

AIDS

———— as an ————
Apocalyptic Metaphor
in North America

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To my father, Dr Leslie Lamonte Palmer,
whose poetry, humour, and medical tales
prepared me for this work

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of the countersubversion ideologies percolating through our society during periods of social upheaval.

Subversion fears have recurred throughout American history, providing food for countersubversion ideologies that have been used to justify the persecution and scapegoating of witches, Amerindians, Catholics, Communists, Mormons, and religious cultists (Bromley, 1991). Fears of subversion, Bromley notes, tend to emerge during periods when there is tension or conflict among contemporary social patterns. Once a central problem is defined, its source is attributed to human agents who are designated as morally inferior. The social construction of extreme moral degradation, he claims, moves the target group to a symbolically distant and alien position, which in turn mandates a repressive response:

Subversives are depicted as having infiltrated a once secure terrain; initially undetected they have become a . . . rapidly growing presence; they are highly organized . . . ruthless and unscrupulous, they possess the capacity for corrupting individuals . . . major institutions, even the entire social order is depicted as in imminent danger of falling prey to subversive domination. (Bromley, 1991:59-60)

Subversion fears are proliferating with the spread of AIDS, stimulating the dissemination of countersubversion ideologies whose stunted forms can be detected in our popular culture – but they find their most luxuriant expression in racist religions.

The LaRouchians

Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr, is the product of a New England Quaker upbringing. By way of Marxist economic theory and radical left-wing activism, LaRouche has become the leader-founder of what the Heritage Foundation has called 'one of the most bizarre cults in American history' (Shapiro & Lumenow, 7 April 1986:38). For ten years LaRouche has 'prowled the fringes of establishment politics,' running for the presidency in 1976 and 1980 under the aegis of the National Democratic Party (not to be confused with the Democratic Party).

LaRouche's apocalyptic ideology is an eclectic synthesis of 'neo-Nazism, a passionate demand for more nuclear power and conspiracy theories featuring such disparate personalities as the Queen of England, William Mondale and Jane Fonda' (Methvin, 1986:91). History and contemporary politics are interpreted as a battle between those who favour evolution and salvation through technology, and those reactionary oligarchies and financiers who batten on the masses by advocating solar energy. The latter group he charges with attempting to plunge humanity into primitive social conditions through bringing about equality for women and minorities. Those who advocate the decentralization of power and environmental safeguards are labelled 'effete pederastic environmentalist sun-worshippers.' The key to LaRouche's global strategy is nuclear fusion energy – 2,500 U.S. nuclear reactors by the year 2000 – which would take the country into a free-energy economy. His 'great Design' is to seize control over the United States government in order to forge a global alliance of international LaRouchian republics under whose tutelage humankind will be transformed into a super-race of 'golden souls.' According to Methvin (1986), the LaRouchians' utopia would of necessity exclude the 'bestial mass of ignorant sheep which is 99 and 44/100 percent of the human race.'

LaRouchians believe that 'Zionist' financiers operate through the 'drug lobby' to control an intricate network of banks and criminal syndicates. All through history, the 'Zionist-British organism' has committed monstrous crimes against humanity that range from destroying Greek civilization through 'Asiatic sex cults,' poisoning popes, running slaves, assassinating American presidents, and (most recently) inventing heroin and the AIDS virus.

Lyndon Larouche's autobiography, *The Power of Reason: 1988* (LaRouche, 1987), concludes with some unusual perspectives on the AIDS problem. First, he accuses public authorities of incompetence and deliberate deception in handling the issue:

Our government, and many other institutions of the world, have chiefly been lying wildly about the nature and danger of AIDS. First, as I have said, unchecked spread of AIDS, without a cure or a vaccine,

means the extinction of the entirety of the human species within thirty-five to forty years, more or less.

Secondly, he denies that it is essentially a *sexual* disease:

AIDS is not a sexual disease, but essentially a blood-transmitted disease. The same type of disease exists among sheep, cows, and horses, among other species . . . the arguments issued by governments and leading bodies of medical institutions are essentially absurd. [They] have not a single experimental fact to support their claim that AIDS is primarily a sexual disease. (Larouche, 1987:324)

Thirdly, he proposes a three-pronged panacea for the pandemic:

1. public health measures based on identifying the persons already infected,
2. preventing infected persons from spreading their infection to others,
3. a 'crash program' on AIDS and related problems modelled on the Apollo project.

