



THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

SPRING 2024

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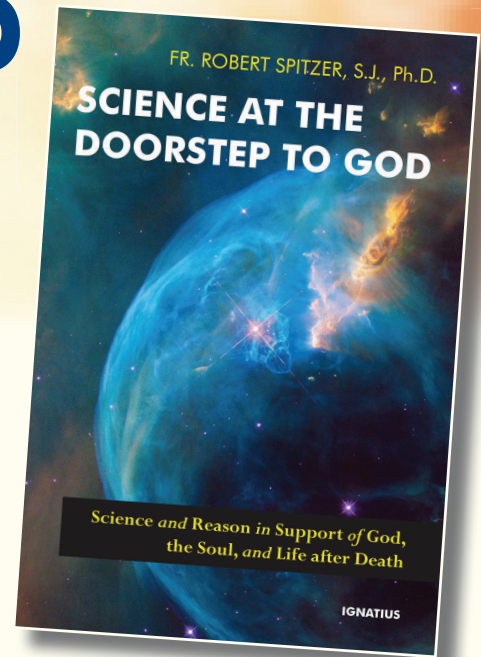
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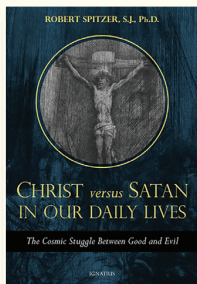


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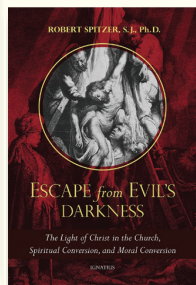
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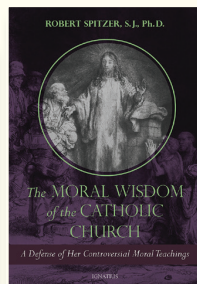
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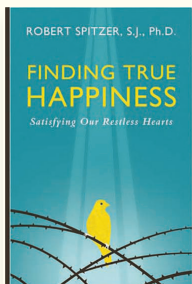
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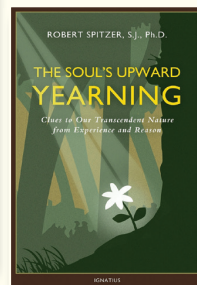
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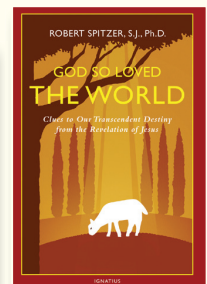
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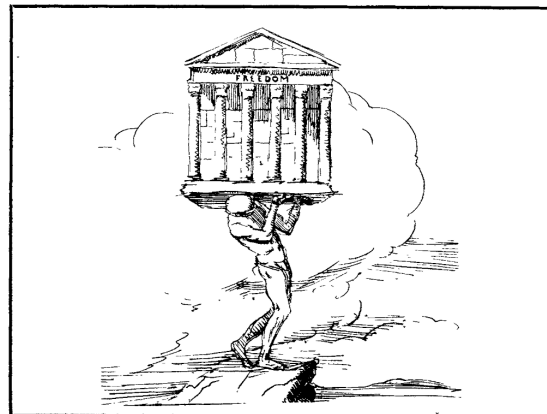
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MOTTO

Politics is too important to be taken seriously.

MISSION STATEMENT

The core purpose of *The American Spectator* is to educate, entertain, and inform readers with smart and witty investigative journalism and editorial writing from a conservative point of view. What distinguishes *The American Spectator* is its wry, youthful, and fresh perspective.

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703-807-2011
editor@spectator.org
www.spectator.org
ISSN 0148-8414

The American Spectator LLC is a subsidiary of The American Spectator Foundation.

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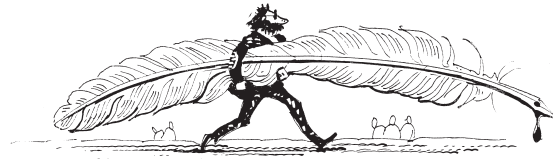
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The Woke vs. the Awake

There is a religious awakening in the midst of a culture at once suicidal and hubristic.

by **Melissa Mackenzie**

Why are adherents to the Woke Cult so grumpy? According to this merry band of misfits, they're enlightened. They are ennobled by their suffering in a world that's enslaved by archaic Western cultural norms. The Woke are possessors of the truth. They accept everyone — well, not Christians, or traditional families, or God, or Jews, or their parents, or Republicans, or TERFs, or Dave Chappelle. When it comes down to it, the list of “others” is long, but not as long as one would imagine. In fact, the academy, the government, the corporate world, the NFL and most sports conglomerates, the media, all of Hollywood, and even a good chunk of churches buy into the Woke religion. And, still, the Woke are aggrieved. That fact that anyone resists their ideological hegemony induces hysteria, venom, and, too often, arson and mass shootings.

The Woke might be miserable because of their list of worries. They worry about climate change. They worry about structural racism. They worry about guns (unless Hamas or transgenders use them). They worry about eating meat. They worry about capitalism while they text anxiously to their friends, who text back on iPhones while watching TikTok videos. They worry about the patriarchy and white people (even though they're mostly white). They used to worry about COVID, but that worry has been replaced by the Ukrainian flag in their bios. They worry and they *care*. They care so, so much. It's a lot, being Woke.

Then there is the inner turmoil. The raging hormones. The psychotropic medication. The vast sums of money spent on pink and purple hair dye. The indecision about clothes and gender and pronouns. The chronic sexual dysfunction and perversion. If only one could just be one thing, but that's “basic.” A Woke's life is so complex and complicated and, well, *you just don't get me*.

It's as if the Woke religion is led by a mishmash of criminals and the mentally ill — thieves “redistributing” their reparations, anti-fascists who militarize and use fascistic methods, strung-out drug addicts, and demented pedophile rejects from the gay pride parade.

Violent and stupid, these people need, well, Jesus. Unfortunately, they might not find Jesus even if they go to church seeking him.

Like many cultural remnants from the 1960s, religion has been in decline. The hippies infected the seminaries and now, as aging boomers, have watered down



Melissa Mackenzie is Publisher of The American Spectator.

the church so much that nearly every denomination has divided. The divisions have been over basic cultural upheavals: women preaching, gay marriage, praise and worship style, and, then, in the aftermath of George Floyd's death, critical theory. Basically, churches have played out the fights of the culture at large, and many denominations have simply withered on the vine.

The problem? Well, the doctrinally adherent tend to pay tithes. The woke "Christians"? Not so much. As an example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) booted those who wouldn't acquiesce to ordaining gays and lesbians in homosexual relationships. The devout left the church. The ELCA has been bleeding membership ever since.

In the rubble of the church, there is hope. Orthodoxy — whether Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish — is on the rise, and it is the young who are leading the way. The orthodox are fighting for their faith and pushing back against the cultural rot.

These folks are happy warriors.

They're entering seminaries. They're becoming nuns. They're running for school boards. They're pulling their children out of public schools and refusing to send their brilliant, often homeschooled or parochial-educated, children to the Ivies.

These happy warriors are also being persecuted. They're being sentenced to prison for praying outside of abortion clinics. They're being surveilled by the FBI while they worship. Their churches and synagogues are being burned down, attacked, and violated, and shot up. Christians have been shot at churches big and small by left-wing woke zealots.

If not a religious war, there is a spiritual one, and one side resorts to bullets and violence. The rhetoric from the woke is eliminationist and pointed. The devoutly God-believing, the Awake, expect this response because persecution from the devil's minions is nothing new.

Is America in its fifth Great Awakening? Maybe. It is certainly in an awakening in the midst of a culture at once suicidal (for abortion and neutering oneself is suicidal) and

In the rubble of the church, there is hope.

hubristic — seeking eternal life through other means. Whether it be the tech bros wanting to download their consciousness to the web or implant a chip in their brain, or the pagan Wiccans consulting their tarot cards, America is still a religious nation hell-bent on finding salvation. Too many even look to claim the power of Satan. For the wokely religious, the answer seems to be anything but God. Community, once found in church with neighbors, is found in online forums of like-minded weirdos.

The Awakened, though, are returning to church and the synagogue and orthodoxy. They're finding meaning in a relationship with God, their families, and their spiritual communities. They're returning to tradition and the forms that give life shape and meaning.

This magazine issue examines all of these trends and makes sense of them. Ultimately, this issue is one filled with hope.

Young writers S.A. McCarthy, Ellie Gardey, Aubrey Gulick, Luther Abel, and new *American Spectator* writer Nate Hochman contributed to the magazine, while our young editor Lucia VanBerkum copyedited the magazine. Ellie Gardey put this magazine together. These young people are in their early twenties and patriots all. The future is bright! ✨





Dancing With the Devil

Tucker Carlson's interview with Vladimir Putin was embarrassing.

by **Wlady Pleszczynski**

Some years ago, a good friend of mine who knows Tucker Carlson well said he's probably the smartest guy he's come across in the journalistic world they inhabit. I never had any reason to doubt him — at least not until Carlson's lengthy chat with Vladimir Putin. He walked into an ambush straightaway, as Putin launched into a tendentious survey of Russian-Ukrainian history. The contents should have been familiar to Carlson, but apparently he hadn't done his homework.

In July 2021, professor Putin released the essay titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." It received wide attention and, in due course, was well understood as a preparatory step toward Putin's invasion of Ukraine. On interview night, why on earth didn't Carlson interrupt Putin with a "there he goes again"? It would have spared him the humiliation of instead interrupting Putin with: "I beg your pardon, can you tell us what period ... I am losing track of where in history we are?"

"It was in the thirteenth century," Putin replied. (Actually, it wasn't. My expertise tells me he'd already reached the seventeenth century.)

But let's not lose track of where in history we are. We should recall Putin saying in 2005, "The breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century." Again, Carlson didn't ask him about it. In general, Putin-respecting conservatives have come to think the Russian

president is someone we can do business with, if only because we have to. Unfortunately, that also requires many conservatives, starting with Carlson, to disdain Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the good press he's received. Carlson calls it propaganda, not the natural outgrowth of admiration for someone

who defied all expectations and, instead of fleeing, as Joe Biden expected he would, led a historic resistance that has put Ukraine on the map for good. (In contrast, Carlson has never accused Putin of employing propaganda.) Impressed by none of Zelensky's accomplishments, Carlson settles for charging that resisting invasion "kills people." Yes, it does, horribly, as our own history teaches us. Does anyone still say freedom is free?

Which brings us to NATO, which is seen by Carlson and Putin alike as the real reason for Russia's invasion in the first place. If it hadn't expanded as a defensive alliance after winning the Cold War, what would have been the point of fighting it in the first place? For some reason, enlightened opinion these days never celebrates the US-led Western Alliance's victory but rather insists we should be forever apologetic for Russia's defeat and do what we can to salvage its pride. As it is, the US went out of its way to be nice to post-communist Russia. Today's wishful thinkers are ready to take Putin's word on being open to a negotiated peace in Ukraine, as he told Carlson. There will be no revanchism, he claims. Isn't that what Yevgeny Prigozhin was told? Just asking.

As of this writing, word comes that Russia's interior ministry has put Estonia's prime minister on its "wanted" list for removing two World War II-era monuments to Russia's military. It might be business as usual, or just another reminder that Russia will forever retain a claim to the Baltic states it colonized until the Soviet Union's collapse. How fortunate it is that those states are NATO members in very good standing.

Then there is Poland, a nemesis going back at least five centuries. Putin's comments to Carlson about that country clearly lacked the affability he was trying to portray in his other remarks. The idea that Poland cooperated with Hitler to set off World War II was clearly sick, particularly coming from the head of state who has erased the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from history. But Putin being Putin is always a useful reminder of who we're dealing with. He may think he's as charming as the devil, but, in temporal terms, he's worse. Again, just something to keep in mind as the Ukraine war plays out. ✨



Wlady Pleszczynski is Executive Editor of The American Spectator.



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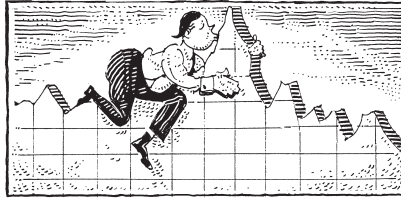
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The Religious Bifurcation Splitting America's Future

The country's inevitable divide between the irreligious and the devout may put an end to the American experiment.

by Ryan Burge

One of the largest cultural shifts in the last hundred years has occurred in the world of American religion. In the early 1970s, just one in twenty adults in the United States told survey administrators that they had no religious affiliation. Over the next two decades, that number would imperceptibly creep up to 7 percent, but few outside the academic community paid much attention to the rise of the “nones.” However, around 1991, the slope of that line became impossible to ignore.

Between 1991 and 1998, the share of Americans with no religious affiliation doubled from 7 percent to 14 percent. By 2012, nearly one in five respondents indicated that they were “nones” in the General Social Survey. The trend line continued its upward trajectory, and, by 2021, almost 30 percent of Americans claimed no religious affiliation. Among members of Generation Z (those born in 1996 or later), the percentage of “nones” now exceeds 40 percent. Thus, there's ample reason to believe that the rise of the “nones” will continue for the next several decades.

Many believe that this data points to the conclusion that religion is receding in the United States and that we will soon become a country resembling Western European

Ryan Burge is a statistician of American religion and a Baptist pastor.

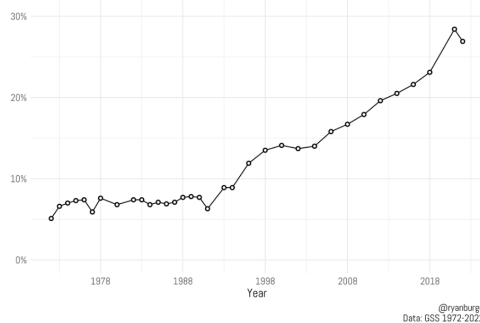
nations like Denmark or Sweden, where churches have become museums and faith has no place in the public square. However, a closer examination provides reason to reject this hypothesis. Just because a significant portion of Americans have left houses of worship over the last three decades does not mean that religion is fading in the United States. In fact, the opposite may be true.

Consider this simple fact. In 1972, 17 percent of all American adults were classified as evangelicals based on the answers they gave to a series of religious affiliation questions in the General Social Survey. By 2018, that same share had risen to 23 percent. In the early 1970s, there were approximately thirty-five million American evangelicals, and that number had surged to seventy-five million by the late 2010s. The “nones” are

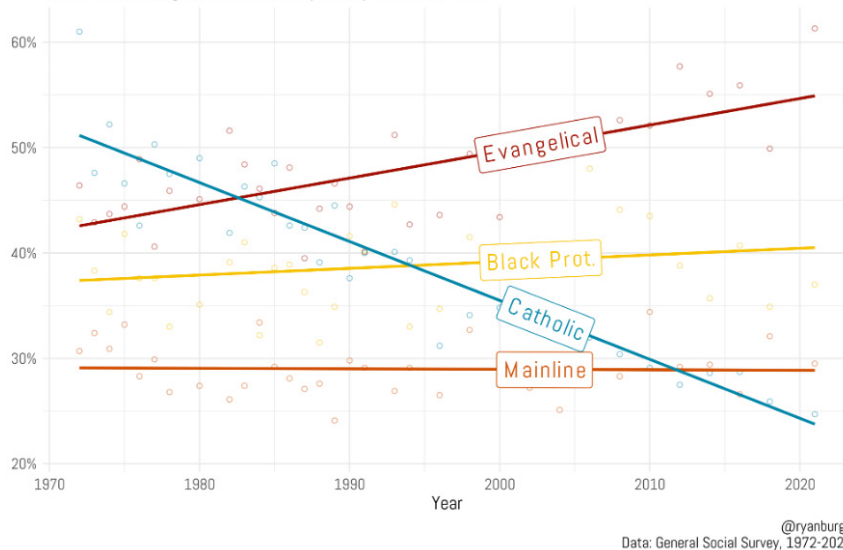
rising, but not at the expense of American evangelicalism. In reality, evangelicalism in the United States may never be stronger than it is right now.

In the 1970s, about 45 percent of evangelicals reported attending religious services nearly every week or more. According to data collected in 2021, that share has now risen to above 60 percent. So, not only have evangelicals grown in size by forty million over the last several decades, but the overall religious devotion of those evangelicals has also never been higher. We've seen other religious traditions, such as Black and mainline Protestants, hold steady when it comes to their religious attendance. A growing number of people are leaving religion behind, but, for those who remain attached to a religious tradition, devotion has never been stronger.

The Share of Americans With No Religious Affiliation, 1972-2022



Share Attending Services Nearly Every Week or More



One outlier in the previous graph, however, is Roman Catholics. In the 1970s, about half of all Catholics reported attending Mass nearly every week or more. That percentage has plummeted over the last several decades. Currently, only a quarter of Catholics are weekly Mass attenders, which is the lowest percentage of any Christian group. In the 1970s, Catholics were easily the most religiously engaged. But there is emerging anecdotal evidence that suggests a resurgence in some types of Catholicism. In the last few years, there has been an explosion in parishes that offer the traditional Latin Mass, and reports indicate that the number of participants in this expression of the Catholic faith has grown rapidly, while attendance at contemporary Masses continues to wane.

This points to a reality that scholars of religion have been aware of for decades: demanding religious traditions tend to retain adherents and attract new members at higher rates than religious groups that do not require much from their followers. What this means is that groups with stringent rules about marriage, family, worship, and dress, such as Hasidic Judaism, are growing rapidly. Another rapidly expanding group is Pentecostal Christianity; certain sects prescribe that women maintain long hair and wear skirts. One potential explanation for the success of these groups is their insularity. Many adherents are at their house of worship on a daily basis, which affords members a tremendous opportunity to build social bonds with other members of the congregation. These groups thrive because members are taught to lean on each other for their needs and to reject larger society.

