

FROM REASON TO SKEPTICISM TO MYSTICISM: MUST THE WEST CONTINUE DOWN THIS PATH?

Before a capacity crowd this past Tuesday evening (September 25) in the University of Minnesota's Moos Tower, Vishal Mangalwadi gave the second in his 10-part lecture series "Must the Sun Set on the West?" His theme was the role of rationality in the development of the West, and the subsequent abandonment of reason in favor of skepticism and, more recently, mysticism.

"What made the West a thinking civilization?" he asked. Whereas in his native India waterfalls would be the focus of meditation, in the West waterfalls (such as the original St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis) would be harnessed for waterpower (a rational project). He went on to explore Leonardo DaVinci's three commitments to empirical experience, instrumental arts, and mathematics as a product of the Renaissance and a culture which had found its grounding in the Bible as cultural authority. In the hands of popular author Dan Brown (*The DaVinci Code*), DaVinci has become a figure representing myth and even sexual mysticism, said Mangalwadi.

He asserted that it was Christian thinkers like St Augustine who "wrote the curriculum" of the West. To be godly was not to meditate, but to cultivate the mind. The rational mind, however, is not enough. Utilizing the illustration of eyes that don't see unless there is light, Mangalwadi asserted that Christian thought encourages rationality (as opposed to mysticism). But in order to truly be rational, one also needs the light of revelation (the Bible). Furthermore, Augustine and others like him recognized that since the Universe is created by a rational being in whose image humans are made, then it is incumbent upon humans to exercise that rationality in order to express the divine image. And since God has communicated with words (logos), then humans have a responsibility to utilize words in our knowledge of God's world.

The problem, of course, is that the West, specifically in the Enlightenment, abandoned revelation and embraced rationalism, which made reason the sole means by which knowledge is gained. Like the Greek Sophists long before Christ, rationalism eventually was consumed by skepticism, which that very rationalism unleashed. Mangalwadi asserted that while relative skepticism (refusing to be naively gullible) is healthy, absolute skepticism is devastating.

Skepticism opened the path to mysticism in the mid to late 20th century, said Mangalwadi, as Indian gurus, such as Rajneesh, brought their message of salvation through sex to the West. The sun will set on the West, said Mangalwadi, if the West continues down the path of mysticism, whether sexual or otherwise. To avoid that civilizational denouement, the West must re-embrace its foundational book, the Bible, and the rationality that comes with it.