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**Obama mixes old-birth culture, new-birth religion**

*Q: In the Weekly Standard, University of Virginia professor James. W. Ceaser argues that President Obama's approval ratings are suffering, in part, because Obama has been cast as a secular savior by people who are trying to "replace God with the Religion of Humanity." Ceaser writes: "Being the leader of humanity is incompatible with being the president of the United States. No man can serve two masters."*

*Do we expect our presidents to be spiritual leaders as well as political leaders? Can they be? Should they be?*

1.....When awe, wonder, ecstasy converge, "worship" is an appropriate word to describe the experience. Almost forty years ago, Harvey Cox used the word to capsule the annual Miss America crowning, and used ancient Near-Eastern goddess-worship to illumine and critique the event.*The pattern is familiar.* Now (Weekly Standard, 25 Jan 10), James W. Ceaser has used it to illumine and critique Obama's world-role, as appears in "Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity finds a 21st century savior," the subtitle of his article, "The Roots of Obama Worship."

2.....The pattern itself needs illumining and critiquing. Ceaser's analogizing, while it provides some plausible tangencies between Comte's atheist vision and the world's 2008 exuberant expectations for Obama, *exaggerates the ideological*(secularist) component. Yes, the world yearns for a functional global coherence in which all benefit each ("they" benefit "us") and each benefits all ("we" are good news to "them"). And yes, Obama's existence, life-story, and oratory converge to make him a personal world-symbol of this yearning. But only humanist academics and their followers would conclude from the Obamanon (phenomenon of Obama) that the world is experiencing the birth of Post-religious Man, humanity without external deity, Humanity as Deity - as Comte put it, "the Religion of Humanity."

3.....Ceaser's article is populist *anti-Obama propaganda*arguing that though the President claims to be a Christian, he is actually the world's premier agent for promoting what Comte called "positivism," the atheist philosophy and "progressive" politics of French-Revolutionary Enlightenment. I grant that this was his birth-culture (his free-thinking mother, & Columbia/Harvard/Chicago universities), but I see him as too independent a thinker ever to have been a captive of that culture, and as inwardly engaging that birth-culture with his NEW-birth religion, namely, evangelical Christianity.

4.....The common claim of Obama opponents is that he's "out of touch" with the common American. Some truth to that. But why, when he was graduated from Harvard Law, did he refuse to work for the U.S. Supreme Court and instead choose to be a community organizer of common Americans on highly dangerous Chicago streets? For his political skills to work best, he must be in touch with ALL Americans: he must be "post-partisan." Yet he is, as are all persons of deep conviction, *partisan to his vision* of a more just and open America in a more just and open world, and accordingly more inclined to work - domestically and abroad - with those who share his vision. He is the President of all the people; but the people are now so polarized that whatever he says and does, many will accuse him of being "out of touch" with them.

5....Our profoundest polarization is not between exponents of small government on the right and big government on the left. All Americans want the government to be big enough for what they want and expect from government: that fact rules out small government, though not the desire to keep government from growing "too big." Rather, the profoundest polarization is between*theists* (who believe in God, with salvation by grace) and *humanists* (who believe in Humanity, with salvation by science). In that the humanists have captured America's public schools and most of our institutions of higher learning, time is not on the side of us theists.

6....But history is not on the side of Man as God. As William Penn put it, "Man will serve God or tyrants." "Man" as a rival of God always collapses into some doomed idolatry. Eleven years ago, in "The Market as God" (Atlantic Monthly, March), Harvey Cox predicted what would happen if the market were to stop expanding: God would not be dead, but the market would be. A bright humanistic future for America is *a doomed dream.*

7....Unfairly, but to possibly *good shock-effect*, Ceaser accuses Obama of caring more about his world role ("higher office") than about his Presidency, and of having as his "guiding light" "not realism" [with Reinhold Niebuhr as his mentor] but rather "a commitment to the dogmas of the Religion of Humanity," including listening more to the experts than to the people.

8....Also unfairly, Ceaser's last sentence misuses a quotation (source unidentified) from Jesus: "No man can serve two masters." Jesus meant God and money. Ceaser means "the leader of Humanity" and President of the U.S. But of course by capitalizing "Humanity," the author is falsely claiming that Obama is the high priest of a world atheist movement.

9....Obama is not a "spiritual leader." He is a *political* leader with *spiritual* convictions which, rightly, he neither conceals nor obtrudes.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  JANUARY 26, 2010; 5:56 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:  [Send E-mail](http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/emailalink?sent=no&link=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html&title=Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion)   [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html&t=Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion)   [Twitter](http://twitter.com/home?status=Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion%20-%20http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html)   [Digg](http://digg.com/submit?phase=2&url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html&title=Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion)   [Yahoo Buzz](http://buzz.yahoo.com/buzz?publisherurn=washington_po284&guid=washington_po284:http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html)   [Del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us/post?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html;&title=Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion%20-%20On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog;)   [StumbleUpon](http://www.stumbleupon.com/submit?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html)   [Technorati](http://technorati.com/search/http:/onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/01/obama_mixes_old-birth_culture_and_new-birth_religion.html)    
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I found this essay very enlightening, though without the background of the article I am not certain how accurate. My only objection is that Pres. Obama's religion is not evangelical Christianity but more likely mainline Protestant Christianity. This distinction of course is less well-drawn in the Black Church experience but I still believe it holds.

**POSTED BY: LPULLEN | FEBRUARY 2, 2010 3:45 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20lpullen%20%20|%20%20Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion%20%20|%20%204815232&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4815232%26blog_id=618)

Rather, the profoundest polarization is between theists (who believe in God, with salvation by grace) and humanists (who believe in Humanity, with salvation by science). In that the humanists have captured America's public schools and most of our institutions of higher learning, time is not on the side of us theists. -- Willis E. Elliott

Not all humanists are atheistic. Not all secularists are atheistic. Many theists believe in a god or gods very much unlike the one you identify as "God". Not all theists believe in salvation by grace. Assertion-based belief in the salvation of supernatural souls does not seem even remotely comparable to the experience-based trust both theists and atheists place in the scientific method in assisting us to establush the truthfulness of propositions about the natural world.

Who would you rather have living next door to you: a Secular Humanist or a fundamentalist theist who fervently believes your soul is doomed unless you worship the god she has bouncing around in her head?

**POSTED BY: CORNBREAD\_R2 | JANUARY 31, 2010 8:13 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20cornbread_r2%20%20|%20%20Obama%20mixes%20old-birth%20culture,%20new-birth%20religion%20%20|%20%204814804&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4814804%26blog_id=618)

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