



## The Meaning of Is

By William A. Borst, Ph.D.

The liberal left took its resounding defeat in the last election with anything but grace and dignity. They were incredulous that the country still had so many unenlightened people willing to re-elect such an ineffectual president as George W. Bush. Following the election, Senator Charles Schumer of New York expressed his disbelief that so many people could put so much raw faith into the cultural values of *life, self-protection, and traditional marriage*. Retired Missouri Representative Richard Gephardt echoed the same sentiments when he urged his fellow Democrats to continue to fight for their *values: a woman's choice, gun control, and gay rights*.

### LOST IN SPACE

Democratic supporters seemed to be caught between the movie *Chueless* and the old TV program *Lost in Space*. They live in a cloistered world that has shielded them from the honest thinking and feelings of most of the general population. They listen to National Public Radio, get their news from CNN or the major networks that suffer from the same insular way of thinking. As George Kendall wrote in *The Wanderer*, "to the extent that they have any contact with people who disagree with them, liberals dismiss them as ignorant yokels and rednecks."

The issues that divide the country run deeply. The cultural left has substituted the values of the French Enlightenment with its man-centered *liberty, equality and fraternity* in place of a culture where people knelt in prayer before proceeding with the business of state and governance. In place of the individual dignity of man, fair play, and hard work, the left has offered abortion, euthanasia, homosexual marriage, and affirmative action.

### A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

The situation is evocative of the Paul Newman 1967 classic movie, *Cool Hand Luke*. Newman was sweating his life away on a Georgia chain gang for his drunken assault on a row of parking meters. The prison boss, a wily little Southerner with a Napoleon complex, deftly played by Strother Martin, recited to an indifferent Newman, one of the great lines in movie history, *What we have here is a failure to communicate*.

This is a perfect illustration of the left's inborn ability to understand the right. The last half-century has witnessed a noticeable decline in verbal skills, and cognitive reasoning that has resulted in the *dumbing down* of the English language and with that, the ability

to talk and write clearly. Political speech has degenerated into serial episodes of shouting, invective, and from the left, a libelous cacophony of mind-boggling commentary that has little resemblance to historical fact. Ann Coulter's new book, *How to Talk to A Liberal* underscores the fact that it is almost impossible to talk to a liberal because of his/her loss of the meaning and understanding of the English language.

### TAKING THE WORLD APART

This raises the question as to how the country arrived at its state of noise and moral confusion. The term that explains it is *deconstruction*. It is the philosophical creation of Jacques Derrida, (1930-2004) one of the leading intellectuals of the French postmodern area. Known as the *father of deconstruction*, Derrida's method of metaphysical inquiry asserted that all writing was filled with hidden confusion and contradiction. It was impossible for any author to overcome the contradictions inherent in any language. Derrida's thinking removed any hope of anyone writing anything that was truthful whether it were literature, history, or philosophy.

Deconstruction is an attack on the cogency of language, a veritable assault on the vestiges of Western civilization. It promises its disciples, not only emancipation from the responsibilities of truth, but also the heightened prospect of radical activism. A blow against the integrity of language is also an attack against the traditions that give meaning to language. In unhinging the idea of truth, the deconstructionist also undermines the bases of any value system, including a society's social and moral principles.

Derrida had an *imperial ambition*, which he inherited from Friedrich Nietzsche and Heidegger whose teachings urged him, not to reinterpret but *uninterpret*. Derrida attempted to demonstrate that all of western thought from the Greeks through Medieval Age theologies was wrong and that everyone was missing the point. His thinking was a novel form of *Gnosticism*, the belief that ideas were so complicated that only the few could grasp them. Shortly after Derrida's death last October, writer Edward Rothstein appraised Derrida as someone *who showed us how to take the world apart*.

### A PERMANENT SHADOW

Derrida's influence was especially strong in the Yale University Literature Department where one of his friends, Paul de Man, the Belgian born Professor of Comparative Literature, emerged as a new

champion of deconstructive literary analysis. He claimed to be a refugee from war-torn Europe, as well as a survivor of the Belgian resistance. In 1987, four years after his death, researchers discovered that de Man had written 170 articles in the 1940s for *Le Soir*, a Belgian Nazi newspaper. Some of his articles were openly anti-Semitic, including those that echoed the Nazis' call for a *final solution*. The public revelations became a major scandal at Yale and other campuses where de Man had been highly respected.

