

Richard Tempest

The World After Covid: Prospects, Dangers,
Temptations

Lecture Five

Alternative Leaders and Sources of Power —
Right Now, and for the Future

News of the Week: Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's visit to the Indian subcontinent demonstrated that in the wake of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States has decisively downgraded its relationship with Pakistan. India, however, looms ever more important in American eyes, despite its ongoing *Modification*. "We don't see ourselves building a broad relationship with Pakistan," Sherman stated bluntly in Mumbai. The reasons for this foreign policy shift are geostrategic as well as economic, and the consequences will be far-reaching. The image shows Sherman with Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi



News of the Week: in the Czech general election, the country's billionaire prime minister, populist Andrej Babiš (on right), was unexpectedly defeated by the center-right Spolu alliance, which has announced coalition talks with a left-liberal party, Piráti-STAN. Immediately thereafter, President Miloš Zeman (on left), Babiš's political patron, was taken to the hospital, apparently gravely ill. He is now in an ICU



Petr Fiala (below), Spolu's leader and a former political science professor, is expected to take over as prime minister. If Fiala forms a government and, as now appears likely, President Zeman leaves the political scene, this will have far-reaching repercussions not only for Czechia, but also the EU and NATO. In addition, such a development would reverse the trend toward populism in postcommunist Eastern Europe. Babiš's defeat may be related to last week's release of a new tranche of Pandora papers. Note that in the years to come, further releases are expected



Like previous pontiffs, Pope Francis is the best-known religious figure on the planet.
And btw, he leads the world's oldest institution



Francis's pontificate is distinguished by his innovative stance on a variety of controversial issues. He is anxious to strengthen the Church both as an institution and a living, evolving community of faith. The changes he has introduced should be viewed not from a doctrinal perspective, but from that of pastoral care: the Church extending the sacraments to a larger number of the faithful. A canny political operator, the pope is skilled at using the press and social media to put his message across; and at hinting and intimating, rather than making formal pronouncements, in order to move things in the direction of change. We can expect that this is the terrain on which battle will be joined by reformers and conservatives within the Church in the years to come

- "If someone is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?"
- Abortion is a grave sin but absolution may be granted to repentant women.
- Favors extending communion to divorced persons and remarried couples: "They always belong to the Church."
- Regarding people who die in a state of mortal sin, reportedly stated, "Those who repent obtain God's forgiveness and take their place among the ranks of those who contemplate him, but those who do not repent and cannot be forgiven disappear. A hell doesn't exist, the disappearance of sinning souls exists."
- Role of women in the Church must be expanded.
- Has become increasingly proactive in addressing the issue of child sex abuse by priests.
- Strong advocate of fighting climate change
- Modest personal arrangements: Francis is the first pope in more than a century to forego living in Vatican's Apostolic Palace

News of the Week: the Nobel Peace Prize committee splits the difference by naming as laureates journalists Maria Ressa (Philippines) and Dmitry Muratov (Russia) “for their courageous fight for freedom of expression in the Philippines and Russia. At the same time, they are representatives of all journalists who stand up for this ideal in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions”



Anti-Nazi journalist Carl von Ossietzky, who received the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize. Arrested after the Reichstag fire in 1933, he was severely tortured in Esterwegen concentration camp and died in 1938. Ossietzky's 1931 conviction for revealing Germany's secret rearmament was upheld by Germany's Federal Court of Justice in 1992



Like Ossietsky, Ressa and Muratov personify the intersection of investigation, reportage, and public advocacy that will increasingly impact public events in the future. MSNBC and Fox News, take note! See also the Pandora Papers published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists or the open source research by Bellingcat



Jessica Byrd “is a Black queer feminist who founded Three Point Strategies in 2015 to provide a home for electoral strategy in the United States that centers racial justice and is transformational rather than transactional,” but she is best known for her work as chief of staff to Stacey Abrams when the latter ran for governor of Georgia in 2018



Donald Trump, Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte, and other “hot” populists creatively channel their publics’ anger by giving it voice. So does Greta Thunberg



Thunberg may be a “hot” charismatic, but she is unusual because she developed her extraordinary public appeal when she was still a child. Here we see her addressing the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland, in 2018. At the time she was 15



Since then she has made a number of well-publicized speeches to spread her global ecological message while renewing, in ritual and even sacral form, her connection to a younger generation of supporters. Thunberg's most famous public appearance to date was at the United Nations Climate Action conference in 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic served to draw attention away from Thunberg and her cause, but now she is once again at the center of public attention



