from Kafka to Lewis Carroll. Here I was at the Mad Hatter's tea party, where grown men and women were keeping up a solemn pretense of sanity, while yet proclaiming openly their belief in human rights. Knowing that a frank statement of my opinion would be tantamount to a confession of guilt, I packed my suitcase and took the shuttle to O'Hare Airport. On the way to the bus, I posted the following memorandum.

A brief submitted in Case 042745 for defendant charged with crimes against humanity by the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia.

Let me begin, like Rousseau, by setting aside the facts: The honorable judges are probably aware that I have had virtually no contact with the government in Pale; never met either Mr. Karadzic or General Mladic; never received any support from their government, unless you count the barracks bed and can of spam provided by Colonel Gusic in Herzegovina.

Facts have never been an element in The Hague Tribunal's deliberations. All the parties to the Bosnian civil war have lied, and the worst liars have not been the so-called "Half-Turks," with their fantasies of reestablishing a fundamentalist corner of Ottoman rule. Their lies begin with themselves: every time a Bosnian Muslim looks in the mirror, his own blond hair and blue eyes tell him that to carry out the final solution of the Serbian problem, he will end up killing himself. Every day they spend in Mr. Izetbegovic's Islamic Magic Kingdom is punishment enough for the self-deluded Muslims who lie for the greater glory of Mahound.

For all their butcheries, the Half-Turks who are finally living out their dream are entitled to a chivalrous respect they do not accord to their Christian enemies. Even the Germans can be pardoned, like the kleptomaniac caught swiping discarded eight-track tapes, for their single-minded pursuit of empire in the Balkans. They are addicted to empire—of which they can never get enough—and like all addicts, Mr. Helmut Kohl has to lie to cover up the evidence of his bad habits.

But what can be said in defense of the U.S. State Department and its satellites (the so-called free press of the United States)? They dream neither of an ancient empire restored nor of a new empire created out of the ruins. To them belongs neither the courage of the Muslims nor the national honor of the Germans. If minds so blank can be said to dream, then Mr. Christopher and his colleagues dream of a world inhabited only by peoples as colorless and bloodless as themselves: a world without song, because songs recall old battles and ancient heroes; a world without faith, because men will die for either the Cross or the Crescent; a world without honor, because honorable men are not reasonable, and they will sacrifice even a comfortable income and a house with a two-car garage to vindicate their private honor and the honor of their people.

The New Order imagined by the internationalists is nothing more than their own petty bureaucracy puffed up to bursting like the mother frog who tried to impress her children that she

was as large as a bull. Ivo Andric, in *The Bridge On the Drina*—a book that no one in NATO or UNPROFOR has read, because if they had, their stupidity would be inexcusable—portrays the arrival of the new imperial mind in Bosnia in the person of Emperor Franz Joseph's soldiers and officials who cannot leave anyone alone:

The newcomers were never at peace; and they allowed no one else to live in peace. It seemed that they were resolved with their impalpable yet ever more noticeable web of laws, regulations and orders to embrace all forms of life, men, beasts and things, and to change and alter everything, both the outward appearance of the town and the customs and habits of men from the cradle to the grave. . . . Every task that they began seemed useless and even silly. They measured out the waste land, numbered the trees in the forest, inspected lavatories and drains, looked at the teeth of horses and cows, asked about the illnesses of the people, noted the number and types of fruit-trees and of different kinds of sheep and poultry. . . . [A] few months later, sometimes even a year later, when the whole thing had been completely forgotten by the people, the real sense of these measures which had seemed so senseless was suddenly revealed. The *mukhtars* of the individual quarters would be summoned to the *konak* (the administrative center) and told of a new regulation against forest felling, or of the fight against typhus, or the manner of sale of fruit and sweetmeats, or of permits for the movement of cattle. Every day a fresh regulation. [Undoubtedly they also prescribed the height limits on shrubs near intersections.] With each regulation men saw their individual liberties curtailed or their obligations increased.

Andric concluded by saying that the life of the towns and villages became "wider and fuller." I assume he was being ironic. Wider, perhaps, but not fuller, since the Bosnian Serbs and Turks had all they needed for a full life, which is not to say that there is not always room for improvement even in Eden, but order, regulation, control are the objects of bureaucracy, not improvement, *per se*. Order and control mean, in essence, subordinating your will to mine, replacing your identity with my identity, reducing the flesh and blood of your aspirations down to the aridity of paper and ink, statistics and regs, and all that cannot be analyzed is boiled away, all that cannot be regulated is suppressed, and this includes—along with honor and courage, love and loyalty, songs and legends—the truth.

Since the rules of the game do not allow the truth to be discussed, let us simply assume (as any good witch-hunter will) that I am an agent, conscious or otherwise, of the Serbs. In one sense, any principled man is the servant of his friends, and for good or ill, I have adopted the Serbs, as I have also adopted the Italians. We can never be entirely reasonable about our kin, even if they are adopted. If the President's wife were right, that there is no such thing as other people's children, then the only logical conclusion would be to treat our own kids with the same rational indifference we display toward the children of strangers. Fairness would dictate that I portion out the sum of my paternal love among the hundreds of millions of children on the planet, my own four included. My love, spread so thin, would have as much an effect as my income, if it were redistributed to the world's poor.

Objectivity, impartiality, universality—these are three of the hallmarks of the liberal creed which tells us to regard ourselves and our friends as if we were an impartial spectator, as if we were making our judgments from behind a veil of ignorance. This indifference to the particularities of affection—the whiff of bitter almonds in the wine of liberalism we have been drinking for centuries—culminates in Thomas Nagel’s demand that we take an off-world perspective on our own life and its obligations. Viewed from Mars, my life, the fate of my family, the happiness of my friends are a paltry affair compared with the sum total of human misery on the planet.