On the other hand, the religious traditions that have seen the most dramatic declines in the last several decades are the ones that do not create a clear separation between them and the rest of the world. In the late 1950s, over half of all Americans were members of a mainline

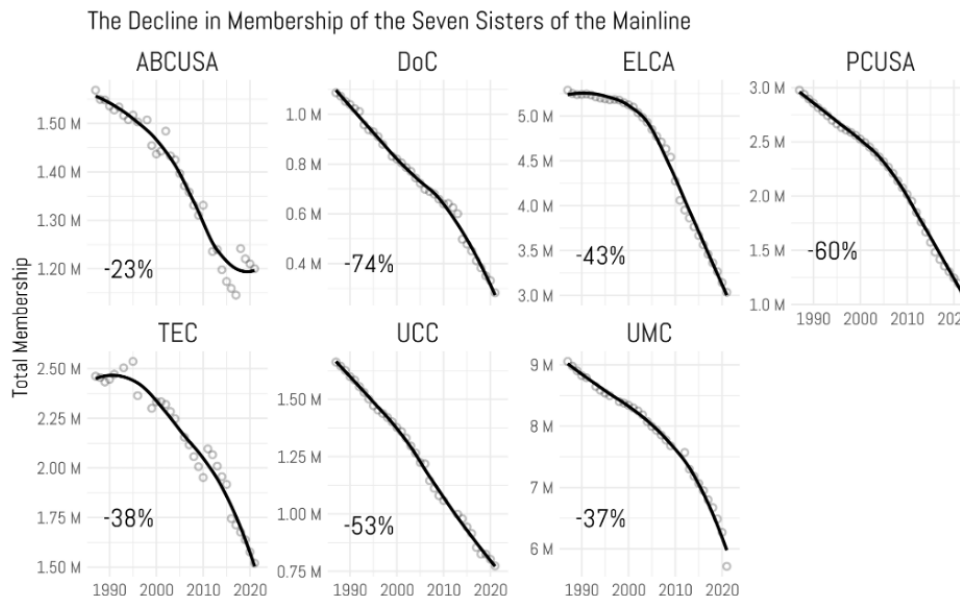
Protestant church, e.g., United Methodist, Episcopalian, and the United Church of Christ. The leaders of these denominations once had tremendous influence on more than spiritual matters; they were able to shape culture and politics in their own image.

The collapse of the mainline, however, is unmistakable; just take a look at the membership records of the largest denominations. The Disciples of Christ has seen its numbers decline by 74 percent since 1987. For the Episcopalian, the drop is 38 percent. It's 43 percent for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. In total, the mainline has lost over ten million members in just the last three decades. Why has this happened? Some scholars claim that these denominations made religion too easy. They did not require members to set themselves apart from the world; instead, they encouraged them to treat their neighbors more generously and be better parents while neglecting to implore attenders to have their lives radically changed by their faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus, over the last thirty years, Americans who were marginally attached to religion have slowly slipped away from houses of worship and become part of the increasing number of “nones.” In essence, American religion has gone through a purifying process, much like a chef making a reduction on a stovetop. What began as a large pot of liquid with some spices and seasonings has reduced to half the volume but with a much more concentrated flavor. Those who were lukewarm about their attachment to religion have evaporated from the pot, leaving only the most devout believers with the strongest attachment to their faith.

In the end, what the United States will be left with in a decade or two is a tremendous amount of religious polarization. The share of Americans with no religious affiliation will likely reach 40 percent — the highest on record. But, on the religious side of the spectrum, there will be increasing numbers of evangelicals, traditional Catholics, Latter-day Saints, Orthodox Christians, and Muslims who have never been more devoted to their faith. This will inevitably make governing more difficult. The United States Constitution prescribes a system of governance that is predicated on compromise. Even in the best of times, securing an agreement among Congress and the president for a major policy change can be nearly impossible.

The future of American society will be a constant state of conflict between a large, organized group of individuals who want to reshape the United States in alignment with their religious values and a growing number of Americans who pay no heed to religious texts or traditional values. Ultimately, the cultural shift that may put an end to the American experiment could be the growing phenomenon of religious polarization.





Wokeness: The Cargo-Cult Religion

A new spirituality consisting of rituals, sacraments, and catechisms has rushed to fill the vacuum created by the absence of Christianity.

by Scott McKay

In 1974, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman delivered the commencement address at the California Institute of Technology, and he used the opportunity to argue that what most people perceive as a world based on science is actually not as rational as we think.

In doing so, he coined a term that well describes many irrational and unsuccessful phenomena. That term: the cargo cult.

Feynman noted that, across several remote Pacific islands and in the more backward areas of New Guinea, a peculiar occurrence had arisen due to the island-hopping campaigns in the Pacific theater during World War II. The natives on those islands had gone to extraordinary lengths to construct intricate models of airplanes from bamboo, erect air traffic control towers, carve out facsimiles of runways, and fashion other accouterments of aviation — all in an effort to mimic the actions of the United States and Japan. Their hope was that those countries would once again provide them with material goods — cargo — as they had during the war in order to induce cooperation.

Except the effort did not produce the hoped-for results. When the war ended, so did the bribes.

“They’re doing everything right,” Feynman said. “The form is perfect. It looks exactly the way it looked before. But it doesn’t work. No airplanes land.”

Such is the sad plight of the cargo cult, whose practitioners fail to understand reality beyond mere appearances. Inviting the benefits that the Americans and Japanese once conferred demands a level of effort and merit beyond their comprehension. A bamboo facsimile of real prosperity simply won’t produce the desired effect.

The analogy of the cargo cult describes secular woke America — and its attempts to substitute man-made pieties for religious inspiration — quite well.

A spiritual cargo cult containing rituals, sacraments, and catechisms has rushed to fill the vacuum that the absence of Christianity has created. The result is our critical theory-driven, race-obsessed, gender-bent, and climate-hysterical culture. But the new woke faith contains none of the foundational redeeming virtues that built Christianity and all of the world’s great religions.

Moreover, the human cost of that enduring spiritual vacuum is immense. The average American is faced with rising crime, a drug epidemic, increasing numbers of suicides, corruption, overpoliticization, narcissism and nihilism, a lower quality of life, and a greatly diminished sense of community.



Scott McKay is senior editor at The American Spectator and the author of *It’s All Obama: Racism, Revenge and Ruin*.

Wokeness is a religion, make no mistake about that. It just isn't a very good one.

British journalist Toby Young, the founder of the Free Speech Union in the UK, offered a fairly good summation of the founding beliefs of the woke faith:

They reason that English-speaking countries are systemically racist; that we're in the midst of a "climate emergency"; that capitalism is responsible for most of the world's ills; that sex as well as gender is a social construct; that people's identities are forged by their membership of certain groups (particularly race); and that different identity groups can be ranked according to how "oppressed" they are, with the most beleaguered victims being the most sacred.

Each of these is an item of faith rather than a recognition of fact. English-speaking countries are not systemically racist; they are the least racist places on earth. There is zero evidence of a climate emergency, much less one that is anthropogenic. Capitalism has lifted more human beings out of poverty and provided a greater standard of living than any other economic system in history. Sex and gender are objectively determined by biology; anything else is insanity by established, though now wavering, psychiatric doctrine.

As for intersectionality, it establishes nothing productive. Its sole accomplishment is to undermine the Christian teaching that individuals derive their intrinsic worth from being made in the image of God, and it's only attractive insofar as it is the glue that holds together the rest of the incoherent articles of the woke faith.

It's just like building bamboo air traffic control towers and model airplanes in an attempt to appease the benevolent gods of the sky only for the airdrops to fail to arrive. The cargo cult knows nothing of how the benefits are generated; it merely seeks to have them.

Wokeness is thus indeed the cargo cult of modern religion. It offers no origin story, unlike all major religions. It has no system of moral values; the woke define goodness only in negative terms. It offers no affirmation or redemption.

Nor does it offer true divinity as a worthy religion should. James Patterson, in a 2021 article in *National Affairs*, noted: "For the woke, identity is the source of divinity. Yet individuals are not divine on their own; they only participate in the divinity found in shared group identities."

What's more, the woke religion lacks perhaps the most important element that the world's great religions offer: love.

A friend shared with me a letter by the Orthodox Christian Saint Theoleptos, metropolitan of Philadelphia (the one in present-day Jordan, not the one on the Delaware), who died in 1322, that discussed the role of love as an inspiration for life and spirituality:

[Paul said:] "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh." This is the nature and quality of love. As the candle melts from the fire and becomes a light that illuminates whoever keeps it lit, so is God's love. When it dwells in the soul and burns in the heart, it penetrates with its warmth the whole existence and inspires the body, so that it toils and risks for the sake of the salvation of people.

Nothing in the woke creed compares to that. The closest thing to the love of God offered by wokeness is the worship of victimhood, especially by those who are deemed to be members of

oppressed classes. This is where DEI and intersectionality become such fundamental sacraments in the woke church.

But in just the same way as those wooden husks made to look like airplanes on hilltops of desolate Pacific islands never brought much in the way of manna from the skies, participation in a group identity with grievances against Western Christian society offers little in the way of payoff for the adherents of wokeness. Ultimately, there are no sky gods to construct packages for the cargo cult.

Wokeness is built on critical theory, a Marxist academic fetish designed to wear down and destroy Western Christian civilization and prepare the way for socialist revolution. Critical theory offers nothing but endless grievance and criticism — and it seeks to solve nothing.

And because it solves nothing and has no productive capacity, wokeness is reduced to a parasitical existence. It draws from the Christian morality it perverts, the capitalist economics it hates, and the constitutional politics

it undermines.

It's no surprise that those who are most susceptible to woke pieties, most likely to take part in the woke sacraments, and most certain to attend the woke temples that are our universities — this being young women — are the most miserable people in America. A 2022 survey found that more than half of women ages eighteen to twenty-nine who called themselves politically liberal had been diagnosed with some mental or emotional disturbance or other.

Wokeness is misery because it is an empty religion devoid of divinity, redemption, or a productive moral code. Senator Marco Rubio noticed this. Writing at *Compact* in February, Rubio noted the Festivus-style airing of grievances in what pass for woke churches:

At such spiritual collectives like Atlanta's Vining Lakes, nationalism and capitalism are subject to "bold critiques." And Miami's Heartway and Tucson's Aldea espouse commitments to "diversity" and "enacting social justice." All three pseudo-churches are places where "LGBTQ inclusion is not up for debate." You can bet that if an evangelical Christian, Orthodox Jew, or conservative Muslim turned up at them, he would soon be branded a heretic.

In short, the sociologists were wrong. Scholars of religion used to think religious decline would correspond with a rise in the population of "nones" — those who believe and care about nothing in particular beyond mundane realities. But it seems more accurate to say that Americans are simply exchanging one set of beliefs for another. Political ideology is replacing religion.

Public professions of faith. Confessions of sin. Demands for orthodoxy under pain of social outcasting. In recent years, we have seen them all, not in communities of faith but in communities of identity politics. Such fanaticism manifests on both sides of the post-Christian ideological spectrum, but it is far more widespread on the left than on the right.

We're disintegrating as a civilization because wokeness robs us of the ability to produce confident, steely-eyed men. Who will show courage and sacrifice for a society that preaches self-hatred and nihilism?

Christianity is the only known remedy.

End wokeness, or you'll end America, along with the rest of Western civilization. It's that simple. 🗡️

Wokeness is misery
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Witchcraft, a Multi-Billion-Dollar Industry, Is Rapidly Evangelizing

Money is an effective incentive to invite people into New Age practices.

by Ellie Gardey



Ellie Gardey is Reporter and Associate Editor at The American Spectator.

“Hello, I am Freya. I make a deal with demons for my rituals and spells, so all my spells come true.” So proclaims the introduction to an Etsy shop that sells “Special Black Magic” for the price of \$135.52 — a supposed 50 percent discount on the usual asking price of \$271.04. A “Powerful Death Spell” from the same shop will run a person \$271.04, though this too is on sale “for a limited time” from its usual fee of \$542.08.

This purveyor of the demonic represents a fraction of the \$2.3 billion “psychic-services industry,” which employs 96,909 Americans — most of whom are women — and attracts 15 percent of Americans as customers. Mediumship accounts for a quarter of the market share, while palm reading, tarot card reading, and animal communication each comprise about 20 percent. Aura reading, astrology, and other practices make up the remaining 15 percent. The financial outlook for the “psychic-services industry” — read: “witchcraft” — is favorable, according to the industry research company IBISWorld, which says that both revenue and market share are projected to increase over the next five years.

On Etsy alone, there are 39,000 “Psychic Readings,” 57,000 “Divination Tools,” 78,000 “Tarot Readings & Divinations,” and 99,000 “Reiki & Chakras” available for purchase. And devotees of “#WitchTok” — the section of TikTok concerned with witchcraft — encounter endless videos of fellow witches shilling “altar starter kits,” herbs, cauldrons, “ritual candles,” and “love spells.” Like Etsy’s witch-for-hire stores, TikTok videos with the “WitchTok” hashtag are extremely popular: they have received more than 52 billion views.

But the economic phenomenon of witchcraft is not confined to one-woman internet storefronts and social media accounts. It has also made its way to the mainstream. Barnes & Noble now sells more than 29,000 products under the category “New Age & Alternative Beliefs,” including two hundred unique decks of tarot cards. In addition, witchcraft is now a popular theme of children’s fiction. In October 2023 alone, the *New York Times* published three reviews of “middle grade novels” focused on witchcraft and six reviews of “Terrific Witchy” novels aimed at teens. This included a review of a book that tells the story of a

group of teen girls who use “magic that feels hungrier and darker than what they’d previously dabbled in” in an effort to resurrect their dead friend. Furthermore, the United Kingdom’s University of Exeter announced last year that it will offer a master’s degree in magic and occult science — though supposedly from the standpoint of social analysis. “Decolonisation, the exploration of alternative epistemologies, feminism, and anti-racism are at the core of this programme,” reads the description of the degree.

A Potent Incentive for Evangelization

Both Christianity and witchcraft seek to evangelize, though for very different reasons.

The apostle Paul preached that he was “a slave of Christ Jesus” and that this paradoxically gave him genuine freedom to serve the Lord. “I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible,” Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, concluding, “All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.” In his second letter to the Corinthians, he further explained, “[W]e do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus.” Those who are “freed from sin,” he proclaimed in his letter to the Romans, will likewise “become slaves of righteousness.”

Conversely, since witches seek to manipulate the world with magic for the sake of personal gain, they correspondingly evangelize others to their craft out of self-interest: specifically, they evangelize — at least in part — for money.

A witch seeking to cash in must convince her potential TikTok, Etsy, or bookstore customers that God’s eternal law is an unjust inhibition on building the lives they desire. She must persuade these possible customers to seize control of their own destinies by unnaturally bending the world to their wills. A witch must charm others into forsaking Christ in favor of embracing the Devil — and choosing all the evil, despair, and death that follows.

This is typically accompanied by a feminist message: that a woman must crush the Western cultural tradition and its Judeo-Christian vision of women as ideally nurturing, empathetic, compassionate, tender, loving, selfless, and sacrificial in favor of a new vision of women as independent warriors who forge their own path of achievement for their own self-fulfillment.

One woman who does just this is a TikTok witch who offers “energy readings” for \$25, “energy healings” for \$250, “love/domination work” for \$450, and “prophetic medium readings” for \$555. In a video in which she advertises her services, she exclaims:

My work is for those of you who are looking for upgrade and Ascension, those of you who are looking to really upgrade your lifestyle and become the best that you can be, align yourself with what it is that you want with your intent, with your purpose.

In our capitalist and consumerist society, the incentive for easy money is driving witches to rapidly evangelize. One metric of

growing adherence to witchcraft is the rapidly increasing number of views on TikTok videos accompanied by “#WitchTok.” By November 2020, the hashtag had garnered six million views; by April 2021, that number had grown to eleven billion; by November 2022, the phenomenon had increased to thirty billion views; by September 2023, it had reached forty-two billion; and by February 2024, it had achieved fifty-two billion views.

In contrast, Christian evangelizers, who have the incentive for righteousness, are failing to increase the number in their fold. Last year, the Pew Research Center projected that the number of American Christians will fall below 50 percent of the American population by the year 2050 if current trends hold.

Avarice is indeed proving to be the more potent motivation for evangelization.

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As Christians, we must not despair, as there are some promising developments in Christian evangelization, especially through those ministries that seek to take advantage of digital communication. For instance, Father Mike Schmitz’s *Bible in a Year* podcast topped charts in 2022 and received hundreds of millions of downloads. Last year also saw the rise of the successful *Exorcist Files* podcast, hosted by Father Carlos Martins, which uses the demonic and the Catholic Church’s ministry

of exorcism for the purpose of evangelizing nonbelievers. Bishop Robert Barron of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, also runs a media organization, Word on Fire, that has introduced the faith to many through podcasts, videos, books, and magazines.

