

A Trilogy of Traumas

Forming the big picture of a world divided against itself

The global identity crisis mushrooming before our eyes sheds new light on dysfunctions that breed violence. It's not difficult to recognize social traumas that fester like extended plagues. This threesome stands out to me:

- **Socially Justified Violence:** People killing people for political, religious, philosophical and ideological reasons;
- **Dysfunctional Economics:** that interrupt prosperity by producing injustice, damage the environment, reduce economic creativity and undermine economic growth and sustainability;
- **Contrived Distinctions between Sacred and Secular:** that subvert instinctual human needs to trust and be trusted, find purpose, love and be loved.

My goal in this section of *Messiah Now* is to highlight some of the main influences at work behind these overarching patterns in order to better understand how we have arrived historically at what's happening in our time. Here is a short introduction to this trilogy of traumas:

The Trauma of Human Violence

Humans have scarcely been at peace since recorded human history began. There've been less than 300 total years of peace on earth by some accounts! Without suggesting that all wars are morally equivalent, the unending saga of violence passed from generation to generation is unequivocally destructive. Even good people who fight valiantly for noble causes often pay a very steep price.

Some people thought things were looking better after the Berlin Wall fell in 1991, when the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the U.S. ended. For a time global violence diminished, as documented statistically in Stephen Pinker's tour de force *The Better Angels of Our Nature*.

When the first quarter of the new Millennium came around, the daydream that violence was in global decline turned to mist. Significant conflicts popped up all over and the world once again played strategic brinkmanship. On top of this, new technologies of terror equipped smaller groups and even individuals to wreak havoc capable of bringing entire nations to a halt. As Steven Pinker himself concluded, his masterwork of regression analyses didn't prove major wars couldn't happen again!

Modern violence is often an extension of historical clashes that stretch across centuries. The war in Gaza that erupted in 2023 is contextualized by violence in that same stretch of prime Mediterranean real estate traceable back at least four thousand years. Egyptians, Philistines, Phoenician's, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and, later, Christians and Muslims all contended to control what had long been a pivotal trade and conquest route through Gaza connecting Africa, Asia and Europe.

A teenager in Israel once asked me very sincerely, "Why do so many people who've never even met me want to kill me?" Good question. At the time I had no good answer. Why all the oppression and terror? Why all the blowing things up? Is this the only way strangers, or even relatives, know to settle each other's' differences?

Is victory reducible to body counts and the amount of sheer destruction one side can create? In the case of Gaza, why has that war provoked widespread protests against Israel and relatively limp protests against Hamas' atrocities? What's behind the asymmetry?

Stepping back, is there such a thing as a just war, as Christianity has long proposed? Is there such a thing as a righteous war, as Islam and Israel believe? What constitutes a righteous war? Where do wars of national liberation fit in? What battles, if any, are still destined to be fought?

One conclusion seems obvious: human violence is like a long heavy freight that can't be stopped on a dime. It seems like it will take a miracle to halt the millennia-long war train and heal the trauma of human social violence.

Trauma from Economic Failure

Violent conflict and environmental damage are two of the most visible symptoms of the dire inadequacy of how humanity understands and manages the economic realities of life. It's not hard to identify the downsides of virtually every modern approach to economic organization and management, including traditional capitalism, socialism, and other economic "-isms." No matter what type of economic system prevails, those who accumulate the most knowledge, wealth and power seem to rise to the top, or vice versa!

Scaling economics up to global proportions invariably precipitates opposing forces. Yet staring every banker, manager, economist, philosopher and Walmart shopper in the face is a fundamental issue: the need to make everyday decisions about what they need, want, and can afford. The word "economics" derives from ancient Greek *oikonomika*, which means "household management." Economics touches everyone's homelife.

Whether bankers intervene in this process by extending credit, or governments intervene by redistributing wealth or levying tariffs, the underlying question remains—how best to provide enough for as many people as possible to manage their households while optimizing creativity, freedom, security, and economic sustainability?

Economic wisdom, or lack thereof, has the power to disrupt human identity and growth every bit as much as war. This calls for rethinking economics without throwing the baby of creativity out with the bathwater of outdated theories and policies.

I'll touch more on economics later, but here suffice it to say that the more elaborate, theoretical and abstract economic thinking becomes, the easier it is to lose sight of basics about what it means that all of us are "economically dependent human beings."

Distinguishing Sacred and Secular

Multi-culturalism moved front and center on the world stage in the new millennium as digital networks wove webs of human connections and shared information. Suddenly, people everywhere were confronted by the inexorable reality of 8-plus billion human beings living in some 11,000 people groups distinguished by different languages and ethnicities, as well as different traditions, values, ideas of what's sacred, and ways of making a living. Cutting across these distinctions are 195 sovereign nation states, some ethnically coherent, others politically contrived, many disrupted by competing ideologies and varying degrees of access to natural resources. Recent lifestyle identity groups add further to the enormous diversity and complexity of human global interrelationships.

A huge wave of multi-cultural/multi-political/multi-religious realities flood our newly connected collective human consciousness. This great diversity stimulates our curiosity and imagination, but our sense of who we are and who to trust is easily overwhelmed by digitally enhanced clouds of confusion—undermined by massive migrations and homelessness that mark our present era.

Secularists tend to assign primary spiritual value to “secular ethics,” often held with a religious mindset and a globalist mindset. They believe the sooner this mentality can be imparted, the better the prospect for the human race to succeed. One result has been to elevate secular views above other religiously held views under the rubric of separating church and state. Some assertive globalists have even begun building a new world order based on what they call a “new way of being human,” as I discuss in detail later.

The pathway to this globally conscious humanity is being actively shaped by radical educational values that prioritize collective needs and social entitlements over individual rights and local authorities, including the authority of parents. A conservative backlash against such secular morality is underway in a number of countries, but so is a liberal backlash against the backlash.

In this context, the opposite of “secular” is not a theocracy or Christian nationalism, nor a Jewish state, a Muslim *umma*, or any other kind of religiously regimented state, including a purely secular one. It’s a healthy balance between what’s sacred and mundane in the daily affairs of life. And what is sacred? A short definition might be whatever resonates positively and proactively with the most fundamental needs of life. There is more to it than this, but this gets the discussion started.

Living in a Multi-Polar World

There come times in human history when people holding strong views converge in such a swirl of energy there’s no stopping the procession of chaos. In such times clouds of conflict overshadow even the best efforts to discern the best way to proceed. Truth, understood as what’s authentic and real, becomes untethered. In such times economic prosperity easily unravels, nations regroup in gang-like fashion, and wars tend to erupt. We’re living in such a time.

What, if anything, can we do in the midst of this conflagration to heal past social traumas and emerge with genuine hope for the future? Before attempting to answer this question, I’d like to invite you on an investigative journey through some factual aspects of the trilogy of traumas I’ve just described to see if we can arrive at greater clarity about what’s actually driving major events in our time.

I begin with a look at the history of what I’ve come to call the Messiah Wars.

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