Even if I were silly enough to think that by devoting all my energies to the world’s welfare I could do some good, I should still reject the premise. The impartial spectator turns out to be the judge handing out a death sentence, and the veil of ignorance is the blindfold they put on just before the officer shouts, “Ready, aim, fire!” Who says I should treat everyone the same? It cannot be God, because liberal philosophers either do not believe in Him or else, out of professional courtesy to their colleagues, they agree to “bracket” His existence as irrelevant. What if I say that blood and love are all that matter in this world? Will you send in the FBI, with a warrant drawn up by the philosophy departments of Harvard, Yale, and Berkeley, to arrest me for thought crimes? *N.B.*: This is just a joke and not a prophecy. Back in the 60’s, I made the mistake of asking, “If women have rights, what’s next—rights of children, rights of homosexuals, rights for animals?” You can’t tell a joke anymore, no matter how fantastic, without it coming true.

No, I am not impartial toward my wife and children, whom I love and take care of, nor to my friends whom I honor and respect, nor to my fellow citizens whose politicians rob me of half my income every year in taxes which I pay as meekly as a lamb going to the slaughter. If I am not allowed to make distinctions between my country and anywhere else in the world, then I might as well hold onto the money. So, I admit it: I have made the Serbs my friends, and although I will not lie for them, my defense of their cause has not been entirely rational, any more than it is rational for a man to fight for his country.

So, if you like, I am an agent of the Serbs. This admission does not make me automatically a criminal. To find me guilty, it is not enough to prove that I have done something, if that something is not a crime. If I am going to be convicted of killing the Jabberwock with my vorpal blade, the prosecutors should have to produce the blade and at least describe the features of the dead Jabberwock. In my own defense, I think I have a right to demand to know just what these human rights are that I—the presumed beamish boy—and my Serbian paymasters have supposedly violated.

To speak truthfully, I have never understood this whole business of rights. There are, of course, specific rights guaranteed by a Constitution or a legal tradition, but those are “civil rights,” which can be altered or abolished by statute or decree or judicial interpretation. The Constitution of the United States spells out a freedom of religion which Congress, i.e., the national government in its lawmaking capacity, may not infringe; and yet, the federal courts, acting as lawmakers, have forbidden American citizens even to pray in the buildings they have paid for with their own money. So there is obviously nothing sacrosanct or absolute about civil rights.

Human rights or natural rights are another matter. They are supposedly universal, built into the constitution of human nature and the universe, like the laws of mathematics and physics.

If they are not—if they were, for example, simply the latest state of progressive thinking—then they could only serve as ideas or theories about how people ought to behave, not as an absolute standard of right and wrong, certainly not a faith to kill for, as we have killed so many already in the Balkans.

But who actually believes in absolute standards of right and wrong, much less in a universe infused by moral law? The shorthand answer to the first: *all* Christians; to the second: *some* Christians. All Christians believe that some things are absolutely prohibited to all people at all times, whatever custom or fashion may dictate: murder, theft, bearing false witness, adultery. But Christians part company on the second question. While many Catholics and Orthodox and some Protestants still adhere to the old concept of the logos, the second person of the Trinity that is accessible to all peoples throughout history, there are many sincere Christians who say that moral laws are simply divine commandments that make no more natural sense than the dietary laws of Jews, Muslims, and Mormons. There is no reason not to kill your father or tell the truth, any more than there is any reason not to eat pork or drink coffee.

For the sake of convenience, I shall call this position fundamentalism. From this fundamentalist perspective, there can be no human rights except those that have been explicitly declared by God. Unfortunately, even a cursory inspection of the Old Testament reveals a hair-raising series of murders and massacres apparently decreed by the Almighty himself. The worst war crimes of which the Serbs are accused are pretty small stuff compared with the treatment of the Sodomites who were evaporated simply for expressing their sexual diversity, or the Canaanites who were slaughtered as aliens in their own land.

But even if we agree with St. Thomas, that there is a natural law from which all human laws derive their legitimacy, we cannot make this conception the basis of an international law that is administered by anti-Christian lawyers for the benefit of non-Christian peoples. The difficulties of maintaining a natural law position in an anti-Christian world crop up daily. A few months ago my friend Ernest van den Haag got into a sparring match with Robert George and William C. Porth, Jr., in the pages of an American conservative magazine called *National Review*. The controversy over the right to die was obviously inspired by the homicides perpetrated by Dr. Jack Kevorkian, whose self-conceit feeds—like the very devil himself—on death. (If Kevorkian were literate, his business card would read: “Now more than ever seems it rich to die.”) I hope I shall not too much trivialize the opposing arguments in saying that Professor van den Haag based the right to die on the classical liberal position that each of us has a property in our own person, while Professor George argued the natural law position for the sanctity of life. The debate was closed—as these things so often are at NR—by an *ex cathedra* editorial warning that Professor van den Haag’s utilitarian pathway led to extermination camps. (I am sure this was a joke and should not be regarded as a reason for indicting the good professor.)

Actually, the reverse is probably true. Liberal rationalist states, while they may destroy the human spirit, do not typically demonize minorities or send them to the ovens. Even when they carpet-bomb civilians, they feel constrained first to lie about it and then to justify the massacre on humanitarian grounds (“By bringing the war to an earlier conclusion, we saved countless lives”). Liberal states, especially when they are putatively democratic, engage in the most preposterous lies, precisely because their legitimacy theoretically rests upon the