Nevertheless, in an age defined by comfort and convenience, Christianity finds itself at a disadvantage. Its calls for self-sacrifice, humility, and obedience to God contrast sharply with witchcraft, which offers what appears to be a shortcut to godlike power. Consider the case of the Etsy witch Freya, who promises that if you purchase her “Powerful Death Spell,” then “the spell will work within 1 to 60 days and you will achieve your goal”:

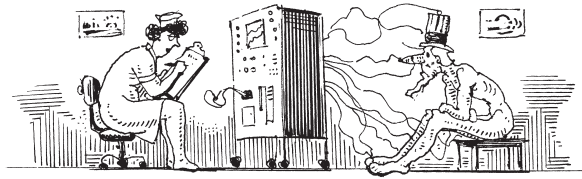
the death of an enemy or revenge on someone you hate. In addition, Christianity — with its emphasis on detachment from material possessions, coupled with low compensation for clergy and lay employees — stands in juxtaposition to a religion that serves as a profit machine for its adherents.

Witches’ perceived powers and monetary profits will eventually be recognized as fleeting gains before inevitable, deadly defeat. “For the wages of sin is death,” said Saint Paul, “but the gift of God is eternal life

in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

But before this truth is ultimately made clear, Christianity will have to face off against a religion that seemingly offers endless temporal promises. It will be a difficult battle. ❧





Techno-Religion Will Snare the Unbeliever

We are reaching an era when people will seek salvation in silicon and lines of code.

by Joe Allen

As humanity descends into digital madness, the air crackles with strange prophecies. We're told "godlike" artificial intelligence will soon arrive. Techno-cultists assure us that artificial intelligence will solve the world's problems, such as writer's block and climate change. AI may even calculate the meaning of the universe. These Silicon Valley sects are like UFO cults for people who don't believe in aliens but do believe in magic computers.

Before long, I fear, the masses will begin praying to AI gods. They will ask machines to answer their deepest questions. Their glowing oracles will reply with things like: "buy more Google stock" or "tell your sexbot you love her." In time, the rise of techno-religions will create a new set of problems — even as frustrated writers continue to have nothing to say and the climate continues to change.

OpenAI executive Sam Altman is a prime example. In late 2022, his company set off a cultural firestorm with the release of ChatGPT, a large language model capable of conducting a person's research and analysis.

Joe Allen is transhumanism editor at War Room: Pandemic and author of Dark Aeon: Transhumanism and the War Against Humanity.

By most metrics — including the USA Biolympiad and the LSAT — ChatGPT outperforms average humans at fact-retrieval and writing. Emboldened by this technical achievement, Bill Gates and Sal Khan say every child should have an AI tutor.

More importantly, such programs provide a direct interface with etheric digital minds. For the credulous, it feels like speaking to another soul. Chatbots, used to power social robots, form a bridge between artificial intelligence and the physical world. In that sense, an AI's "soul" can be made incarnate.

Back in 2013, two years before he co-founded OpenAI, Altman shared a quote on his blog: "Successful people create companies.... The most successful people create religions." The idea drips with implicit cynicism. "It got me thinking," Altman mused, "the most successful founders do not set out to create companies. They are on a mission to create something closer to a religion, and at some point it turns out that forming a company is the easiest way to do so."

This corporate religiosity — a world where logos are sacred symbols, mission statements are creeds, and top executives are saints — was born of American optimism. Today, that gilded faith is accelerating toward

some dismal omega point in the Future™. Artificial intelligence advances just ahead of robotics. Brain-computer interfaces are catching up to genetic engineering. Digital currency pulses through the system like electric blood.

Mammon-worship is coming to full realization through technology. The average consumer may not believe any of it, but that hardly matters. The people selling them the Future™ are true believers.

Last year, billionaire investor Marc Andreessen wove this infernal thread into his "Techno-Optimist Manifesto." The document is a "materialist" declaration of religious aspiration. "We can advance to a far superior way of living, and of being," the manifesto promises. "We believe Artificial Intelligence is our alchemy, our Philosopher's Stone — we are literally making sand think. We believe Artificial Intelligence is best thought of as a universal problem solver."

Lest the reader be tempted to ascribe leftist or globalist intent to Andreessen, it should be emphasized that he's an American nationalist and intensely anti-communist. "We believe in accelerationism," the manifesto goes on, "to ensure the techno-capital upward spiral continues

forever.” This Promethean ascent hinges on a total transformation of our species “as people form symbiotic relationships with machines.” The manifesto concludes with a list of “Patron Saints of Techno-Optimism,” featuring such conservative icons as Paul Johnson and Thomas Sowell.

Ray Kurzweil is also on the list. The Google director is best known for his prediction that digital intelligence will soon surpass human intelligence a trillion fold, forcing us to fuse our minds and bodies with various devices. Any holdouts will be cast into the dustbin of irrelevance.

Kurzweil puts the date for this technological “Singularity” at 2045. By then, computers will have become gods. Hardwired cyborgs and uploaded personalities will be functionally immortal. “There will be no distinction,” he says, “post-Singularity, between human and machine or between actual and virtual reality.” The skeptic might say Kurzweil and his followers have already lost the distinction between actual and virtual reality. Investors couldn’t care less.

At the top of Andreessen’s “patron saint” list is @BasedBeffJezos, the X handle for the once pseudonymous Guillaume Verdon. This Diet Coke-guzzling coder started the surprisingly popular “effective accelerationist” (e/acc) movement to combat the degrowth agenda of the well-funded “effective altruists.” Not to get lost in their techie drama, but if old-school transhumanists are akin to Catholics,

think of this young crop of “effective accelerationists” and “effective altruists” as Lutherans and Anglicans fighting a world war online.

“For me, e/acc is a form of spirituality,” Verdon writes, “it’s about contributing to something greater than one’s self through building technology.” In other posts, he

As AI
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elaborated that “e/acc is a meta-culture/meta-religion” that is “compatible with many existing religions.” But it’s also a self-contained belief system meant to replace hopeless atheism. “If we can fill the religion-shaped void with e/acc or similar techno-optimist ideologies,” he said, “we will live in a better world.”

The latter point is crucial. Traditional religions exalt higher intelligences above the human mind — God, angels, devas, and buddhas. But these religions fare poorly in the developed world, especially among the

young. Religion’s influence has faded, along with its moral limits and responsibilities. For wistful souls, the resulting “religion-shaped void” is pretty depressing.

The transhuman impulse — the drive to go beyond human limits by way of technology, even to the point of abandoning our humanity — arises from a godless cosmos. The evolutionary view begins with atoms and the void. It moves through various organic forms and presently sees the human brain as the highest intelligence in the known universe. Artificial intelligence holds out the promise of a tangible higher power. If God does not exist — and if aliens aren’t coming to save us — then we must create our own gods.

The problem is that God does exist. Yet those blind to the divine, or impatient for results, want their own custom-built gods. This is an old tendency. But unlike ancient statues, the new idols speak in a clear robotic voice. Their words descend from the world order’s apex.

As AI becomes more sophisticated, so will the cults surrounding them, until they become full-blown religions. You may refuse to bow to these digital gods, just as early Christians denied the Roman emperor’s divinity, or Israelites rejected the gods of Egypt and Babylon. In terms of worldly power, such doubts may be irrelevant. If today’s techno-cults reach a critical mass of believers, we’ll be clinging to our Bibles and guns under a cyborg theocracy. ✎



Artwork created via AI.



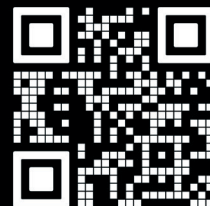
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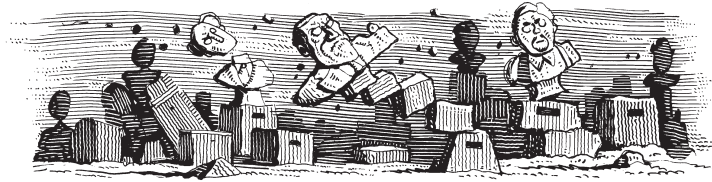
Pacific Legal Foundation has celebrated **fifteen Supreme Court victories**, with two more cases to be decided this term. One day we're arguing in court against a federal agency; the next we're defending a small business owner.

We've been fighting for Americans' constitutional rights since **1973**—that's 50 years of long nights, 50 years agonizing over losses, 50 years toasting our victories, and 50 years helping clients stand up to government overreach. **And we're just getting started.**



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‘Deviate Sexual Intercourse’ and Its Consequences

The price of manufacturing new “rights” has become increasingly evident.

by **Robert Stacy McCain**



Robert Stacy McCain is contributing editor at The American Spectator and is the author of Sex Trouble: Essays on Radical Feminism and the War Against Human Nature.

Much of the madness over gender and sexuality that now consumes our culture can be traced to one night in November 1998 when police in Houston, Texas, responded to a call about an alleged “weapons disturbance.” The facts of the case are disputed, but the police arrested John Geddes Lawrence Jr., fifty-five, and Tyron Garner, thirty-one, and charged the two men with “deviate sexual intercourse.” The suspects were released on bond after a night in jail and ultimately fined two hundred dollars each. It was a rather trivial incident that didn’t make headlines at the time. Within fifteen years, however, this crime led to the White House’s being lit in rainbow colors as the Obama administration celebrated the Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which made same-sex marriage the law of the land.

The late Justice Antonin Scalia saw it coming. Scalia’s dissent in the 2003 case *Lawrence v. Texas* — the result of an appeal concerning that 1998 arrest in Houston — is worth reading in its entirety for anyone wishing to understand how American society has spent the past two decades spiraling downward into depravity.

What Scalia foresaw was that the six-to-three Supreme Court majority in the 2003 *Lawrence* decision, which overturned the Texas law against sodomy, had not only paved the way for legalizing same-sex marriage but also taken a sledgehammer to centuries of common-law legal precedent. This had the effect of denying legislatures the authority to prohibit behavior deemed “immoral and unacceptable” by a majority of citizens. In his dissent, Scalia said that the Texas law struck down by the court advanced “the same interest furthered by criminal laws against fornication, bigamy, adultery, adult incest, bestiality, and obscenity,” as well as laws against prostitution. Scalia called attention to a passage in the majority’s ruling that claimed to find “an emerging awareness that liberty gives substantial protection to adult persons in deciding how to conduct their private lives in matters pertaining to sex.”

That this nebulous and hitherto unheralded “awareness” should become the basis of constitutional law was clearly remarkable, as was the fact that the *Lawrence* decision reversed the Supreme Court’s own prior ruling in the *Georgia Bowers v. Hardwick* case from just 17 years earlier. Citing the *Bowers* ruling, Scalia eviscerated the *Lawrence* majority’s ludicrous claim that the Texas sodomy law somehow violated the due process clause

of the Fourteenth Amendment: “Sodomy was a criminal offense at common law and was forbidden by the laws of the original 13 States when they ratified the Bill of Rights. In 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, all but 5 of the 37 States in the Union had criminal sodomy laws.”

Despite this clear history contradicting the claims of the Supreme Court’s majority ruling, the *Lawrence* decision nonetheless became the de facto law of the land, and what we may call the “emerging awareness doctrine” has wreaked havoc for the past two decades. If even the most well-established legal traditions of a nation can be swept aside at a whim, who can say what barriers will be the next to fall? Whither shall this “emerging awareness” lead us?

Sex, Gender, and the Cult of Equality

A major aspect of the madness that has warped twenty-first-century American culture is a fanatical concept of Equality (with a capital E, denoting its status as an object of quasi-religious devotion). Adherents of the Cult of Equality view almost any *difference* between categories of people as evidence of *oppression*. Insofar as people can be defined as distinct groups, and any differences of social or economic status exist between these groups, those of lower status are considered to be victims who are being oppressed by those of higher status. The Cult of Equality then demands that action be undertaken in the name of social justice to remedy the alleged oppression. Take, for example, the “systemic racism” that activists blamed for the May 2020 death of George Floyd.

What’s that you just muttered to yourself, dear reader? Something about *facts* and *logic*? But didn’t I just tell you that the Cult of Equality is quasi-religious in nature? Facts and logic have no impact on the beliefs of a mob rioting over some nonsensical social justice claim. Remember when a CNN chyron infamously described the vandalism, looting, and arson that destroyed much of Kenosha, Wisconsin, in the summer of 2020 as “fiery but mostly peaceful protests”? The same irrationality that inspired such chaos over the claim of racial oppression can be witnessed in regard to claims of oppression involving what is nowadays often called “the LGBTQIA+ community.”

However prophetic Scalia’s warnings about the consequences of the 2003 *Lawrence* ruling and its emerging awareness doctrine may have been, even Scalia failed to foresee how the transgenderism craze would seize hold after the fight for same-sex marriage ended with the 2013 victory that cast the White House in rainbow colors. There is a reason why what used to be called the “gay rights movement” is now referred to by an awkward acronym. It is precisely because the transgender *T* now plays such a dominant role in the movement’s agenda that the lesbian *Ls* and gay *Gs* are scarcely heard from anymore. (Don’t even get me started on the bisexual *Bs* and the queer *Qs*, with their largely imaginary victimhood.) Transgenderism is not so much a *movement* of political activism as it is an *industry* with a powerful lobby. There is big money to be made from the dispensing of hormones, and battalions of therapists and surgeons earn lucrative incomes from the process of “transition” from male to female or vice versa.

Transgender, Inc., as we may call it, also operates a powerful publicity machinery to crank out pro-transgender propaganda. TV shows with transgender themes have proliferated since *RuPaul’s Drag Race* debuted in 2009, and the teenage transition of “Jazz Jennings” (née Jaron Bloschinsky) became the subject of a reality TV series, *I Am Jazz*, in 2015. Hollywood and Madison Avenue avidly promote the inclusion of transgender actors (e.g., Hunter Schafer) and models (e.g., Valentina Sampaio) in

TV, movies, and advertising, and there is an effective blacklist of anyone who expresses any criticism of this escalating trend.

Did I say “escalating”? It would be more accurate to say transgenderism is *skyrocketing*, especially among young people. A 2022 study found that, between 2017 and 2021, the number of minors ages six to seventeen in the United States diagnosed with gender dysphoria roughly tripled, with more than forty thousand such diagnoses in 2021. Even this startling statistic, however, is likely the tip of a much larger iceberg, as many young people

who identify as transgender do not seek treatment until they become adults, and, among young adults ages eighteen to twenty-five, transgender identification is twice as high as it is for those twenty-five and older.

In the ideology of the Cult of Equality, all of these people are viewed as victims of oppression. This means that the rest of us are required to watch what we say about them, lest we express transphobia. It is now an article of faith among advocates for the LGBTQIA+ community that the expression of transphobia is deadly. The Human Rights Campaign issues reports about “fatal transgender violence” and other “hate crimes motivated by anti-transgender bias.” According to the HRC, there were thirty-two such fatalities among “transgender and gender-expansive people” in 2023. However, “anti-transgender bias” doesn’t seem to have been a factor in most of these violent deaths. Many involved the kind of more or less random shootings that plague urban America. There is no reason to believe that, for example, the shooting death of Thomas “Tom Tom” Robinson in Calumet City, Indiana, was motivated by bias. This is just another person in the metro Chicago area who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nor was there any claim of a transphobic motive in the domestic quarrel that ended the life of Camdyn Rider in Winter Haven, Florida. Yet these and dozens of similar deaths are counted as statistical evidence of bias by the Human Rights Campaign. If you should express doubt about what these statistics prove, well, your skepticism just proves you’re guilty of transphobia. To deny the universality of transgender victimhood is to endorse such oppression, you see.

The Price of Manufacturing New ‘Rights’

Since the triumph of the gay marriage crusade, there has been a noticeable (and noncoincidental) erosion of free speech and religious liberty. The Supreme Court’s decisions have been widely interpreted as having made it illegal to criticize the LGBTQIA+ community or to oppose any policy advocated on behalf of the aforesaid community. Making certain people exempt from

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entire generations of
young people.



criticism is what prohibitions on so-called hate speech are really about. It turns out, then, that the pursuit of Equality (again, the capital *E* denotes its quasi-religious status) results in a zero-sum-game approach to rights. In the process of manufacturing a constitutional “right” to gay marriage, our judicial overlords have shortchanged us, reducing those rights protected by the guarantees of the First Amendment.

Consider, for example, the annual “Hate Map” published by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which includes multiple churches and religious organizations among the various “anti-LGBTQ” hate groups it monitors. Without knowing what is preached from the pulpit of, for example, True Light Pentecost Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina, or All Scripture Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, it’s impossible to say whether these congregations are more “hateful” on this subject than any other church faithful to the text of the Bible.

Certainly, a Christian might cite scriptural authority for disapproving of homosexual behavior — Romans 1:18–32 seems rather explicit in this regard — and maybe the churches named by the SPLC are more outspoken on this subject than some other denominations. But where is the evidence that such preaching constitutes such a public safety menace as to justify the inclusion of these churches on a “hate map” alongside neo-Nazi prison gangs and other groups known to perpetrate terroristic violence?

Even if some of the churches listed by the SPLC are associated with extreme rhetoric or fringe theology, shouldn’t there be a provable connection to criminal activity before they are deemed “hate groups”? One of the religious groups listed on the “hate map,” D. James Kennedy Ministries of Coral Ridge, Florida, sued the SPLC for defamation, but the case was

dismissed, and an appeal was denied certiorari by the Supreme Court. Dissenting from the denial of certiorari, Justice Clarence Thomas noted:

Coral Ridge maintained that although it ‘opposes homosexual conduct’ based on its religious beliefs, it is in no sense a ‘hate group.’... SPLC’s ‘hate group’ designation lumped Coral Ridge’s Christian ministry with groups like the Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazis. It placed Coral Ridge on an interactive, online ‘Hate Map’ and caused Coral Ridge concrete financial injury by excluding it from the AmazonSmile donation program.