Thunberg's mainstream climatological stance

Note that in her United Nations speech, Thunberg did not go beyond the sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015. Both then and since, in the substantive part of her message she adheres closely to the scientific consensus on global change. It is the tone and the visuals that are startling and, yes, mobilizing

Two charismatics, two populists, two generations in a single public space, whether it's a room or the entire planet



A Twitter spat between a septuagenarian and a teen. There could be no doubt who would emerge as the winner

Trump's first Thunberg-themed tweet, which followed her United Nations address, was meant to be mocking: "She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!"

After *Time* magazine made Thunberg its Person of the Year Trump decided to be more direct.

Trump: "So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!"

Thunberg: "A teenager working on her anger management problem. Currently chilling and watching a good old fashioned movie with a friend."

The Children's Crusade of 1212 aimed to establish a second Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Holy Land. The crusade was led by two young boys, Nicholas of Cologne, a German, and Stephen of Cloyes, a Frenchman. The movements grouped under the rubric of Children's Crusade included both minors and adults. Within a couple of decades, it became the stuff of legend



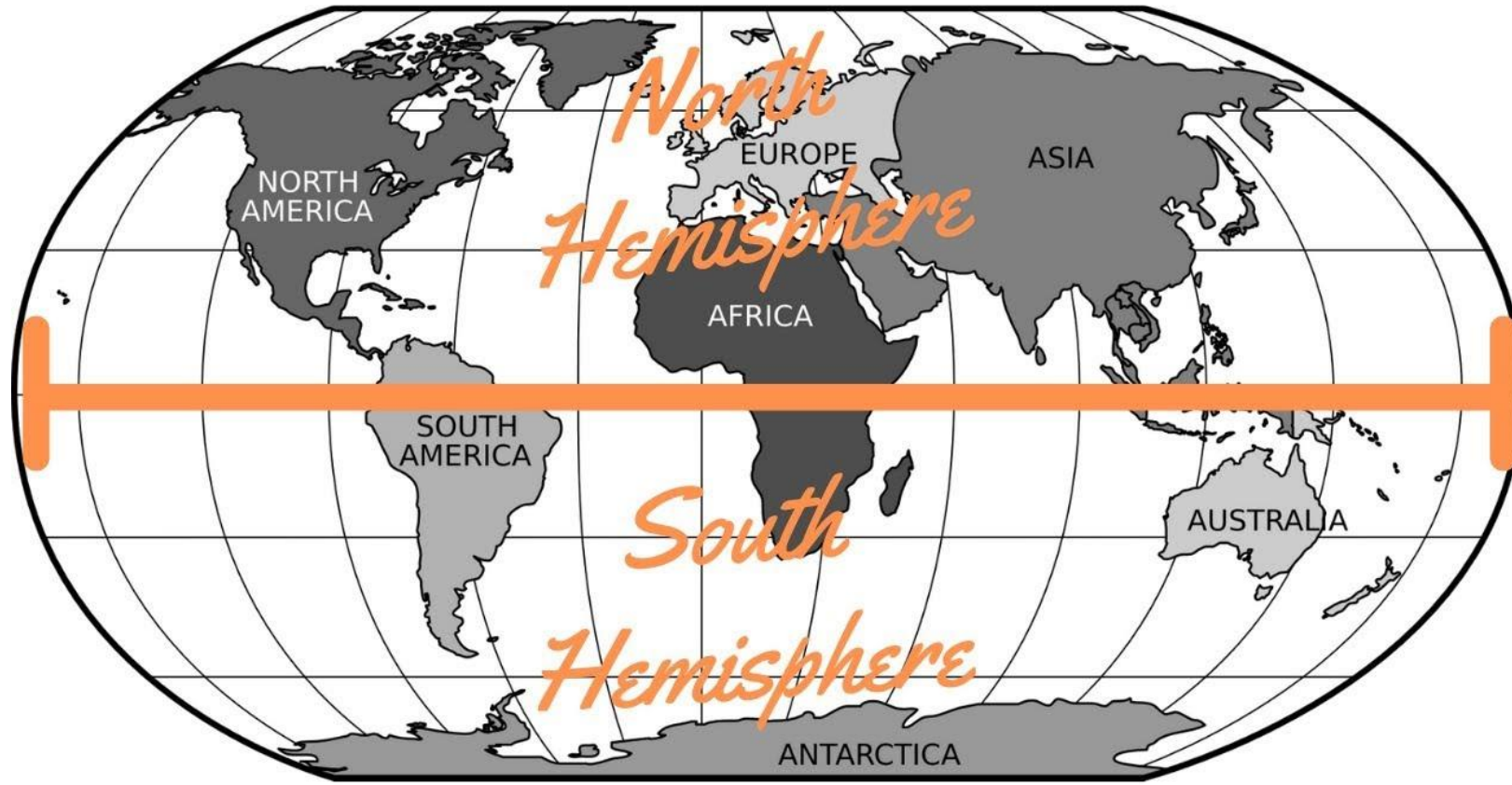
Thunberg's mother, Malena Ernman, is an opera singer and actress, while the activist's father, Svante, is an actor and producer. Her younger sister, Beata, enjoys a burgeoning reputation as an Instagram influencer, though her main focus is on music