Regarding the third prong, LaRouche feels that research into artificial biospheres, essential for space exploration, is an area that overlaps with research on AIDS. Hence, expansion into space is the way to overcome the 'apocalyptic reality of AIDS':

The Mars project typifies the positive roadway leading up out of our presently worsening condition, the failure to face the apocalyptic reality of AIDS, typifies the absolute breakdown of presently existing policy-making structures. The link between the scientific work needed for the Mars project, and the scientific work needed as part of the conquest of AIDS, expresses the efficiency of the approach I have outlined, both to build the future, and, simultaneously, to ensure that a future exists to be built. (Larouche, 1987:326)

The LaRouchians also see AIDS as a form of biological warfare,

introduced into this country by a Soviet spy. In a 1985 pamphlet, the *Executive Intelligence Review*, Dr Sergey Litvinov was named as the chief perpetrator of the AIDS conspiracy:

Litvinov personally runs the global chain of command for WHO [World Health Organization] of all international AIDS information and projects. Litvinov, who trained at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Moscow, coordinates the activities of the Atlanta WHO's Task Force . . . and the West German activities . . . Litvinov is known to be issuing straight Soviet Propaganda such as 'blaming AIDS on the United States.' Details on Litvinov and other shocking aspects of the Soviet angle to the spread of AIDS will appear in the next issue of *EIR*. ('Soviets Are Running the AIDS Coverup!' 1985)

This article accuses the American government of sloppy security measures and warns that 'the AIDS pandemic is deadlier than nuclear war.' The solution urged is as follows:

Therefore, we propose that the United States now declare a full-scale global war on AIDS in the interests of the security of the Western Alliance. Among the principal features of this war must be the objective of eliminating the disease-spawning conditions caused by the economic-austerity conditionalities policy of the International Monetary Fund in the tropics.

LaRouchians associate AIDS with homosexuality and the liberal attitudes of heterosexuals in the counter-culture. A 1985 flyer, distributed in Montreal in August 1985 by the National Democratic Policy Committee, bears the headline, 'LaRouche Warns: "Spread Panic, Not AIDS."' The article asserts that AIDS is the most deadly global pandemic since the bubonic plague. It blames the gay rights lobby for 'blocking the 'growing public demands for quarantine measures to assist in containing the pandemic,' and also politicians who, estimating the margin of the gay vote, 'had often traded away their morals by identifying themselves as defenders of the "civil rights of homosexuals."' The pamphlet goes on to declare that the

anti-AIDS political movement (i.e., the LaRouchians) will make the homosexual threat their 'number one sub-issue.'

The role of homosexuals in creating the massive concentration of infection, from which the pandemic spreads to other portions of the population, and the strong concentration of homosexuals among such occupations as teachers, medical paraprofessionals, dishwashers, cooks, waiters, hair-dressers, and other service occupations through which contamination is most easily spread. The vulnerability of children to infection in schools, playgrounds, and so forth, will be the sub-issue around which the political fight is being concentrated now.

The LaRouchians' prophecy concerning the ultimate effect of the AIDS 'pandemic' on American society is as follows:

Politically, the growing anti-AIDS political movement will develop a strong anti-liberalism character. Initially, this trend will center around the fact that legalized homosexuality, the 'sexual revolution' generally, and quasi-legalization of the 'recreational-drug sub-culture,' are the most widespread social expression of the post-1963 eruption of the 'radical counterculture.' There will be a powerful 'backlash' against the 'radical counterculture' generally, a backlash which will spread and grow as an anti-liberalism backlash.

The anti-liberalism backlash will have the effect of fostering a surfacing of traditional moral values from among what Vice President Spiro Agnew once called 'the silent majority.' Sizable portions of the sectors of the population caught up in the 'youth counterculture' of the 1960s and 1950s, lacking such traditional moral values, will react to their terror of AIDS, either by causing the burgeoning of radical-right populist (quasi-fascist) political associations, or serving as a recruiting-ground for novel varieties of religious fundamentalism. The political danger is, that if the moderates from the 'silent majority' fail to seize leadership of the government, the new 'radical right' will form a fascist movement to fill the vacuum.

The message is clear: vote for Lyndon LaRouche. He will expose

the conspirators and dispel the darkness, rescuing those victims duped by an evil plot to control the world and subjugate the masses.