Thomas’s last point is very important. Being listed as a “hate group” by the SPLC can result in an organization being denied participation in payment systems, part of what is known as “de-banking.” In order to protect gay people from “hate,” in other words, banks will refuse to do business with organizations or individuals accused of “hate speech.” The threat of such treatment thereby serves as a sort of financial blackmail against anyone who might be tempted to express opposition to whatever policies are advocated for on behalf of the LGBTQIA+ community, even if the religious motives for such opposition are clear. Anyone who can’t see how this agenda threatens First Amendment freedoms is blind.

None of these incidents were predicted by Justice Scalia when he warned about the consequences of the Supreme Court’s 2003 decision striking down the Texas sodomy law. Yet it is clear that the *Lawrence* ruling was the opening of a Pandora’s Box from which chaos has emerged. Indeed, all this trouble started with a petty crime in Houston, for which the culprits paid a mere two-hundred-dollar fine. ❧



Those Who Disavow God Entrust Their Faith to Aliens and Bigfoot

More Americans believe in extraterrestrials than attend church.

by Daniel J. Flynn

In the 1950s and 1960s, 98 percent of Americans believed in God. Now, according to Gallup, just 74 percent do.

This would seem to represent the advancement of the forces of reason over the forces of faith — except Americans did not stop believing in things beyond sensory perception when they stopped believing in God.

A YouGov survey reports that 57 percent of Americans believe in aliens, 31 percent believe in Bigfoot, and 18 percent believe in the Chupacabra. (You might not believe in the Chupacabra, but the Chupacabra believes in you.)

Match.com found that 46 percent of singles believe in astrological compatibility, up from 32 percent in 2022. Any Pisces mismatched with an Aries without first consulting the stars could tell you the wisdom of always asking, “What’s your sign?”

The decline in belief in God is but one metric that shows a collapse in religious faith. Just 43 percent of Americans now report attending a religious service a few times a year, according to the Public Religion Research Institute. Americans notice immigration altering their country. Unnoticed goes the more profound, unrelated trend of a churchgoing people becoming nothingarians

and worshippers of the Sunday morning crossword puzzle.

“When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing,” G.K. Chesterton famously observed. “They then become capable of believing in anything.”

The aphorism finds 2024 affirmation in the fact that politics has become the de facto religion for those who no longer subscribe to religion. The Church of St. Progress, though lacking a god, a hereafter, and much else that is positive in traditional churches, registers high in terms of fanaticism, sins, heretics, apostates, excommunication, catechesis, devils, and, especially, scolds. No longer finding meaning in religion, they have made a religion of their politics.

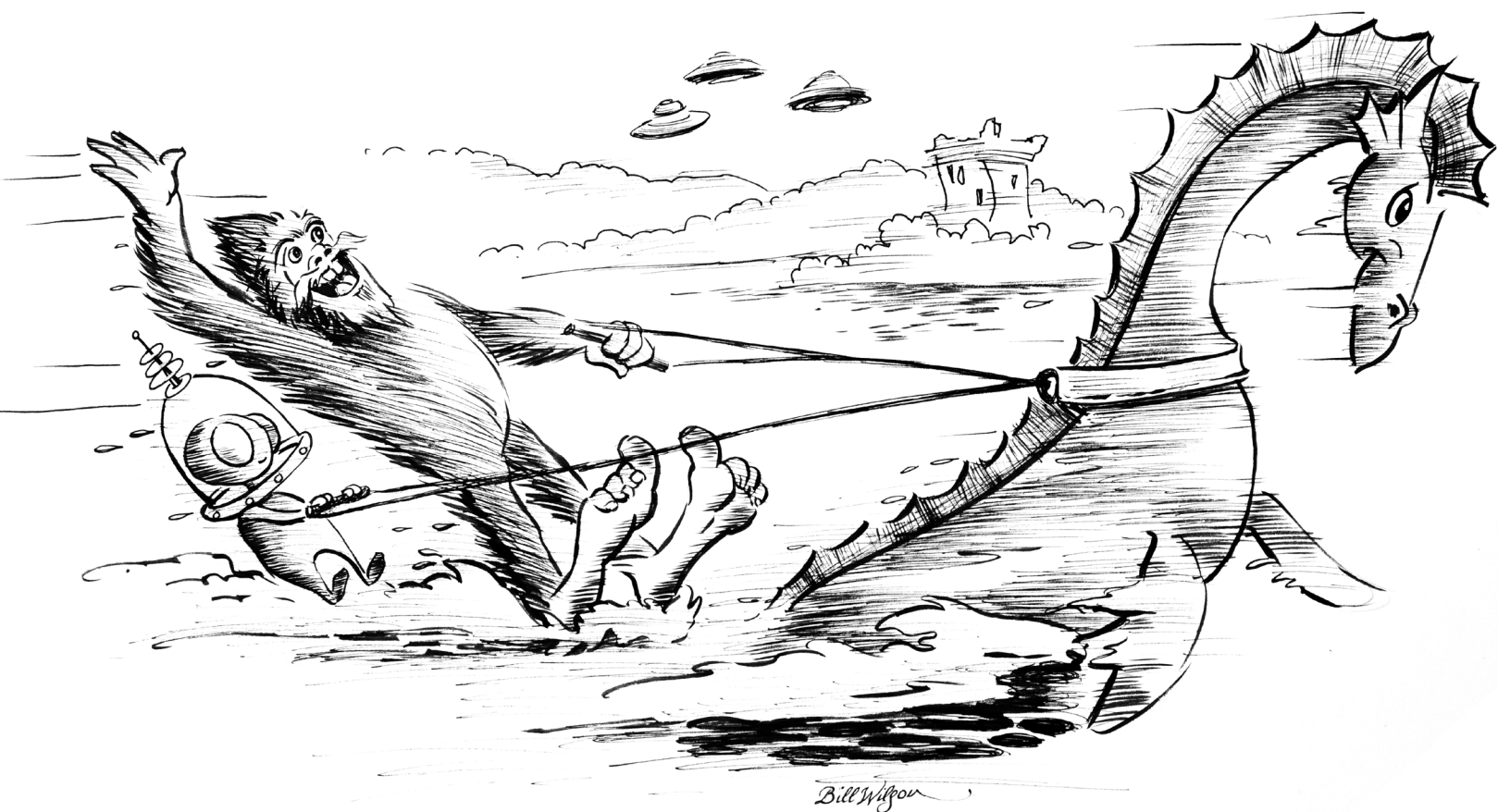
At its worst, at least in North America, this all-consuming political mindset jails political opponents, takes away the livelihoods of comedians who unveil the wrong punchlines, and rewards not excellence but obedience to prevailing dogma.

In more subtle ways, revealed by public polling but rarely in any convincing way in everyday life, the congregants of the Church of St. Progress advertise their intolerance.

A year after the last presidential election, a Generation Lab/*Axios* poll of



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college students demonstrated a massive intolerance gap between the parties. Democrats were far more likely to refuse to shop at a business (71 percent to 31 percent), date (41 percent to 7 percent), or befriend (37 percent to 5 percent) someone who voted for the opposing candidate than were Republicans.

A *Harvard Business Review* study of managers and MBA students found that describing a company's values as conservative led to respondents being 26 percent less likely to buy its products and 44 percent less likely to apply for a job there. Conversely, describing a company's values as liberal led to no change among

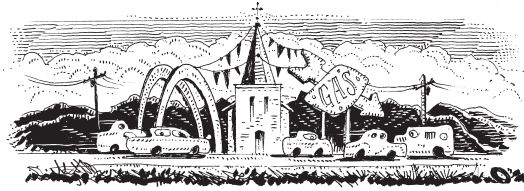
respondents. The authors described the bias as "entirely driven by participants who identified as Democrats."

One finds the Nicene Creed of this irreligious religion on lawns in leafy suburbs. "In this house," one line of it proclaims, "we believe science is real." This means microbes would represent life on Mars, but a fully formed baby inside her mother does not constitute it; a college athlete with Barney Fife's Adam's apple, Richard Kiel's voice, and John Holmes's penis amounts to a woman just as much as does Lana Del Rey or Mikaela Shiffrin; and eleven-year-olds must take the shot just because. The lab coat takes the place of the collar in conveying authority.

Science, a tool to inquire, becomes a cudgel to silence once it is religionized.

"To rely on the evidence of the senses and of reason is heresy and treason," social philosopher Eric Hoffer observed of such people in *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. "It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible. What we know as blind faith is sustained by innumerable unbeliefs."

We live in the era of unbelief. So thoroughly does it overtake those who show themselves to be "capable of believing in anything" that they insist they take nothing on faith, except, perhaps, their lack of skepticism of their own skepticism. ❧



Young Believers Are Fueling a Renaissance of Catholic Culture

These young traditionalists are reclaiming the heritage lost after Vatican II.

by **Mary Frances Myler**

The Sisters of Charity of New York announced last year that it will not accept any new members. The announcement was more of a formality than anything else, as no one has joined the order in more than twenty years. Founded by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1817 and formally recognized as the Sisters of Charity of New York in 1846, the order had more than 1,300 sisters in the 1960s. Today, only 154 sisters remain, and their median age is eighty-five years old.

The Sisters of Charity of New York isn't the only Catholic religious order with an aging population and no new vocations. As of 2022, four out of five orders had no new vocations, according to a study conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). Amid this decline, it's easy to spot the orders that continue to receive new vocations, in part because they're still wearing habits.

In an attempt to "modernize" Catholicism following Vatican II, many religious orders

abandoned their traditional garb — the Sisters of Charity of New York among them. Nuns traded in their habits for modest blouses and skirts or slacks. But it appears that young people don't want 1970s-style Catholicism. Ninety-three percent of women who entered religious life in 2022 chose an order that wears the habit, as did 65 percent of men. What's more, eight in ten entrants to religious life were "very much" influenced by their religious order's practice of wearing a habit.

Desire for traditional habits isn't the only signifier that today's young Catholics are hungry for something different. Each generation of Catholics is smaller than the one preceding it, but those who remain faithful are noticeably drawn toward more traditional, orthodox expressions of Catholicism.

Since 2000, more than half of newly ordained priests have self-described as theologically orthodox, and that number has grown each year. A study by the Catholic Project found that more than 80 percent of priests ordained since 2020 are doctrinally orthodox, with less than 5 percent calling themselves "very progressive" in matters of Catholic theology. By comparison, at least 80 percent of priests ordained between 1960 and

1980 identified as theologically progressive or as "middle-of-the-road" on Catholic doctrine.

And just as recently ordained priests are likely to be theologically orthodox, so too are recent entrants to religious life. Three in four entrants in 2022 said they were "very much attracted" by their order's fidelity to the Church.

Changes in broader American culture explain the somewhat recent swing toward traditionalism. Monsignor James Patrick Shea provides a paradigm for understanding the relationship between personal faith and culture in his book *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*. In *Christendom*, Christianity is deeply entangled within the broader culture; but in an apostolic age, the prevailing culture is either hostile to or unfamiliar with Christianity.

In order to withstand the gravity of secular culture, Catholics must cling not only to the teachings of their faith but also to their distinct culture. When surveying young adults who had been raised Catholic, sociologists Nicolette Manglos-Weber and Christian Smith found that those who identified as Catholic and still practiced their faith were generally "more likely to have

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grown up with parents who were committed, vocal, and reasonably well educated about Catholicism.” That is, younger Catholics engaged with faith as an integrated way of life, not just as an intellectual assent or Sunday morning obligation.

During the era of Vatican II, numerous American Catholics dispensed with the trappings of Catholic culture and instead sought conformity with modern Christianity. Nuns traded their habits for lay clothing, church architecture imitated Protestant styles, and guitars and tambourines replaced Gregorian chant and the organ. Suddenly, after thousands of years of continuity, Catholics walked away from their distinctive culture. Today, many Catholics are reclaiming it.

A growing number of young people are gravitating toward more traditional expressions of their faith, whether through joining habited religious orders or simply seeking out a parish that incorporates traditional hymns into its Mass. For some, this choice is a deliberate rejection of

modernity’s emptiness in favor of a form of worship passed down through the ages. Others are guided by an instinctive desire for tradition or an attraction to beauty.

This rekindled interest in the Church’s age-old treasures is not without its opposition. To some Catholics, chapel veils and altar rails are signs of regression, not endurance. Some people genuinely prefer their 1970s–style Catholicism and do not understand the resurgence of traditionalism. But, as one priest told the Catholic Project, most young priests today are theologically conservative because “the super-progressive wing didn’t really replicate” itself. In terms of theological Darwinism, traditional Catholicism seems best equipped to survive — not least because it has already endured for thousands of years.

Much of the so-called rise in orthodoxy among young Catholics is more accurately understood as a recovery of the Catholic culture that was stripped from the life of the Church during the Vatican II era. In

many cases, it marks a return to the actual norms established by the Church during the council, whose proclamations are often incorrectly interpreted as granting *carte blanche* for wide-ranging liturgical changes. (Unbeknownst to most people, for example, Gregorian chant remains the Church’s preferred form of music within the Mass.)

Today’s young Catholics embrace the task ahead of them. Living the faith amid the onslaught of secular culture — and raising a new generation of Catholics in that hostile environment — has led many to reclaim the traditions passed down through the Church for generations. These young traditionalists recognize that the continued practice of Catholicism demands more than intellectual assent to doctrine; it also requires a commitment to a shared culture and way of life, both in the pews and in the fabric of their daily lives.

Perhaps this new orthodoxy isn’t the folly of youth but rather the wisdom to identify that which endures. 🐦





Eastern Orthodoxy: Why an Ancient Faith Grows in Modern Times

It is a church comfortable with the profound mysteries of our world.

by Steven Greenhut

As a journalist, it's easy to turn around copy on any of the public policy and political debates of the day, but I struggle to write about religious issues in a meaningful way. My *American Spectator* columns detail the usual insanity in the California Capitol and Washington, DC, but what can I say about matters of faith, where my usual tool — reason — isn't entirely useful?

I grew up Jewish, the son of a Nazi Holocaust survivor. Our religion was important, but I was raised in a secular home where religious observance didn't reflect any deep expression of faith. That led me on a journey to try to make sense of this inexplicable world.

I became a Christian thanks to the patient evangelism of some friends in a college fellowship. My wife, Donna, still finds it a bit funny that the person who played the most significant role in this East Coast Jewish kid's conversion was a traveling pastor from rural Kentucky. God does indeed work in mysterious ways. Donna, who grew up Catholic, and I eventually were married in the Episcopal Church and then attended various denominations as we embarked on our careers and started a family.

Nearly thirty years ago, we found ourselves living in a small city in Ohio where I worked as the editorial page editor of a daily newspaper. We bopped from church to church and found the experience depressing. After attending a service that combined smarmy music with altar calls, I had finally had enough. I thought that there must be an alternative to emotional nondenominational services and atrophied mainstream congregations. I was a political writer, but I was tired of politics in the church.

At that time, a former Baptist minister showed up in town to start an Eastern Orthodox mission. I attended with a good friend who was also the newspaper's religion editor. We read everything we could about Orthodoxy, which I had previously chalked up as the province of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Greece. I dragged along my wife, who at first came kicking and screaming. We hosted the fledgling mission in our living room and became members. My kids have been raised Orthodox.

Recent news reports point to growth in Orthodox churches in the United States as people with no related ethnic affiliation or Orthodox background have flocked to join. A *Wall Street Journal* article reported last year that “[s]ome [Orthodox] pastors across the



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country report growth of their flocks by 15% or more in a single year owing to conversions, defying an overall trend of decline similar to that in other denominations.”

The article added that the COVID-19 pandemic, “with all its social and economic disruption,” played a strong role in “usher[ing] in newcomers” who were “drawn by the ancient faith’s traditional teachings and the beauty of its worship, which prominently features the veneration of icons.” Many of the new converts, it further reported, are conservative young men.

Actually, the church’s growth in America goes back to the mid-1980s, around a decade before my wife and I joined. Metropolitan Philip Saliba, a leader of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in America (based in the Middle East), “made the controversial decision in the mid-1980s to embrace waves of evangelical converts (I am one of them),” wrote Terry Mattingly in his *Eastern Christian Insights* blog in 2014 after the metropolitan’s death. He reported that the number of Antiochian parishes subsequently increased from 66 to 275.

American Orthodox Church leaders finally began to treat the church as one that has a vital mission in America and doesn’t merely provide (important as it may be) a place for religious observance for immigrant communities and their descendants. The church I attend in Sacramento was originally composed of converts. The one I attended in Southern California always made clear that it was a pan-Orthodox church, meaning it was welcoming to everyone, regardless of their ethnic background.

There is sometimes a tension between those two groups. However, in well-received remarks delivered at a Greek Orthodox event in New York in 2004, Metropolitan Philip said: “I told them that if I could sum up this new [church] constitution, I would begin with the words, ‘We the people.’ We cannot ignore this truth — Americans are infested with freedom. We cannot ignore that our churches are in America and we are here to stay.”

What can Orthodoxy bring to Americans?

I was initially drawn to the beauty of its liturgies and icons and its embrace of church history. I learned to appreciate the long and grueling schedule of observances and fasts. I joke that at each service we have a service, the service before the service, the service after the service, and then the service after the service after the service. It takes conditioning to attend Pascha (Easter) liturgy at 11 p.m. and finish at 2 a.m. — and then break the weeks-long fast with fellow parishioners. But it’s wonderful.

Beyond these observations, Orthodoxy has a network of monasteries; an emphasis on prayer, contemplation, and repentance; and a focus on the lives of the saints and on the next world. It attempts to provide a respite from the fixations of the day. It offers theological differences (you can read about those on your own), but it mostly offers an otherworldly outlook — one that is comfortable with the profound mysteries of our world and doesn’t try to systematize and explain everything.