Derrida led the forces that attempted to deconstruct the evidence against him. They inundated the debate with a flood of *obstructionist mendacity* that sought to absolve de Man of any blame. That same year Martin Heidegger was exposed as a card-carrying member of the Nazi Party from 1933 to 1945. Predictably, Derrida refused to condemn him. These cases cast a permanent shadow on his deconstructive teachings.

### DEAD WHITE MALES

Despite its setbacks, the process of assimilation, especially on the college campus, assured deconstruction of an enduring influence. From its base in comparative literature, the nihilistic tenets of deconstruction have expanded their considerable reach to other fields such as history, sociology, political science, and architecture. Deconstructive themes have increasingly become part of the dominant intellectual milieu to the extent that its principles float around as invisible particles of the society's spiritual pollution.

One need only reflect on impeached President William Clinton's skillful dance around the truth during Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's 1998 investigation. At his defense, the disgraced President audaciously offered *it all depends on the meaning of the word 'is'*. Presidential candidate John Kerry personified the deconstructed politician. He nuanced every major issue to the point that his positions became incomprehensible.

Radical feminists, civil rights activists, and homosexuals have all used deconstruction to *expose the hidden sexism, racism and homophobia that has supposedly characterized all of the great writers of Western civilization*, that is its *dead white males*, such as Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, and Bacon. Their influence is also discernible in architecture and design, especially in the churches, which have retreated from the old vertical symmetry of the past, which aspired upward, toward a new horizontal asymmetry, which emphasizes man over God.

Deconstruction has filtered into Bible study. Several commentaries tend to undermine the authenticity and accuracy of the Gospel narratives by casting doubt and uncertainty on authorship and the true meaning of Jesus' words. December issues of *Time* and *Newsweek* chimed in with the contention that Christ's nativity was *not fully factual*, and that *evolving scholarship* had cast doubt on the Biblical narrative.

Deconstructionists consistently disavow the visions of Hell and damnation and even Christ's dire warnings about the lasting fires of Gehenna. Strong efforts to eliminate or ignore the existence of the Devil persist to the point that the French writer Baudelaire's admonition that *Satan's cleverest wile is to make us think he doesn't exist*, seems timely and appropriate. This wave of

anti-Christian attacks pervades all aspects of American culture with a subtlety and a depravity that is devastating in its spiritual impact.

### THE HARVARD METHOD

As a political strategy, deconstruction skillfully combined Marxist analysis with Freudian psychological conditioning techniques such as sensitivity training, to form what is called Critical Theory. As a solid pillar of deconstruction, *Critical Theory* aims its destructive criticism at the main supports of Western civilization, such as Christianity, capitalism, the family, especially patriarchy, morality, and sexual restraint, nationalism, patriotism, and political conservatism.

Critical Theory holds that the patriarchal social structure should be replaced with matriarchy. It wants to substitute the belief that men and women are different and have properly defined sexual roles with androgyny and gender interchangeability. It strives to replace the heterosexual norm with a broader definition of sexual normalcy that would obscure the meaning of *normal*. As the nation witnessed months before the last election, the law is a powerful weapon for cultural disruption. Led by Alan Dershowitz, Harvard Law School advocates this method. To see him debate Ann Coulter on TV, leaves no doubt whom she had in mind when she chose the title to her latest book: *How to Talk To a Liberal*.

### IN THE MIDST OF DECEPTION

Since the country has had opposing positions, it is not surprising that there would be two languages, separating one from the other. One might differentiate the division as between the *language of life* versus the *language of death*. Playwright, Johann Friedrich Schiller wrote that *truth lives in the midst of deception*.

Novelist Robert L. Stevenson recognized that *words are power!* Sir Rudyard Kipling called words the *most powerful drug used by mankind*. It is a truism that those who control a country's written past, will control the present and the future. The same is true of ideas. As Richard Weaver said, *ideas have consequences*. Words convey ideas. Language is the bloodstream for ideas by which the values and truth of a society are transmitted and passed down to succeeding generations. The language must remain whole and meaningful for true ideas to remain fruitful.