Greta Thunberg speech at the Youth4Climate summit in Milan, Italy, on September 28, 2021. She may be no Cicero, but politically effective she certainly is

Build back better. Blah, blah, blah. Green economy. Blah blah blah. Net zero by 2050. Blah, blah, blah. This is all we hear from our so-called leaders. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises. [...] They've now had 30 years of blah, blah, blah and where has that led us? We can still turn this around – it is entirely possible. It will take immediate, drastic annual emission reductions. But not if things go on like today. Our leaders' intentional lack of action is a betrayal toward all present and future generations.

...although for reasons of class and style her appeal is largely confined to residents of the global North



Thunberg’s apocalyptic messaging is effective. On the other hand, she fails to acknowledge the successes of the global environmental movement such as the reduction in the ozone hole over the Antarctic, which is anticipated to close in 2050. As a latter-day prophet, she relies on her personal and emotional appeal rather than detailed scientific analysis; and on instilling in her constituency a sense of dire urgency



The Bridge, a popular Danish-Swedish crime drama, features a female heroine, Swedish detective Saga Norén (Sofia Helin), who is assumed by many viewers and critics to have Asperger's. See "the lying handicap"



Thunberg has declared she would never buy new clothes. Some of her behavioral and representational patterns such as an extreme bluntness of speech and a studied disregard for appearances evoke the medieval cultural model of the holy fool. These figures would act as moral judges of a corrupted and unjust society and make cryptic or prophetic pronouncements. Thunberg, of course, is not cryptic — far from it — but prophetic she most certainly is!



St. Augustine of Hippo distinguished between moral evil, derived from human free will and disobedience, and natural evil, which resulted from the loss of order in the world stemming from the first sin. It is human nature, however, to elide the distinction



On the night before the inauguration, President-elect Biden, vice-president elect Harris, and their spouses visited a Covid-19 memorial in Washington, DC



Vienna's famous Pestsäule, or Plague Column (also known as the Trinity Column) was erected to commemorate the victims of the 1679 plague epidemic



The Aids Memorial Quilt was displayed at the National Mall in 1987, 1996, and 2021



Memorializing the pandemic. This is a remembrance plot set up by a private individual in Bel Mar, New Jersey in early 2021



Architecture firm Gómez Platero is leading a \$1.5 million project to create a monument to the victims of COVID-19 on the Atlantic shore near Montevideo, Uruguay



Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (New York, Vintage Books, 1997), p. 252.

As she came up to the arch, Elizabeth saw with a start that it was written on. She went closer. She peered at the stone. There were names on it. Every grain of the surface had been carved with British names; their chiselled capitals rose from the level of her ankles to the height of the great arch itself; on every surface of every column as far as her eyes could see there were names teeming, reeling, over surfaces of yards, of hundreds of yards, over furlongs of stone.

She moved through the space beneath the arch where the man was sweeping. She found the other pillars identically marked, their faces obliterated on all sides by the names that were carved on them.

“Who are these, these...?” She gestured with her hand.

“These?” The man with the brush sounded surprised. “The lost.”

“Men who died in this battle?”

“No. The lost, the ones they did not find. The others are in the cemeteries.”

She looked at the vault above her head and then around in panic at the endless writing, as though the surface of the sky had been papered in footnotes.

When she could speak again, she said, “From the whole war?”

The man shook his head. “Just these fields.” He gestured with his arm.

The Thiepval Memorial at the Somme