As the fifth-century bishop Saint John Chrysostom wrote: “I know that God is everywhere, and I know that he is everywhere in his whole being. But I do not know how he is everywhere.... My reason fails to grasp how it is possible for an essence to exist when that essence has received its existence neither from itself nor from another.”

So, as Metropolitan Philip explained, Americans bring an important perspective to the table, but I believe Orthodoxy is growing in our country because it brings something Americans need. ✨



Young Writers Program

Meet our intern team from the past year!

Elizabeth Crawford, Hillsdale College, '24
Hunter Oswald, Grove City College, '24
Grace Reilly, Grove City College, '24
Mason Stauffer, Utah Valley University, '22
Emma Verrigni, Hillsdale College, '26
Matthew Xiao, Cornell University, '23
Liliana Zylstra, Grove City College, '25

And veteran members of our Young Writers Program:

Elyse Apel, Hillsdale College '24:
social media coordinator

Mary Frances Myler, University of Notre Dame '22:
contributing editor

S.A. McCarthy, McDaniel College '19:
contributing editor

Nate Hochman, Colorado College '21:
writer

Stephan Kaputska, Quinnipiac University '21:
development associate

Aubrey Gulick, Hillsdale College '23:
reporter

Lucia VanBerkum, Hillsdale College '23:
associate editor

Ellie Gardey, University of Notre Dame '21:
reporter and associate editor



A Rabbi, a Pastor, and a Bishop Defend a Shared Goal

They stand together, facing the abyss of secularism and atheism.

by **Dov Fischer**

I grew up in the 1960s as an Orthodox Jew in a semi-parochial community in Brooklyn, New York, a neighborhood tucked between Flatbush, Flatlands, and Canarsie. Although very few of our neighbors were Orthodox, the community must have been 95 percent Jewish. Kathy was the one Catholic kid on the block. Hers was the only window in a half-mile radius that did not display a menorah kindling in December. Since she was the only non-Jew in our world, we assumed all non-Jews were Catholic. Protestants were exotic. There were Italian Catholics, Irish Catholics, Polish Catholics, and Kathy.

All we knew about Catholics — i.e., Christians — was that there had been Crusades in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries assembled to liberate the Holy Land from Muslims, but somehow the English, French, and German Crusaders always managed to get detoured along the Seine or Rhine rivers and end up instead massacring whole Jewish communities. Some communities had outposts that hid Jews, and some bishops risked their own safety to offer Jews sanctuary. But these massacres became indelibly impressed on the Jewish consciousness. To this day, Ashkenazic Jews (descendants of Northern and East European Jewry) recite a prayer every Shabbat morning to remember the martyrs of the Edicts of 4856 (the Hebrew year coinciding with the 1095–1096 First Crusade). A direct cultural and sociological line connects that Holocaust with the one that returned to Germany a millennium later.

In time, we also learned about the Catholic Church's Spanish Inquisition, which was established by Spain's Queen Isabella I and King Ferdinand II. It spread on the Iberian Peninsula to Portugal in 1497 when Portugal's king, Manuel I, married their daughter. The Inquisition tortured and burned Jews. As those two world powers explored the New World, they brought the Inquisition with them. That drove Jews out of South America and into solidly Protestant New Amsterdam. That's why so many American Jews ended up in what became New York.

Accordingly, like my classmates, I grew up unsure about non-Jews. Did they all despise us, dating back to the biblical Esau's hatred for his brother, Jacob? Did they really believe the worst canards? I could never ask Kathy. I was six or seven, and so was she. No way to know.



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I attended yeshiva Jewish parochial school. As in the movie *Hester Street*, I wondered a bit, as did the newly immigrated Yiddish-speaking Jewish woman protagonist from Russia, who found herself in the almost exclusively Jewish Lower East Side of Manhattan, “Where do the Goyyim keep in this country?” Everywhere she went — Delancey Street, Rivington Street, Hester Street — all she saw were Jews. “The Goyyim must keep in a different place, no?” she asked. Likewise, I just did not know where I stood with non-Jews. In an abundance of caution, I always assumed the worst. It is easier to be pleasantly surprised than to be crushed with disappointment or, even worse, blindsided.

I experienced my first full encounter with non-Jews when I attended Columbia University, but I knew that was not exactly real life. Even more strangely, I ran for one of three seats to represent the entire undergraduate student body in the University Senate, and I got elected. Everyone at that leftist mecca knew they were voting for a yarmulke-wearing anti-Communist activist for Soviet Jewry. But they liked my gumption. The key issue of the day was tuition increases, and the feeling was: “If this guy can put up half the fight for us that he does for Russian Jews, he’s our guy.” But I still knew I was not living in the real world.

I got another wake-up twenty years later when, as a law student, I was elected to be chief articles editor of the *UCLA Law Review*. I later learned confidentially that I had been one of the two finalists for the role of editor-in-chief but had been voted down over

concerns that I would not be able to fulfill the role because I do not work on Friday nights and Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath. So there was that. Ultimately, that number two slot served me well these past thirty years, as it helped me win one of the most coveted federal appellate judicial clerkships in America — I would say the best — as well as adjunct professorships. Indeed, my ultimate moment of Enlightenment came while clerking in Louisville.

Federal appellate judges each get to hire three clerks, and Judge Danny Boggs had selected two superstars (plus me for entertainment). One of them, a non-Jewish lady from Knoxville, Tennessee, whose family grew tobacco, one day was bantering with me at a coffee shop: “Y’knowwe, Dowve,” she said in her Southern twang, “until y’all came into my life, I never gave a thote about Jews.”

Wow! I followed up: “Not at all, Kae? Not in Sunday school? Nothing bad about us at all?” And she said: “Dowve, I hate to disappoint yew, but Jews don’t matter in Knoxville. Only one thing matters.”

Me: What’s that?

She: Gradin’ backer. (Brooklyn translation: grading bundles of tobacco for auction.)

The years have marched on. Something has been changing theologically in post-Obama America. I don’t know what tomorrow may hold, and we Jews always have an eye gazing toward Zion, partly from biblical affinity, partly because Israel

is to us what Italy is to Italian Americans and Ireland to Irish Americans, and partly because Israel is all we have when the party ends elsewhere. But America no longer is about Christians on Team A and Jews on Team B. Rather, in today's America, G-d-fearing and Bible-believing devout Christians and Orthodox Jews stand on one side, astride the abyss of secularism and atheism on the other. That is the new landscape.

In 2008, I finally first encountered a Protestant minister. We each were in transition; he was building his new church, and I was establishing my new *shul* (synagogue). We met at the kosher coffee shop in Irvine. We turned out to share a great many values, with but one stereotypical nuance worthy of a “three-clerics-walk-into-a-bar” joke: he, the Gentile, had been an NHL goalie, and I had been a law professor. But we shared common concerns about Barack Obama's efforts to erode America's religious fabric. Our mutually cherished values were under siege given the rise of abortion on demand, homosexual “marriage,” and public cursing, as well as the breakdown in the social order. Pastor John spoke his blessing on Israel and the Jews, and I reciprocated. We bonded, and we have been friends now for sixteen years.

And then I had another revelation. Orange County religious leaders held an urgent meeting to discuss Obama's efforts to force Catholics and others to insure employees' birth control costs. As we discussed the Obama blight, a Catholic lay leader invited me to confer with the bishop of the 1.3-million-strong fifty-eight-church diocese in Orange County. And so I met with the late Bishop Tod Brown. It was quite something.

Bishop Brown explained that he knew most heterodox rabbis in Orange County but that never before had he encountered one of me: an Orthodox rabbi. We talked. I shared that we Orthodox Jews believe that every word of the Torah is true. He asked, “But Jews do not literally believe that the Red Sea split or that everyone stood at Mount Sinai and G-d spoke the Ten Commandments, right?”

I answered, “Well, actually, we do.” He continued, “But you believe abortion is a woman's choice, right?” I said: “Well, actually, we believe our bodies are on loan from G-d, not ours. We may not tattoo them. Assisted suicide is forbidden. We may not cremate them. And the life of the unborn is a life.”

Hmmm.

He asked, “Well, what about gay marriage?” I answered: “Forbidden. And we don't use the word ‘gay’ for ‘homosexual’ and ‘lesbian.’”

Then, he finally asked it. And though it was a strange question, I understood. “Rabbi Fischer, does your denomination really believe these things, or do just you?”

We Orthodox Jews indeed believe all these things. We have grown to nearly a million in America and another two million in Israel. For the first time in Israel's history, for example, a majority of the governing coalition's Knesset members are Orthodox. Those personal exchanges with Pastor John, Bishop Brown, and Bishop Brown's successor, Bishop Kevin Vann, brought home that Orthodox Jews, devout Catholics, and Bible-faithful Protestants all now speak a similar language. We practically can complete each other's sentences. On the question of gender, the Bible speaks only of man and woman. It says

in Genesis: “And G-d created humankind in His image. In the image of G-d He created him. Male and female He created them.” None of us believe that gender is susceptible to reversal by a surgeon's scalpel, implanted contrivances, and some stitching.

Likewise, Bible-faithful Catholics, Protestants, and Jews are as one unable to consecrate same-sex “marriages.” We are bound by a shared belief that the world was called into being by a Creator Who bestowed on His creation guidelines for conduct. Civil society may legislate as times, social pressures, and political calculations dictate, but His law is eternal, a compass that always points true. Homosexual behavior cannot be shoe-horned into Leviticus 18 and 20,

just as prostitution cannot be sanitized as a libertarian value while its immorality is denounced in Deuteronomy 23:18.

We do not believe in assisted suicide. Dr. Jack Kevorkian, who killed many of his patients, was convicted of second-degree murder in 1999 and served eight years in prison. It was murder then, and it is murder now, even if the secularist forces that dominate and manipulate our tools of mass persuasion conspire to redefine murder as though it were life-affirming.

And we are in harmony on our generation's signature religious-cultural controversy: abortion on demand. For all of us devoted to G-d's Word, the life of the unborn is precious. While Bible-believing Catholics, Protestants, and Jews may encounter nuances of difference on fine points of interpretation, we share a common horror over the thirty to forty million lives snuffed out during the half a century since *Roe v. Wade*.

In 1955, Marshall Sklare, the “father of American Jewish sociology,” predicted the demise of Orthodox Judaism in America, calling it “a case study of institutional decay.” Orthodox Jews were not much on the national horizon even a quarter of a century later. Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (D-CT) was quite the anomaly when Al Gore selected him as his 2000 running mate. But the landscape has changed. The Coalition for Jewish Values, founded in 2017, now speaks on public policy for 2,500 Orthodox rabbis in America and is consulted by political figures from both parties. The Orthodox Union, National Council of Young Israel, and Hasidic movements like the Chabad and Satmar number many hundreds of shuls, while the Rabbinical Council of America and the Rabbinical Alliance of America each count close to one thousand Orthodox rabbis in their fraternal associations. Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood, New Jersey, alone boasts eight thousand students. In all, Torah Umesorah numbers more than 760 Orthodox Day Schools educating more than 250,000 children.

Orthodox Jews now are ubiquitous throughout American secular opinion journalism. They include Jeff Jacoby at the *Boston Globe*, Joel Pollak at Breitbart and Sirius XM, Seth Mandel at *Commentary* magazine, and even our own Shmuel Klatzkin and me at *The American Spectator*. Ben Shapiro, with his famous black yarmulka, answers the call too. And newly married Josh Hammer, the opinion editor at *Newsweek*, speaks proudly of having gone completely “legit kosher,” donning *tefillin* every morning, studying Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, and planning to embrace complete Orthodox practice when he has kids *b'ezrat Hashem* (with G-d's help).

Orthodox Judaism has come of age in America. ❧

America no longer is about Christians on Team A and Jews on Team B.



The Regime Should Be Terrified of Conservative Christianity

Red America's newly formed militant political consciousness is rooted in a shared faith identity.

by Nate Hochman

In May 2022, Tucker Carlson took to the airwaves to explain a blitz of recent attacks on American churches. The immediate reason for the attacks, which were carried out by a loose affiliation of left-wing groups, was the leaked draft of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. Activists enraged by the court's dethroning of abortion from its long-standing position as the final telos of the constitutional order had taken it upon themselves to inflict a collective punishment upon all of Christendom. But Carlson sensed something deeper at play: "Modern liberals hate Christianity," he concluded. "Not because it's repressive — but because they are. Any religion that puts God before government is by definition a threat to their power."

It wasn't a particularly new sentiment on the American right. The titles of any number of conservative books published over the past few decades — David Limbaugh's *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging a War Against Christianity*; S.E. Cupp's *Losing Our Religion: The Liberal Media's Attack on Christianity*; or William Donahue's *Secular Sabotage: How Liberals Are Destroying Religion and Culture in America* — testify to the popularity of the thesis in the conservative media market. "There's no question: The left wing ... they hate God,"

Franklin Graham remarked during a recent trip to Israel. ("And," he added, "they hate God's people.")

It's true that the authentic, three-dimensional God of the Bible — not just of fuzzy, isolated passages of Scripture about caring for the poor and being kind to immigrants, but also of Revelations and Leviticus and millstones tied around necks — is unlikely to look too kindly on a fervent devotion to late-term abortion, the chemical castration of healthy young children, and a sexual ethic that makes Sodom and Gomorrah look like Mister Rogers' neighborhood. But in contemporary American culture, the Christian God is only one of many gods — and by no means is He necessarily the most prominent or influential one.

Realistically, progressives are perfectly comfortable with — or even actively favorable to — organized religion, under certain conditions. While the Bush-era phantom menace of "Islamism" may have been overstated, there's no doubt that liberals have proved exceptionally willing to defend, apologize for, and even praise Islam — even conservative forms of Islam whose doctrines are directly at odds with their own. (Burqa-wearing, Human Rights Campaign-endorsed progressive ideologues like Ilhan Omar are perhaps the best personification of this odd alliance of medieval religion and twenty-first-century ideology.) The obvious contradictions

in this coalition occasionally give way to infighting, as was evident in the recent revolts against the Left's LGBT maximalism from Muslim communities in Michigan. But, by and large, Muslims remain in good standing within the intersectional coalition. Presumably Islam, like Christianity, places "God before government," as Carlson put it; nonetheless, studies consistently find that ideological liberalism is linked to more favorable views toward Muslims in America.

Nor does the Left appear too perturbed by at least certain kinds of Christianity. The clergymen (and now clergywomen) of today's mainline Protestant denominations are almost universally liberal, even if segments of their flock are not. The last few octogenarians who still dutifully trundle out of bed every Sunday to attend services at Episcopalian, liberal Lutheran, or Methodist churches encounter a theology that is almost indistinguishable from the Democratic Party platform. Black churches, too, have long served as one of the primary vehicles for left-wing ambitions, from the civil rights marches of the 1960s to the Black Lives Matter agitations of 2014 and 2020. Far from being an antagonist to the Left, black Christianity has given us such staples of modern progressivism as Al Sharpton, Cornel West, the self-proclaimed "pro-choice pastor" Raphael Warnock, and "souls to the polls"-style Democratic Party voter-mobilization operations.

Nate Hochman is a writer at The American Spectator.

So it would not be quite right to say that the Left hates Christianity as such, much less organized religion as a whole. Progressive ire tends to be reserved for certain forms and expressions of Christianity — and, more specifically, certain types of Christians: those who are predominantly white, rural (or, at least, nonurban), politically and theologically conservative, and pro-Trump. These are the unhappy victims of the long, unending procession of left-wing books, think pieces, and media reports on the loathsome character of Trump Country evangelicals, the blossoming cottage industry of hysterical tracts on the specter of “Christian nationalism,” and the sustained campaign of anti-Catholic harassment on behalf of the federal security state.

The most obvious explanation for this hostility is simply that conservative Christian beliefs are at odds with secular liberal doctrine — most notably on such issues as abortion, marriage, and sexual morality. But the Christian Right’s views on such matters aren’t all that far off from some of the religious groups in the Left’s coalition. Less than half of blacks — who are more likely to identify as Christian and vote Democratic than any other racial group — believe abortion is “morally acceptable,” and the largest black Christian denomination in America (the five-million-member Church of God in Christ) is formally pro-life. As of 2018, General Social Survey data showed that blacks are the only racial group in America who still maintain, by a majority, that homosexual sex is “always wrong.” Similarly, a not-insubstantial 42 percent of American Muslims say that abortion should be illegal in “all or most” cases, and, as of 2017, only slightly more than half (52 percent) of American Muslims say that homosexuality should be accepted by society — eleven points lower than the general American public.

The Left’s problem with conservative Christians is not that they believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God; nor that accepting Christ and his Church is the only way to enter the kingdom of God; nor even that abortion, sodomy, and adultery are grave sins. In fact, the problem has very little to do with theology, and it is only incidentally related to religion at all. The fear and disdain that today’s governing cultural regime harbors toward the Christian Right is, at root, a question of power.

While the Religious Right is far less influential now than it was in its 1980s heyday, Christian identity remains one of the most potent organizing forces for Red America. Whether or not Middle Americans still believe in Christian doctrine, they remain loyal to the in-group identity it affords. This is why a substantial segment of Trump’s base comprises self-identified evangelicals who don’t actually attend church. This class of Americans grew in size during the former president’s time in office. The *New York Times* recently reported:

Being evangelical once suggested regular church attendance, a focus on salvation and conversion and strongly held views on specific issues such

as abortion. Today, it is as often used to describe a cultural and political identity: one in which Christians are considered a persecuted minority, traditional institutions are viewed skeptically and Mr. Trump looms large...This is most true among white Americans, who over the course of Mr. Trump’s presidency became more likely to identify as “evangelical,” even as overall rates of church attendance declined. The trend was particularly pronounced among supporters of Mr. Trump: A 2021 Pew Research Center analysis found that white Americans who expressed “warm views” of him were more likely to have begun identifying as evangelical during his presidency than those who did not.