Deconstruction leads only to doubt, despair, nihilism, and eventually death. The teachings of the Gospels and the theological virtues are powerful weapons that Catholics and like-minded Christians must use to combat the pervasive deconstruction of the language. Amid a world in confusion, John 8:31-34's admonition *that the truth shall make you free* rings more boldly than in his times. All Americans must be aware of the strategic abuse of the language.

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*The following article was reprinted with permission from George Weigel, a Senior Fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.*

## The Catholic Difference Right and Wrong in Ukraine

*By George Weigel*

Congress established the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in 1968 as the official national memorial to the country's only professor-president. Twenty years ago, when I came to the Wilson Center to think through a contemporary Catholic theory of international relations, the roster of Fellows (of whom I was indisputably the junior subaltern) reflected the ecumenical, indeed eclectic, intellectual tastes of the Center's brilliant director, James H. Billington, now the Librarian of Congress. So we had political scientists (including a blind Palestinian and a distinguished Israeli soldier-scholar), a practitioner of the higher journalism, an educational theorist, an ecclesiologist tracing the intellectual roots of Vatican II, a historian writing a biography of W.E.B. DuBois, and one of the founders of the then-nascent discipline of bioethics, among a couple of dozen others.

The fellow Fellow from whom I learned the most that year was Bohdan Bociurkiw. Bohdan, then in his late fifties, had had an adventurous life. Born in Ukraine, he had joined a resistance group that had fought both Nazis and communists, and had survived two tours as a guest of the Third Reich, the latter in the Flossenburg concentration camp (where Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran martyr, was a fellow-inmate). After spending two years in a displaced persons camp, Bohdan had emigrated to Canada, with the help of some distant relatives; there, after rocketing through an undergraduate and graduate career that included a University of Chicago doctorate, he was firmly entrenched at Ottawa's Carleton University, where he had established himself as the world's leading scholarly historian of the underground Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine – the most bitterly persecuted Christian community of the twentieth century.

Over the course of many conversations, Bohdan taught me the story of this remarkable local church, eastern in its liturgy and disciplines but fiercely loyal to Rome. His great life-work was to write the history of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics in the twentieth century – a project that took on a new urgency when Ukraine achieved its independence in 1991, after the Soviet Union imploded. Shortly before his untimely death in 1998, Bohdan finished the book that he was, in a sense, born to write. It's now the standard reference on the subject.

I've thought of Bohdan a lot in recent weeks, as the drama of Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" has unfolded on the streets of Lviv and Kiev. As I write in early December, it's unclear what the outcome of this struggle will be. But, in a sense, Bohdan and all who shared his conviction that the suffering of the Greek Catholics of Ukraine would some day give birth to a new flourishing of the human spirit have already been vindicated.

As evidenced, for example, by an e-mail I received from another Ukrainian friend, Father Borys Gudziak, rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, as the "Orange Revolution" got underway in earnest:

“...Ukraine is witnessing a miracle. Citizens who have come to know freedom are defending their basic human and civil rights. Millions have spent the last week on the streets in freezing and snowy conditions protesting against the accumulated abuse...”

“Over the last week a new Ukrainian nation has been born – a people conscious of its dignity...At the forefront is the generation of students whose formative years came after the fall of communism and direct rule from Moscow. They will not be denied the hopes that have been articulated in the 'Orange Revolution:' freedom from corruption, justice, and authentic democracy.

“The uprising is a moral one. It is a call for virtues in the face of vices. It is not a clash of different language groups. Conducted peacefully, with great discipline by enormous crowds, it has been characterized by joy and solidarity...”

“This is not East vs. West, or Yushchenko vs. Yanukovych. This is right vs. wrong.”

Father Borys was writing from Kiev, where half the students of his university had gone to demonstrate peacefully in their national capital and to help feed and clothe others. Bohdan Bociurkiw, a demanding teacher who gave his life to students and to scholarship, would understand class cuts in these circumstances. And he would be very, very pleased.

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“**H**ear and let (this) penetrate your heart my dear little one: Let nothing discourage you, let nothing alter your heart or countenance. Also do not fear any illness or trouble, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?”

—Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego

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