The Nation of Islam

I am warning you, black people of America and white people of America: The end of America is now in sight. You could save your miserable lives, but you're too filthy and wicked. You hate me for warning you. You hate me for defending another servant of Almighty God, my brother, Rev. Jesse Jackson. Before 1989 comes in, we will close out both books – the Bible and the holy Koran – and the world will be in the throes of that which will destroy every power that is on this Earth in preparation for a new gospel . . .

— Minister Louis Farrakhan

Minister Louis Farrakhan is the leader of the Nation of Islam, one of the most powerful of the post-Garvey religious movements in America. Founded by Elijah Muhammad in Chicago, this sectarian neo-Muslim group seeks to unite American blacks through a theology of the land, a faith in the Divine as a liberating power throughout history, and communal moral values. Elijah Muhammad revealed his racial/millenarian theory as follows:

Allah created the first humans (black) who founded Mecca. A Mr Yacub rebelled and was exiled with his 59,000 followers to Patmos, where they separated into two races through eugenics. The pale race was morally weaker and became a race of devils that brought war and crime to earth. Moses was sent by Allah to civilize the whites who would rule the earth and enslave blacks for 6,000 years. Then Allah sent W.D. Fard to relay his message of the liberation and impending millennial supremacy of the black race to Elijah Muhammad.

Farrakhan was born in New York City and christened Louis Wolcott by his middle-class Episcopalian parents. He was working in nightclubs as a Calypso singer in the mid-1950s when he joined

public, ritualized deathbed scene. Ma Jaya, Florida high priestess of the art of dying with dignity, is in the vanguard of this movement.

As death by AIDS grows more familiar – and hence more tame – there are efforts made to beautify it. As we move into the mid-1990s we begin to find many examples of the ‘romantic way of death’ among artistic expressions of grief and emotion by friends, lovers, and family members of dying PWAs. These works shift attention away from the patient or the deceased to the survivors’ feelings of loss.

The Future: Apocalypse or Accommodation

If – or perhaps I should say when – a cure for AIDS is found, the statements recorded above will become no more than curiosities. If, however, the virus continues to spread exponentially and reach pandemic proportions, the possible repercussions for religion include the following:

- *The renewal of religion’s function of preserving the sanctity of the family.* The AIDS threat will continue to be used to reinforce individual churches’ particular versions of sexuality and family life, and to prove that these are divinely ordained or reflect a higher order.
- *A resurgence of millenarian movements.* The advent of AIDS as we approach the year 2000 has evidently stimulated the apocalyptic fantasies of minority churches, and this is likely to increase as we advance towards the second millennium. The old religious idioms have been replaced by secular ones, but, as Norman Cohn (1972:286) observes, ‘it is the simple truth that, stripped of their original supernatural sanction, revolutionary millenarianism and mystical anarchism are with us still.’
- *The proliferation of healing cults.* Out of those churches which hold that illness reflects a state of sin or inferior consciousness, new healing mystiques and rituals are likely to arise – especially

since Antiviral and other drugs permit PWAs to live longer. Therapeutic cults originating in the human potential movement and New Age groups are likely to respond in this fashion, while gay spiritual responses will probably recede as the virus claims more and more heterosexual victims.

As Christopher Evans noted in *Cults of Unreason* (1974), charismatic leaders have often displayed an almost uncanny ability to predict future trends. In 1984 Rajneesh began insisting on condoms and AIDS tests. By 1987 singles’ clubs in New York were instituting obligatory HIV testing for their members. Unificationists incorporated this practice into their Blessings in 1986, and today many engaged couples in the mainstream are unwittingly following their example. Communal societies such as the Northeast Kingdom and The Family insist on AIDS tests for new members. Even the LaRouchians note self-righteously in their paper that ‘AIDS reports 1991 sound like LaRouche 1984.’

Finally, if AIDS does continue to spread exponentially, and if increased pressure is placed on public health, legal, and political authorities to solve the problem, religion might turn out to offer the best protection for individuals and families. Religious communities are uniquely qualified to provide enclaves of safety owing to their ability to exert a stringent control over their members’ courtship patterns and reproductive faculties. The famous historian of the family, Lawrence Stone, interviewed on Canadian television, was invited to extrapolate on the social consequences of a widespread epidemic, and postulated the following developments:

My guess is that a totalitarian state will emerge which will impose very, very severe restrictions on the victims and will also change sexual relationships, or drive people back into monogamous relationships – whether they like it or not!

It would appear likely that legal measures, public health rules, or even a totalitarian regime will fail to stem contagion or effectively segregate the infected. In the end, it will be those commu-

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