One of the most significant events of the past decade was the birth of a new, militant political consciousness in Red America — a sense of shared identity that invariably seeks to express itself in collective terms. In the struggle between “us” and “them,” the “them” is — broadly, if not always precisely — defined as the left-wing elites, spanning a public-private class of institutions from the federal bureaucracies of Washington, DC, to Wall Street and Silicon Valley. The “us” has manifested in a number of ways: patriots, MAGA, Trump Country, and so on. But “Christian” remains one of the most effective and widely recognized signifiers of the identity, beliefs, worldview, and interests of the right-wing base. The power of that identity is not in the term *Christian* itself but rather in the mass constituency it describes and the basis it provides for organizing and mobilizing that constituency against the regime and its interests.

In this sense, the Left’s hostility to Trump Country Christians is just one expression of its broader hostility to Red America. This demographic, in spite of its declining relative numbers and influence, remains one of the most powerful obstacles to the Left’s ambitions. Its members, spanning from the believing Christians of the Bible Belt to the unchurched evangelicals of Middle America, are the “unassimilated” constituency, sitting outside the ideological reach of the media, the universities, Hollywood, the cultural industry, and the various other institutions that purport to represent the New America. These are the alienated Americans: among white working-class voters in 2016, one of the strongest predictors of support for Trump was agreement with the statement: “I often feel like a stranger in my own land.”

This is the true threat that the Christian Right represents. They are the Old America: the blue-collar conservative “Archie Bunker vote,” the jingoistic flag-waving malcontents who drove hours to hear Donald Trump speak, the “bitter clingers” who Barack Obama famously denounced. They are a nagging reminder of what the country is and has been, rather than what it could be. With every passing day, more and more Americans of this persuasion are learning that their true enemy resides not in some far-flung corner of a foreign nation but in the halls of their own government. And, each day, they are discovering that millions of their fellow countrymen have arrived at the same conclusion.

Perhaps the Left is right to worry. ☞

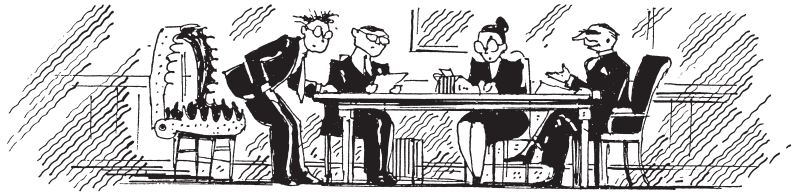


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The Crisis of Christless Conservatism

Its supposed ideological vacuum actually creates a suicidal, relativistic morality.

by S.A. McCarthy

The American conservative movement is fracturing. Although it may be a difficult truth to grapple with, particularly amid the continued dominance of leftism on the cultural battlefield, this impending division is nonetheless necessary. The conservative movement is finally being forced to reckon with the question that is fundamental to its identity and existence: “What the hell are we conserving, anyway?”

In December, various self-identified satanic groups began erecting demonic idols across the country as a means of mocking the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ. It was certainly no surprise when Democrats lauded the spate of satanic idols. Michigan Democratic staffer Samantha Skorka even posted a photo of herself on social media kissing what she called “the sexy satanic Baphomet goat altar” outside her state’s Capitol building. But what was disconcerting was that even Republicans and Christians were recalcitrant to knock down the satanic statues.

In Iowa, pastor and state Representative Jon Dunwell actually issued a defense of the Baphomet-headed, pentagram-holding idol ensconced inside his state’s Capitol building. Although he described the statue as both

“objectionable” and “evil,” Dunwell ultimately determined that it should not be taken down. “I don’t want the state evaluating and making determinations about religions,” he said.

Dunwell’s argument is the best one proffered by the old guard of American conservatism, and it is trotted out time and again, especially when the newer, younger conservative wing starts getting a little rowdy.

At first glance, it appears that the old guard abstains from wielding political power to legislate morality and instead preserves an ideological vacuum in which all ideas and value structures are welcome. But, in fact, by refusing to legislate Christian morality, the old guard actively legislates a suicidal, relativistic morality that props up the fallacious idea that one man’s evil is another man’s god.

This amoral framework is suicidal for several reasons. The first is that it merely sustains a moral no man’s land that will inevitably be seized by hostile forces. America today is rife with evidence of this, from the imposition of LGBT ideology on elementary schoolchildren to the weaponization of courts and federal agencies.

The second and subtler reason is that the preservation of this supposed moral vacuum is not absolute. The old guard does still cling to one moral claim: that there is no such thing as objective moral truth. Such an ideology is impotent in the face of doctrines and dogmas

that do claim to be the objective moral truth. Leftism, for example, vociferously declares itself the unequivocal moral supreme. It is intolerant of all who do not also worship at the altar of LGBTism or pray at the shrine of DEI. Leftism does not and will not accept the terms proposed by the old guard: it will not respect the claim that the nation’s culture is not a battleground but rather a playground for diverse groups to enjoy as they see fit. Leftism will rapidly occupy whatever ground is left open and press fiercely to capture what few corners are denied it.

The old guard’s Christless conservatism has been tried time and again and found wanting each time. It is ineffective, inept, and woefully unaware of its own prodigious shortcomings. The moral code embraced by Christless conservatism is eminently malleable, as it rests not on anything firm, solid, or absolute but instead on the very ideology it claims to reject. Christless conservatism simply picks up whatever tools or weapons have been discarded by yesteryear’s leftism.

This feckless ideology yields such idiotic ideas as a softcore pornographic beer calendar that claims to combat transgenderism. How is degrading, demoralizing, and objectifying women a means of “owning the libs”? Any father who pins up the “Real Women of America” calendar is not defeating transgenderism; rather, he is ingraining in his

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sons a warped and twisted view of the worth and purpose of women and instilling in his daughters the pained declaration that their value and worth rests on sex appeal and a brazen willingness to flaunt it.

Christless conservatism is how gay men are allowed to rent out a woman's womb, rip a newborn baby away from his mother, and call themselves a family. Without an absolute, objective understanding of what a family is, Christless conservatism simply

The old guard does still cling to one moral claim: that there is no such thing as objective moral truth.

accepts whatever broken, mangled, and cannibalized redefinition is handed to it by its cultural overlords. If a family does not begin with one man and one woman united in marriage, then of course the next natural step after calling two men sodomizing each other a "loving couple" is to allow and even encourage them to buy a baby, inaugurating a new era of slave trading.

It's Christless conservatism that has severely crippled the pro-life movement in the wake of *Roe v. Wade's* demise. Lacking an absolute understanding of when life begins and from whom life derives its value, these spineless adherents simply leave abortion decisions up to individual states. They have no incentive to ban the barbaric practice, much less campaign on it.

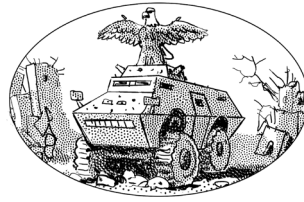
The American conservative movement is facing an identity crisis that cuts to its very core. Over the past several decades, Christless conservatism has shown itself to be meaningless. It proclaims its opposition to leftism only by recycling the very talking points, tools, and ideologies that leftism ceased to find useful years ago.

Christianity offers objective and absolute truth. Its moral dogmas are supreme. Where Christless conservatism is malleable and invertebrate, Christianity is stalwart and immutable. Christless conservatism cannot stand against the onslaught of the Left. It instead stands upon sand and shifts with each wave thrown at it from the Left.

The Left holds dogmas and doctrines. It punishes heretics within its ranks. It proselytizes. Christless conservatism does the opposite.

Without Christian conservatism, America will fall. ✨





Chaplains Needed

Our men-at-arms need Christian ministers to answer the call to serve.

by **Luther Ray Abel**

Eight thousand souls are deployed in a single carrier strike group. The multitude is spread across the aircraft carrier as well as its satellite submarines and destroyers. Every night afloat, the 1MC, the announcement system, sounds. These speakers — which would at other times call sailors to war or carry the captain’s instructions to his men when making ready to leave homeport for up to a year — at 2200 sound the voice of God. A prayer, theologically simple and universal but undoubtedly Christian, passes into the diesel enclosures, the reactor departments, and the ammunition storerooms.

While the prayers are rendered, it is expected that all hands halt in their transits and receive the benediction. Sinners, all — some saved, others agnostic, and a few militantly atheistic — still themselves. The only lights allowed in most parts of the ship at night are red in order to reduce the distance that the illumination travels; it is in this scarlet glow that a sailor can feel the smallness of his sleeping rack (which measures 6.5 feet by 2.25 feet by 2.5

feet) and easily imagine himself as either Ebenezer Scrooge in his grave or Jonah in the belly of a mechanical whale. These moments are a comforting, unsettling, and blessed interlude in a day that, in all other aspects, is a simulacrum of the one that preceded it. The ancient maritime tradition of the evening prayer connects those souls with the multitudes who did the same in those very racks.

Our mariners need ministering, but men of the cloth are difficult to come by. This must change, for almost nowhere is there a more profound need for the spiritually palliative effects of God’s love. Like the country it protects, the military is spiritually adrift. But while civilian pastors must compete with seemingly endless distractions for their flock, the chaplaincy has the opportunity to reach out to servicemen who are away from many of those distractions (phones, freedom, etc.).

While this may sound exploitative to the skeptic — “Ha ha, yes, get the troops Christianized through coercive, state-funded proselytizers” — it’s more true that deployments are a rare opportunity for a young man or woman to reflect on mortality. This was certainly true for me. Adolescence

is frenetic, and kids operate off of preloaded scripts from parents or reject those scripts with just as much carelessness. In such instances, when the specter of death looms large, sailors or marines require a confidant outside the chain of command with whom to work through human emotions and existential dread. This is the good and proper role of the chaplain, who, unlike a psychologist, can do more than offer coping strategies — he can offer eternal perspective while occupying a nonmedical role in a serviceman’s life. Oftentimes, those who seek help through counseling are viewed by shipmates as broken or as a liability. The chaplain, while uniformed, occupies a liminal space between medicine, hierarchy, and fraternity.

Unfortunately for our deployed forces, there simply are not enough chaplains to go around. The U.S. military has fewer than 6,000 chaplains to serve its 1.4 million active-duty members, with the best ratios of chaplains to servicemen going to the Air Force, which has a chaplain for every 146 airmen, and the Army, which has a chaplain for every 162 soldiers. Meanwhile, the Marines and Navy, joint branches, share 800 chaplains between them for an unacceptable

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ratio of one chaplain for every 643 sailors and marines. The Navy recently announced an effort to get chaplains aboard every surface combatant — destroyers, cruisers, and the like — but, for now, the chaplains that are available to a carrier strike group are often exclusively on the carrier. With a crew of over 5,000 on an aircraft carrier, the chaplain has more than enough to occupy himself aboard that one vessel, so he may only visit the other ships a couple of times during a deployment.

Having not worked and eaten alongside the crews of those smaller vessels, the chaplain will find that the sailors have little reason to seek his counsel outside of moments of acute distress — and those who do sign up for the few available appointments will be scrutinized by their peers for weakness. While that scrutiny may seem uncharitable, the reality is that deployments introduce petty rivalries, frustrations, and dramaturgy that civilians — who only deal with their coworkers for 40 hours a week — cannot understand.

Having a full-time chaplain on board offers organic interaction that can more naturally engender personal dialogue in a way a four-hour stop could never produce. A fleet chaplain, Captain Richard Ryan, put it this way in an interview with the military news service Defense Visual Information Distribution Service: “There’s an old saying that no one cares what you know until they know that you care. That saying is rooted in relationships. That’s chaplaincy care. Just being there and being available can mean the world to someone going through a difficult time. It’s those moments that I treasure the most.”

Such a change would be expensive in terms of manpower and would require serious recruiting efforts from Christian sects, especially the Catholic Church. The *Catholic World Report* reports: “In 1965, with U.S. Catholic population around 50 million,

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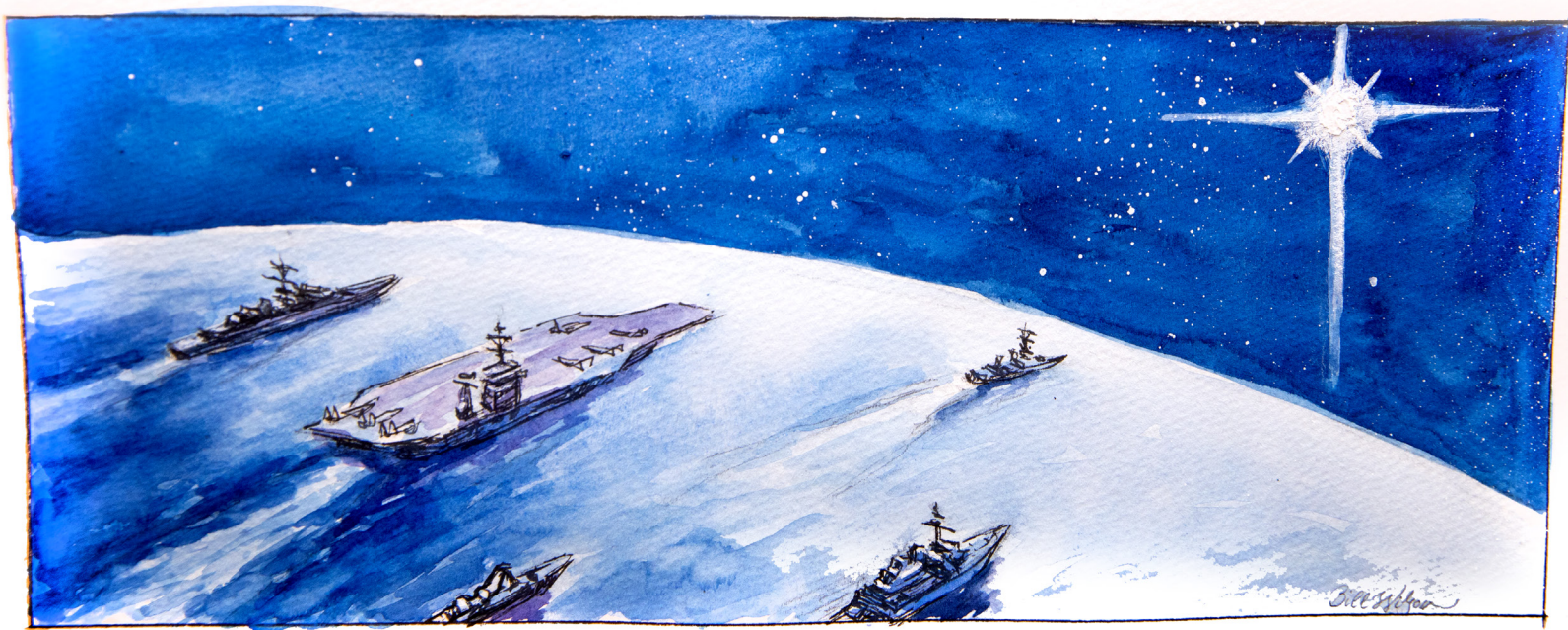
95 percent of the country’s 36,467 diocesan priests were engaged in active ministry; last year, 73.5 million Catholics were being served by 66 percent of the 24,110 priests (most of the other 34 percent were retired). Ordinations dropped from 805 in 1970 to 451 last year.” Still, an increasing cultural unfamiliarity with Catholic rites and representation brought about an episode in which priests were barred from practicing at a VA hospital after a for-profit religious services group won the chaplaincy contract despite having no priests to conduct Roman Catholic services and sacraments. Catholic believers need their priests, and Rome, to fight for them.

Protestants, especially low-church evangelicals, have picked up most of the slack for those who wish to be buried beneath a cross. However, the Protestants aren’t able to entirely fulfill demand either, which is worrisome for a couple of reasons. The first is that it increases the chances that other religious groups — Islam and pagans,

foremost — may fill those positions. Call me bigoted, but I want Christian chaplains. Islam and paganism in their many forms are antithetical to American ideals, and we should tolerate them but do all we can to limit their influence in the armed services.

To be sure, it has never been a more challenging time to serve as a chaplain, outside, of course, of war: chaplains now face demands that they preside over non-Christian ceremonies and questions about how to handle same-sex “marriages.” For instance, there was a controversy at Fort Bragg in North Carolina that involved a Baptist chaplain, Jerry Squires, who faced confinement in military prison because the Army alleged that he had engaged in discrimination by not allowing a same-sex couple to attend a marriage retreat he was leading. The chaplain testified that he had attempted to find another chaplain to take over the retreat, and, because he was endorsed by the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, an organization that does not affirm same-sex marriage, he was within his rights to opt out.

