



Reflections in Red and Blue

by Matthew Gaventa

In my election hangover I spent two days crawling back to my old hideouts, desperately looking for consolation from my favorite liberals and comedians. Overwhelmingly, more loudly than anything else, I heard proclaimed the death of the Enlightenment, the death of reason. Evangelism, I was told, was behind this recent trauma. Christians were to blame, Christians who think that all liberals are latte-drinking, Huffington-reading, America-hating, (well, you know the rest of the line from here). A friend suggested that “we should have let the South secede when we had the chance.”

But I don't know who the “we” is. See, I'm a liberal, but I'm also a Christian. I voted for Kerry, and I voted with my brain, my heart, and, yes, my moral values.

I have been a Christian in blue states. I have been a liberal in red states. I do not provisionally exclude my faith when I vote democratic; rather, I embrace it. My moral values abhor photographs of my fellow citizens standing over tortured piles of Iraqi bodies. My moral values abhor identifying myself with a country that commits international acts of murder on a mind-boggling scale to further its policies of economic hegemony. My moral values support a woman's right to choose, everybody's right to love, and the scientific imperative to understand the universe we are fortunate enough to inhabit. My moral values have overdosed on CNN and, lately, cannot bear to look.

I strictly support the separation of church and state, as much as possible to protect each from the imperfections of the other. But this does not mean that I separate my faith from the electoral process; nothing could be more integral to my citizen duty than the God I believe in. I refuse to be hated for my faith by a bitter, disheartened left, and yet in the past months I have heard people whose political views I very much respect refer to themselves as “anti-Christian” out of what, I think, is misunderstanding borne of reductionism. Not all Christians are Evangelicals. Not all Evangelicals are Republicans. Not all Liberals are Latte-Drinkers. I don't like coffee at all; I live in the Midwest; I think whatever voices George hears in his head are his own problems, not Jesus giving him directions.

We are clearly not one America. Nostalgia for the so-called national unity that followed September 11 seems to me misguided, and a misremembering of what was already a divisive and difficult time. Equally dangerous, however, is the idea that we are somehow two Americas, one blue, one red. I have read this too many times: one believes in the Enlightenment, the other in Mel Gibson; one thinks before choosing, the other chooses without thinking. These binaries fuel the fires of anger and escapism that, comforting as they may seem, are ultimately just as destructive as trying to pretend that we're all the same.

There are, in truth, millions of Americas. It is a frightening sort of loneliness to begin to think this thought, but it is valid nonetheless: none of us thinks exactly the same. None of us believes exactly the same. Evangelical Christians are not a large, mindless horde, something out of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, descended into our midst to steal our souls and eat our children. This makes just as little sense as painting all liberals with the same broad strokes we've read before. As a Protestant Democrat, I do not conform to most expectations about the demographics of the liberal left in America; yet, it is that very nonconformity that fuels my liberalism and my passionate defense of my own rights and duties as a citizen.

Being different doesn't mean I have to be alone. Recognizing my own identities allows me to find community, and communion, with as many fellow citizens as the horizon will hold, to the boundaries of this country and beyond them. It's messier this way. It's tough, because it demands that we resist easy answers and easy categories. But it is the prerequisite of a genuinely moral politics, and it must be our goal. I will be a Christian, I will be a Democrat, you can't make me choose. But please don't try, because I don't know if everybody else can resist that choice. ■

Matthew Gaventa studies film in the University of Iowa's cinema and comparative literature Ph.D. program. Princeton Seminary claims him as one of its own since he was a former intern in the PTS Communications/ Publications Office and is the son of Beverly and Bill Gaventa. Beverly is a professor in the Seminary's Department of Biblical Studies.