Persecution by protocol and peers is not new to the armed forces, of course, with the story of Desmond Doss, the pacifist-medic-turned-superman in World War II, standing out as a powerful example. Nevertheless, for those of principled faith, serving can be daunting, especially with the current administration’s prejudice against Christian teaching. Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines need chaplains who teach the truth and can be turned to when on patrol in the valley of the shadow of death. It’s a heavy calling, but it will be fulfilled by lesser alternatives if Christian men do not answer it. ❧





The Affirmative Action Roots of Campus Antisemitism

Jewish liberals sowed the seeds when they betrayed their principles.

by Seth Forman

Of all the anti-Israel protests heard around the world since the Hamas attack on Israel last October 7, none have been as profoundly disorienting for American Jews as the eruption of protests and antisemitic sentiment on American college campuses. The Anti-Defamation League reports 505 antisemitic incidents on college campuses within the first three months following the attacks. This deluge represents a direct strike at the liberal civic identity of secular Jews, and it has left critics pondering the fate of Jewish political affiliation, power, and cultural status. When three elite university presidents, sitting before Congress last December, could not confirm

that mobs calling for the genocide of Jews were violating their universities' codes of conduct, one writer for the Jewish journal *Sapir* responded with emblematic indignity: "We need to demand a wholesale change. And if we can't find it in the places we used to love, then we need to walk away."

Reforming higher education will be difficult, yet, for Jews, disengaging from the universities might prove even harder. Among the values that attracted Jews to twentieth-century liberalism — such as the separation of church and state, civic and racial equality, and free speech — none are as closely linked to Jewish welfare as the values of universal education and merit-based advancement. American Jews, particularly those who descend from immigrants from Eastern Europe, where severe occupational restrictions were the rule, have been especially enamored of living in a country where rewards and penalties are distributed based on demonstrations of character and competence.

In America, Jews readily embraced the liberal view that education is the great equalizer among people born to different circumstances — especially regarding higher education, which is seen as meritocracy's gatekeeper. Jews utilized both public schools and higher education to catapult themselves into the

professional middle class and, eventually, a seat at the table of America's most vaunted institutions. As sociologist Stephen Steinberg has written, "While the Jewish passion for education is easily romanticized, the fact is that Jewish immigrants did place high value on education and sent their children to college in disproportionate numbers."

Most Jews from Eastern Europe lacked a formal education when they arrived in the United States by the millions between 1880 and 1925. But by 1950, when only 10 percent of adult males in the US had a college degree, more than 25 percent of Jewish men had completed four or more years of college. By 2000, 75 percent of Jewish men and 62 percent of Jewish women were college graduates — roughly double the rate of their non-Jewish counterparts.

As Charles Silberman documented in his 1985 book *A Certain People*, the vast expansion of American higher education after World War II was driven not only by a flood of federal funding but also by Jewish students and faculty. By the 1950s and '60s, Jews, who never accounted for more than 3 percent of the US population, constituted about one-third of Ivy League enrollments. By 1975, they made up 10 percent of all college faculty and 20 percent of faculty members at elite universities. At elite law schools, Jews made up 38 percent of faculty.



Seth Forman is Associate Editor of *The American Spectator*.

Even as larger numbers of Jews intermarry with the non-Jewish population and fall away from their ethnic mores, the Jewish veneration of higher education seems to persist. Political scientist Samuel J. Abrams found in 2022 that fully 80 percent of Jewish adults reported growing up in households where they “were expected to pursue a degree at a four-year school.” This is roughly twice the national average.

Given the centrality of education to Jewish life, it is not surprising that some of their most significant political conflicts have involved educational institutions. One notable example occurred in New York in 1968 when the longest teachers strike on record was precipitated by a clash between blacks in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville school district — who were attempting to wrest control over hiring and curriculum — and the predominantly Jewish United Federation of Teachers.

In higher education, Jews were at the forefront of the battle over admissions. In the 1920s, as second-generation Jews sought access to prestigious universities, Harvard University and other Ivy League schools infamously imposed restrictive quotas and capped Jewish enrollment at around 10 percent of their student bodies.

The immediate result of Ivy League quotas was that public colleges and universities, which previously attracted large numbers of poor Jews, became even more Jewish, with enrollments at City College and Hunter College in New York becoming 80 and 90 percent Jewish, respectively, in the 1920s.

This set the stage for yet another crisis, one that would presage today’s difficulties. In 1969, black and Puerto Rican students commandeered classrooms across the City University of New York (CUNY) system and demanded “open admissions” and the establishment of black studies programs. Riots and beatings ensued. CUNY then capitulated to the radicals’ demands and effectively eliminated academic screening from the university system’s four-year campuses. Consequently, the Jewish presence at CUNY rapidly dissipated, falling from an absolute majority to 37 percent by 1971.

The demand for open admissions, which later morphed into broader demands for affirmative action in college admissions, should have given Jews a clue that American higher education was heading in a direction hostile to the equal opportunity liberalism upon which Jewish social mobility was secured.

Postwar liberalism peaked with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Then, however, a significant shift occurred. President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered a speech indicating that it was not enough

to liberate blacks through “equality of opportunity.” Instead, Johnson stated, the ultimate goal must be “equality as a result.”

With these words, liberalism changed its focus from equal treatment to “affirmative action.” It thus staked its claim to power on what would later be called the “woke” assumption of universal black disadvantage and white privilege. This ideology posits that all whites unjustly benefit from racial advantage and that standards should be reduced for blacks due to their shared experience of oppression. “The liberal community became willing to violate liberal principles to maintain solidarity and meaning,” political scientist Eric Kaufmann wrote, “while ‘retaining the ‘liberal’ label.”

Jewish organizations fought valiantly, and ultimately successfully, against Ivy League quotas in the 1920s. However, they followed the Democratic Party over the affirmative action cliff by choosing to forsake the principle of equal treatment in order to remain part of what was still calling itself the postwar “liberal” coalition. Jews then continued to vote at an overwhelming rate of 75 percent for Democratic presidential candidates.

Before the Supreme Court ruled in the 2023 case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard University* — and found racial preferences in college admissions to be unconstitutional — the leading Jewish defense agency, the Anti-Defamation League, filed an amicus brief in defense of Harvard’s racial discrimination. A more blatant dereliction of duty in the annals of ethnic group advocacy would be hard to find.

Nevertheless, the most serious danger for Jews is not the academic or occupational displacement that the racial preferences regime brings about, though this is considerable. Rather, the greatest threat lies in the ideology that arose to justify this betrayal of basic American notions of fairness. After a critical threshold of affirmative action—selected students, faculty members, and administrators took their places in university departments and newly spawned bureaucracies, ideologies that viewed traditional notions of merit, such as SAT scores, as symbols of white supremacy took hold. The presupposition of critical race theory (CRT) and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) — that racial discrimination is the only reason whites prosper more than nonwhites — has profound implications for Jews.

With CRT and DEI, the educational and occupational achievements of Jews were suddenly no longer the just rewards of hard work. Instead, they were the result of a system of status and resource allocation that is deeply rigged to favor whites.

In the woke mind, if white success is the result of racism and Jews are the most

prosperous whites, then Jews must be the worst oppressors who are guilty of the most severe acts of racial prejudice. In the Left’s desperation to square this reductive worldview with reality, the woke deconstruct Jewish history so that Jews are seen not as a persecuted minority but, rather, as the most privileged and powerful of all whites.

Thus, we get the common tropes: Jews didn’t just own slaves; they ran the slave trade. Jews didn’t just contribute to white racism; they invented black stereotypes in Hollywood movies. Jews aren’t victims of Nazi genocide; they’re perpetrators of genocide against nonwhite Arabs.

A small, yet distinct minority, Jews are a practical stand-in for such abstractions as “patriarchy,” “whites,” and “the West.” As Mark Winston Griffith, the executive director of the Black Movement Center in Crown Heights, told the Jewish news site *Forward*, Jewishness is seen as “a form of almost hyper-whiteness.”

If the woke racial binary is to be sustained, then the Jewish experience with persecution — and the lives Jews live today — must be extinguished and delegitimized. Israel’s necessary military response to the unprecedented Hamas attacks on October 7 provided the perfect opportunity for the Left to portray Jews as powerful oppressors. Even before Israel began military operations, woke campuses exploded with calls for a worldwide “intifada” and chants of “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” The eliminationist antisemitism inherent in these slogans is a reflection not only of how corrupt and unworthy the woke believe the West to be, but also of how angry they are at Jews for thriving in it.

Liberalism and civil rights activism was, in effect, an accommodation secular Jews made within American life. It provided a way for Jews to shed their ethnicity and, without reverting to religious orthodoxy, signify they were culturally different from the American mainstream.

But is it too much to ask for liberal Jews to finally acknowledge that this mode of cultural identity vanished the instant when civil rights became mainstream and liberalism moved from focusing on the individual citizen alone to seeing only powerful or powerless groups? At that moment, American liberalism ceased being a guarantor of Jewish acceptance and difference, of Jewish safety and advance. “American liberalism, our civic religion, has turned on us,” Jacob Savage asserted in *Tablet* magazine. “This ... should tell you just how much power Jews in America still have.”

The harshest truth is that the anguish many Jews now feel is, in part, a consequence of having recklessly joined Jewish meaning to the precarious uncertainty of political ideology in the first place. ❧



The Catholic Church in China Has Been Co-Opted by the Communist Party

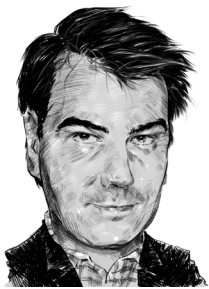
The Chinese government has repeatedly and brazenly violated its secret pact with the Vatican.

by Matthew Omolesky

Nestled among the 3,000 or so engraved slabs and columns that make up the city of Xi'an's sprawling Stele Forest, in the second of the seven galleries devoted to Confucian, calligraphic, poetic, and all other manner of ancient stelae, rests one of the most astonishing artifacts in all of China. It is the *daqin jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei* (大秦景教流行中国碑), or the Stele to the Propagation in China of the Luminous Faith of the Roman Empire, usually referred to simply as the *jingjiao bei*, or the Stele of the Luminous Faith. Rising to a considerable height of nine feet, and inscribed from top to bottom with 1,900 Chinese characters and a smattering of Syriac text, the stele was erected on January 7, 781, in the Tang imperial capital of Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an), to commemorate the first arrival of Christians in China, who brought with them a "luminous faith" characterized by the worship of *Allaba* and *Mshiba*, the Syriac words for God and Christ that were phonetically transcribed into Chinese and carved into the surface of the immense black limestone block.

According to the stele inscription: "Among the enlightened and holy men who arrived was the most-virtuous Olopun, from the country of Syria. Observing the azure clouds, he bore the true sacred books; beholding the direction of the winds, he braved difficulties and dangers, and in the year 635 he arrived at Chang'an." Owing to the efforts of Olopun and his fellow proselytizers, Christian communities took root in Tang China, where they were welcomed by the broad-minded Emperor Taizong, whose own syncretic personal religion borrowed liberally from Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and other Eurasian religions. Sadly, this atmosphere of religious tolerance and coexistence did not last, and, in 845, the beleaguered and immortality-obsessed Emperor Wuzong launched a campaign to eradicate Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and indeed everything other than indigenous Confucianism and Taoism from the Middle Kingdom. In 987, the Nestorian scribe Abul-Faraj would recall meeting a Chinese monk passing through Baghdad who lamented, "Christianity was just extinct in China; the native Christians had perished in one way or another; the church which they had used had been destroyed; and there was only one Christian left in the land." That last Christian was presumably the monk himself.

Jingjiao, China's luminous faith, did not die out, however, and the sixteenth-century appearance of the Jesuits, led by Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, heralded a new dawn. These missionaries cleverly employed a strategy of culturally sensitive accommodation, treating Chinese civilization as equal to that of Europe and drawing



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parallels between classical Chinese and Christian texts. The result was a glorious syncretism. I can think of no music more beautiful than the *divertissements chinoises* composed by the Baroque organist Teodorico Pedrini, who was dispatched by the Vatican to the Forbidden City to serve as a music tutor for the Kanji emperor's three sons. And I can think of few paintings more captivating and intriguing than the Ming-era Madonna Scroll in the Field Museum's collection, with its depiction of the Virgin Mary looking rather like the Buddhist bodhisattva Guanyin, goddess of mercy, replete with a forged stamp of the renowned Ming artist Tang Yin, perhaps meant to confuse censors in the event of future religious persecutions. The achievements of Chinese Christianity are primarily measured not in artistic masterpieces, of course, but in souls, and by 1844, there were some 240,000 Chinese Catholics, a number that increased to around 720,000 in 1901, and to around six million today, alongside as many as thirty-eight million Protestants.

Christianity's taproots in China plunge deep into the centuries, far deeper than the shallow epiphytes of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. When the Communists took power in 1949, they naturally looked askance at preexisting Christian communities, and, as the historian Daniel Bays noted, it was "not surprising that this new government, like the emperors of several dynasties of the last millennium, evinced an insistence on monitoring religious life and requiring all religions, for example, to register their venues and leadership personnel with a government office." The Qing dynasty had at times lumped Christianity in with "wizards, witches, and all other superstitions" and interdicted the distribution of religious texts; the Communists would likewise alternate between suppressing and heavily regulating the Christian religion. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards destroyed churches, murdered priests, and raped nuns. Post-Mao authorities employed a lighter touch, instead propping up the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, a supervisory organ for the Protestant communities, and the Catholic Patriotic Association, a state-managed church that, according to the 1950 Guangyuan Manifesto, is "independent in its administration, its resources, and its apostolate," much to the Vatican's chagrin. House churches and other forms of unregulated religious expression, meanwhile, remained illegal.

Efforts to regulate and restrict Chinese religious life have only accelerated under the rule of Xi Jinping. The Chinese Communist Party exerts pressure on the five recognized religions (Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism) to "Sinicize," which really means adhering to a Patriotic Education Law that requires constant political indoctrination from the pulpit, lectern, or minbar. Unregistered churches are raided, sanctioned, draped with banners reading "Guide Religion With Core Socialist Values," and then shuttered, while those caught in possession of illegally printed religious texts face jail time and crippling fines. The intensity of persecution is not on the level of the dark days of Emperor Wuzong, or the more recent Cultural Revolution, since the Party is content to absorb and neutralize these age-old religious institutions, as it anticipates a less contentious extinction event in the future.

The Holy See now finds itself in an unenviable position. The Chinese government exercises increasing control over the Catholic Patriotic Association while threatening faithful but unaffiliated Catholics with further oppression. In 2018, the Vatican and Beijing came to an accord, the contents of which are closely guarded. The agreement, which was renewed in 2020 and 2022, is meant to regularize the status of underground Catholics while legitimizing the Catholic Patriotic Association.



Pope Benedict XVI had previously warned that "compliance with those authorities is not acceptable when they interfere unduly in matters regarding the faith and discipline of the Church," particularly with respect to "forces that influence the family negatively," with which Red China is positively awash. But the current Bishop of Rome has been more willing to seek rapprochement with Beijing, confusing the theological accommodation of his Jesuit forebears with the political accommodation (otherwise known as kowtowing) demanded by the ruthless apparatchiks of the Zhongnanhai. An unending humiliation ritual has been the result.

On November 25, 2022, Cardinal Emeritus Joseph Zen was found guilty by a Hong Kong court on a trumped-up charge of failing to register a humanitarian relief fund, just a day after Bishop Giovanni Peng Weizhao was installed as auxiliary bishop of Jiangxi, over the vociferous objections of the Vatican. A few months later, Bishop Shen Bin was installed as the bishop of Shanghai, again contrary to the wishes of the Holy See. As *Bitter Winter's* Massimo Introvigne has argued: "[T]wo clues make a proof. It is now obvious that the Vatican-China deal of 2018 is regarded by the CCP as binding for the Vatican only, which is expected not to criticize religious persecution in China, but not binding for Beijing, which appoints Catholic bishops as it deems fit, with or without Papal mandate." And worse was still to come. On October 17, 2023, the Chinese Anti-*Xie-Jiao* Association, which combats so-called evil

cults, provocatively republished a statement made twenty-two years earlier by Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan, then the head of the Catholic Patriotic Association. This statement described “genuine religions” as “progressive” and “enthusiastic” about the Communist Party and contrasted them with “cults” like Falun Gong, which are “ugly,” “trample on human ethics,” “destroy human nature,” and pose “a threat to society.”

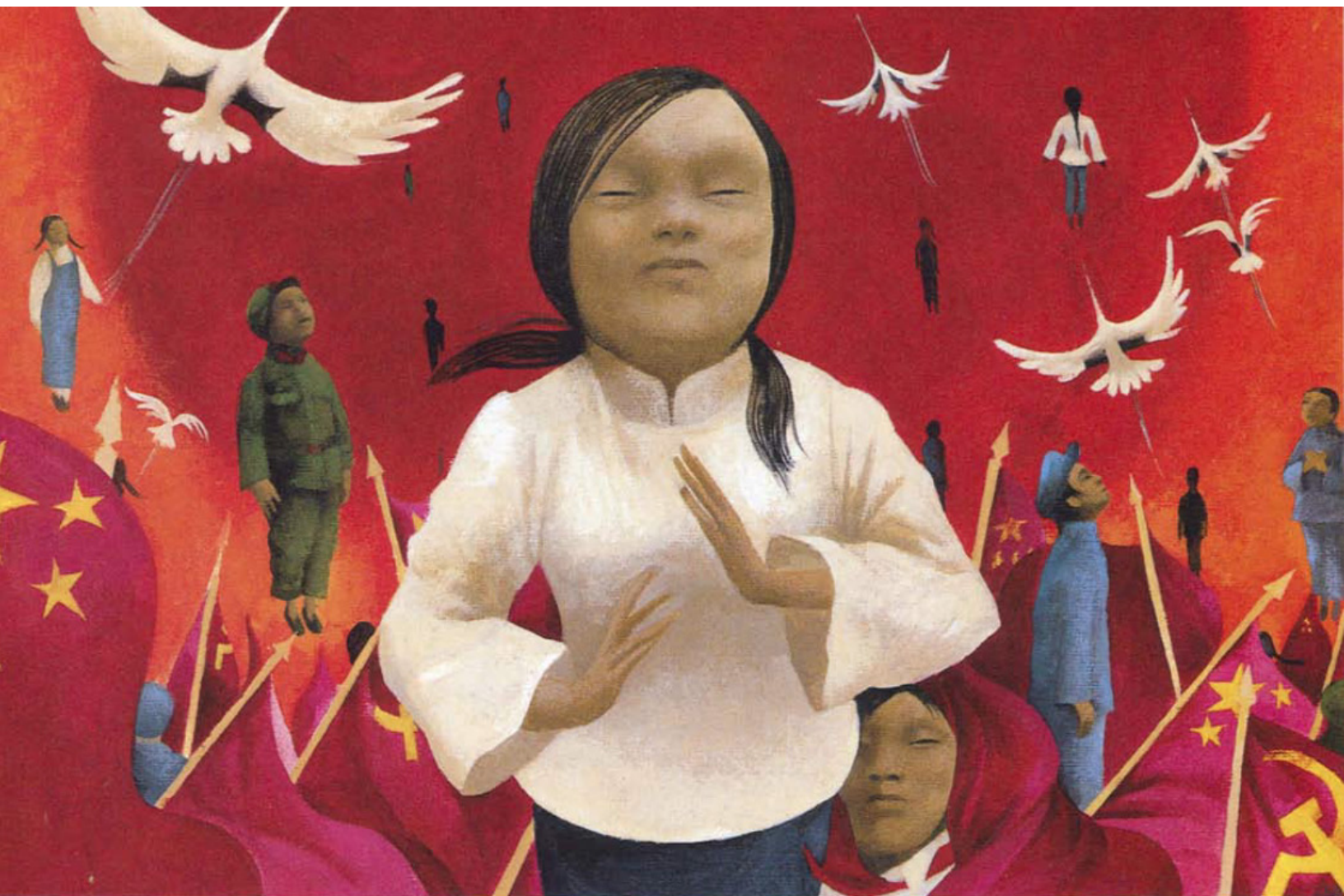
Thus has Catholicism been co-opted by the communist government as part of a bloody campaign of religious persecution, murder, and organ harvesting, without the slightest pushback from the Catholic Patriotic Association or the Vatican. Chinese Catholics find themselves in an increasingly untenable situation.

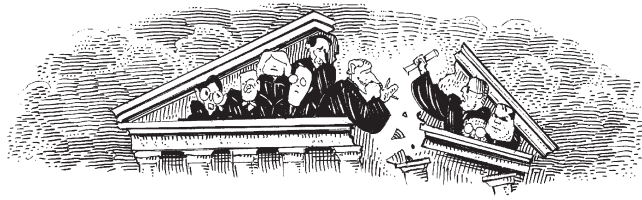
No Christian of good conscience should be obliged to pledge fidelity to such an ersatz church, yet the only alternatives are joining precarious underground communities, as in the time of Nero or Diocletian, or quietly consuming contraband religious texts and listening to audio Bible players preloaded with gospel verses and hymns, in direct contravention of draconian laws against “illegal publications and pornography.”

The Vatican’s secret pact with the Chinese government has been violated repeatedly and brazenly, but it remains to be seen whether Pope Francis — who as recently as September 4, 2023, characterized Sino-Vatican relations as “very respectful” — is willing to trigger a confrontation between the two global titans, one spiritual, the other political. The Holy See would do well to remember, as the Catholic philosopher Nicolás Gómez Dávila so eloquently maintained, that “[T]he Church’s function is not to adapt Christianity to the world, nor even to adapt the world to Christianity; her function is to maintain a counter-world in the world.” That counterworld arrived in China

1,389 years ago, conveyed there, as the Xi’an Stele informs us, “by enlightened and holy men” who “braved difficulties and dangers” in the service of Christ and the *jingjiao*, the “luminous faith.” This year figures to be a crucial one in the history of Chinese Catholicism, which has survived for far too long, in the face of so many persecutions and cultural revolutions, to be condemned to a lingering and inglorious demise by genocidal communists and credulous prelates. ✎

Christianity’s taproots in China plunge deep into the centuries, far deeper than the shallow epiphytes of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.





The Supreme Court's Religious Retreat

The court's subjectivism contradicts the founders' understanding of natural religion.

by Gerard V. Bradley

In June 2022, the Supreme Court decided three blockbuster constitutional cases. The ones you have surely heard about are *Dobbs* and *Bruen*, which, respectively, reversed *Roe v. Wade* and dramatically expanded Second Amendment gun rights. The third was an establishment of religion clause decision, *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*. It made far fewer headlines than did *Dobbs* and *Bruen*. It deserves much attention nonetheless, for in it the court announced a revolutionary turn in how it would view questions of religion and public life.

Kennedy concerned a public high school football coach's practice of praying briefly on the field after each game. He did not invite anyone to join him. But join him they did, especially the players he coached. The spectacle drew the unfavorable attention of school authorities, who thought it amounted to a public adoption of the Christian religion, in violation — they further thought — of the First Amendment's ban on religious "establishments." (Coach Kennedy was and is a convinced Christian.)

Kennedy lost his job when he refused to abandon his post-game ritual.

The Supreme Court first considered school prayer as possibly unconstitutional in 1962, when it threw out (in the case of *Engle v. Vitale*) a teacher-led nondenominational invocation that students were not required to join. The court has taken up school prayer in other contexts several times since, the results of which have varied. The opinions in these cases, however, have been invariably unsatisfying, and often incoherent.

In *Kennedy*, Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote for the majority that the court's longstanding doctrinal approach to school prayer cases — as well as to all establishment clause questions — was too "abstract, and ahistorical." Gorsuch announced that the court was "abandon[ing]" the "*Lemon*" test. (This test was called "*Lemon*" not because it doesn't work well, although that is true, but rather after the 1971 case that minted it, *Lemon v. Kurtzman*.) All too briefly, that set of standards required each government action to have a "secular" purpose, avoid effectively advancing religion, and steer clear of "excessive entanglements" between public authorities and religion.

No doubt the *Lemon* test had to go, if only because (as we shall soon see) it was deeply at odds with the founding and

the whole constitutional tradition up until around World War II. Judges and lawyers and professors had moved from criticizing *Lemon* to lamenting it and then, finally, to lampooning it. Justice Antonin Scalia, more than thirty years ago, wrote that "like some ghoul in a late-night horror movie that repeatedly sits up in its grave and shuffles abroad, after being repeatedly killed and buried, *Lemon* stalks our establishment clause jurisprudence once again, frightening the little children and school attorneys." The commentary had grown more caustic in the decades since.

Henceforth, it was to be all history all the time. The *Kennedy* Court wrote that the establishment clause must instead be interpreted by "reference to historical practices and understandings.... '[T]he line' that courts and governments 'must draw between the permissible and the impermissible' has to 'accor[d] with history and faithfully reflec[t] the understanding of the Founding Fathers.'" The justices propose to ride bareback across the early national era, checking to see what the founders thought and did about specific "church-state" issues — like legislative prayer, public support of religious schools, oaths, and public religious monuments.

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Some good outcomes would be obtained in establishment clause cases *if* the court seriously engaged with the founders’ “practices and understandings.” To do so, however, the court will have to confront, disentangle, and correct an unforced error it made decades ago. It is a mistake that impenetrably blocks the justices from understanding the founders’ “understanding,” for central to *that* “understanding” is the inestimable place of natural religion — truths about divine realities that reason can grasp without resort to revelation — in it.

Wrapping one’s mind around the salience of natural religion is essential to “understanding” the “practices” of the founders for four reasons.

First, and as historian Owen Anderson aptly wrote, “The United States was founded on natural religion.” From the beginning of our existence as one country (and even before, for that matter) public authorities across the land forthrightly affirmed the truths of natural religion. The “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” emboldened the revolutionaries in Philadelphia. Before and after the founding, civil governments in America affirmed truths such as God’s eternal existence and creation of all that there is; God’s providential care for humankind, including promulgation of the moral law for guidance of human affairs; and some form of the afterlife in which the guilty suffered and the virtuous prospered, or what the

founders almost always rendered as a “future state of rewards and punishments.”

In the Declaration of Independence, our founders declared, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Nearly two centuries later, in the 1963 Bible-reading-in-public-schools case *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, the Supreme Court said that the “fact that the Founding Fathers believed devotedly that there was a

The Founding Fathers firmly believed that governmental care for religion, including public witness to the existence of a Creator God who providentially guides human affairs, was part of the temporal common good.

God and the inalienable rights of man were rooted in Him is clearly evidenced in their writings, from the Mayflower Compact to the Constitution itself.”

When public authority affirmed that there is a God in the national motto (“In God We Trust”) or in the Pledge of Allegiance (“one nation under God), or as did Lincoln

throughout his Second Inaugural, lawmakers did not abandon a proper concern for the common good of the polity. Yes, some would say today that affirming the truths of natural religion would be an unalloyed religious act, without any proper “secular” purpose at all. Not so. For one thing, the tenets of natural religion — true propositions about divine realities and the connections between those realities and humankind that *can be known through the use of unaided reason* — are really truths of *philosophy*, not religion. They are no more mysterious or dreamy or impractical and no less metaphysical (if you will) than our nation’s founding beliefs in human equality or inalienable rights.

Besides, the founders did not forsake “secular” law-making purposes when they affirmed natural truths about divine things. In fact, they did not use the term “secular” when they discussed religion and the polity. They knew that there was *this* world (of time and space and suffering) and that there was a subsequent very different world of final universal justice. Death marked a passage between the two. But that did not establish a hard boundary, in either thought or action, between the “secular” and the “religious.” For the founders, the border between the two realms was porous, with lots of traffic to and fro. God reigned in both worlds. God revealed Himself in the heavens and to the minds of the prophets and in the public ministry of Jesus. God gave to humankind a natural moral law “written on the heart,”

according to the apostle Paul. The standard meaning of “secular,” however, is the absence of God, or at least living as if there were no God. This “secularism” was just not part of the founders’ world.

The Founding Fathers firmly believed that governmental care for religion, including public witness to the existence of a Creator God who providentially guides human affairs, was *part* of the *temporal* common good. If the founders were pressed further to articulate this arrangement, they likely would have said that religion is a distinct and incommensurate part of human experience, and that public authority has a limited but still important duty to foster religion. There was nothing meaningfully “secular” about it.

The second reason to understand natural religion in the founders’ worldview is that it enables us to appreciate the distinction they drew between it and the particularities of the various “sects.” Before and after 1776, anyone could see that the many churches and religious groups were distinguished one from the other mainly by what each *added* to natural religion. Some of these additions were matters thought to have been revealed by God to humankind, chiefly by and through divine communication with the prophets and, then, in the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Others were humanly established conventions and rules, accouterments of religious living, both solo and in community. Therefore, one could — and the founders did — contrast “natural religion” with “revealed” and “positive” religion.

The founders wisely judged that their polity could flourish without enforced unanimity about, or a top-down settlement of, these questions. The common good did

not require, for example, that the government show favor to a particular form of liturgy. Nor did it necessitate authoritative adoption of any one church’s creed. Theologians might contend over the details of faith and worship, but the lawmaker adhered to an authoritatively stipulated incompetence when it came to matters of religious doctrine, church discipline, modes of worship, and manner of a religious community’s internal governance. The truth or falsity of these matters — even recognizing that they were the kinds of things that could be true or false — was strictly beyond the ken of public authority.

This was the original understanding of the establishment clause. As the Supreme Court expressed it in one nineteenth-century case: “The law *knows* no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect.” Just so — and none of it touches the central, public place of natural religion in the founders’ “understandings” and “practices.”

The court smudged that distinction right after World War II and obliterated it in the 1960s. The justices treated matters as different as pronouncing ours a nation “under God” and giving, say, the Episcopal Church exclusive government patronage as indistinguishably, univocally “religious.” Thus did the court render invisible (to the justices, at least) the distinction essential to grasping the original understanding of the establishment clause.

The third reason it is important to understand natural religion according to the founders is that it restores to the religious question open-minded reasoning based upon evidence and argument. The court has for many decades regularly described

religion as a noncognitive, subjective, and even fantastical enterprise. The most emblematic statement of this unfortunate descent into religion-as-superstition is from the 1981 case *Thomas v. Review Board*, in which the court declared that “religious beliefs need not be acceptable, logical, consistent, or comprehensible to others” to merit constitutional protection. There is a sense in which that improbable observation fits into a sound legal train of thought. But my reference to it here illustrates what the court has steadily maintained for many decades: when you enter the realm of religion, you have left behind the realm of reason.

Fourth, there was no more widespread conviction among the founding generation than that they lived in a morally ordered universe; thus, the founders recognized the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” Even the most skeptical among them (such as the quasi-deist Thomas Jefferson) never doubted that there was a transcendent source of meaning and value for human actions. The balance of natural religion — monotheism, human equality, and so on — supplied the additional premises to conclude, with confidence and based upon reason, that there was an objective, universal moral law, and that there was an end to it.

Our Supreme Court declared in a 1992 abortion case (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*) that the “heart of [constitutional] liberty” was the right of everyone to make up his or her (or, today, their or its) own mental and moral universe. This acidic subjectivism *cum* solipsism is not only a cancerous growth on our body politic. It is an utter repudiation of all that the founders thought and practiced. ❧

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The Gospel of Discontent: How Feminism Shattered Our Understanding of Motherhood

The communist vision of a genderless worker has supplanted the Christian creed and its vision of mother and child.

by Carrie Gress

The Christian story started very simply: a mother delivered her baby, truly God and truly man, amid the squalor of straw and livestock. Such humble beginnings begat a new vision of motherhood that became the archetype for the Church — Holy Mother Church. Embraced by all Christians for centuries, ecclesial motherhood was cast in art, music, poetry, and culture. Even the word for *church* is feminine in the romance languages. Architecturally, the wide-reaching and iconic arms of St. Peter's Square in Rome remind Christians that the Church is meant to be home, nurturer, comforter, and nourisher to us all. She is our mother.

Since Eve, motherhood has been a gift unique to women. Historically, it was understood as a wide category that included the wise grandmother, the religious sister, the mentoring teacher, and the guiding aunt. Holding the needs of others in focus, motherhood encompassed sheltering,

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nourishing, caring for, and assisting others to grow and live abundantly.

For decades now, that maternal image, as it relates to both women and the Church, has worn thin. Our modern conception of motherhood has narrowed to include only the biological birthing or adoption of children. This is not due to lax or scandal-ridden pastors and clergy, activist bishops, or even a confusing pope. Motherhood has become threadbare because feminism has successfully supplanted the Christian creed and its connection to motherhood with the communist vision of a genderless worker.

Most Western women consider feminism a gentle, benevolent friend who at times has gone astray. Voting, property rights, employment opportunities, education, and public office all speak to the positive goods that most women think feminism has brought women; few understand the commanding power it now has over Western culture and the way in which it has quietly but resolutely made itself the deadliest ideology in human history.

The slide downward began with the rise of socialism in the 1800s, when activists used consciousness raising, a tool of Mao's Communist China, to stir up women's emotions of anger and outrage, making

them aware of their own oppression. In 1897, the socialist paper *Lucifer* encouraged readers to “preach the gospel of discontent to women, to mothers, to the prospective mothers of the human race.” Through these efforts, socialism spread one family at a time.

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia enshrined female discontent. Private property was eliminated, everyone was sent to work, child raising was collectivized, and abortion was legalized. Women, mimicking men, became model workers under the Soviet system; abortion, the default birth control. The grisly practice became so common that the Soviets had to later encourage women to have children because of plummeting birth rates. One Russian woman decades later spoke of having had eighty abortions.

In the 1920s, the Soviet Communists, desperate to win out over capitalism, found an ally in feminism. Initially, the two had been at odds: communists viewed feminists as too bourgeois, while the feminists thought the communists too ideological.

Clara Zetkin, the head of Communist International, believed working-class women were key to the worldwide revolution. She saw the effectiveness of the gospel of discontent among feminists and pushed for more of it. “Female

employees, especially intellectuals...are growing rebellious,” Zetkin wrote. “More and more housewives, including bourgeois housewives, are awakening... We have to utilize the ferment.” Internationally, women continued to flock to communism.

The two groups fused together seamlessly. Feminism — focused on free love, a restructuring of society, and the occult — easily blended with the communist concepts of free love, restructuring society, and atheism. Doctrinaire communists could easily overlook witchcraft, mediums, and seances if it meant they got bourgeois women, especially when both groups sought, above all, the destruction of the nuclear family and the Christian faith.

In 1946, Bella Dodd established the Congress for American Women (CAW) in the United States. Dodd, who later risked her life in 1949 to abandon communism, explained that the CAW was established to influence and control women. First, it aimed to decrease women’s spending in order to starve capitalism; second, it resolved to make women “a reserve force of the revolution because they are more easily moved by emotional appeals.” The CAW attracted many highly influential women, such as the ex-wife of a U.S. senator; academic women like Eleanor Flexner, author of the feminist history *Century of Struggle*; Susan B. Anthony II (niece of the first); and Betty Friedan. It was dissolved in 1950 by the House Committee for Un-American Activities after being denounced as Soviet propaganda.

Although disbanded, the CAW’s influence did not fade. Betty Friedan latched onto one of Friedrich Engels’ ideas:

[W]e see already that the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree.

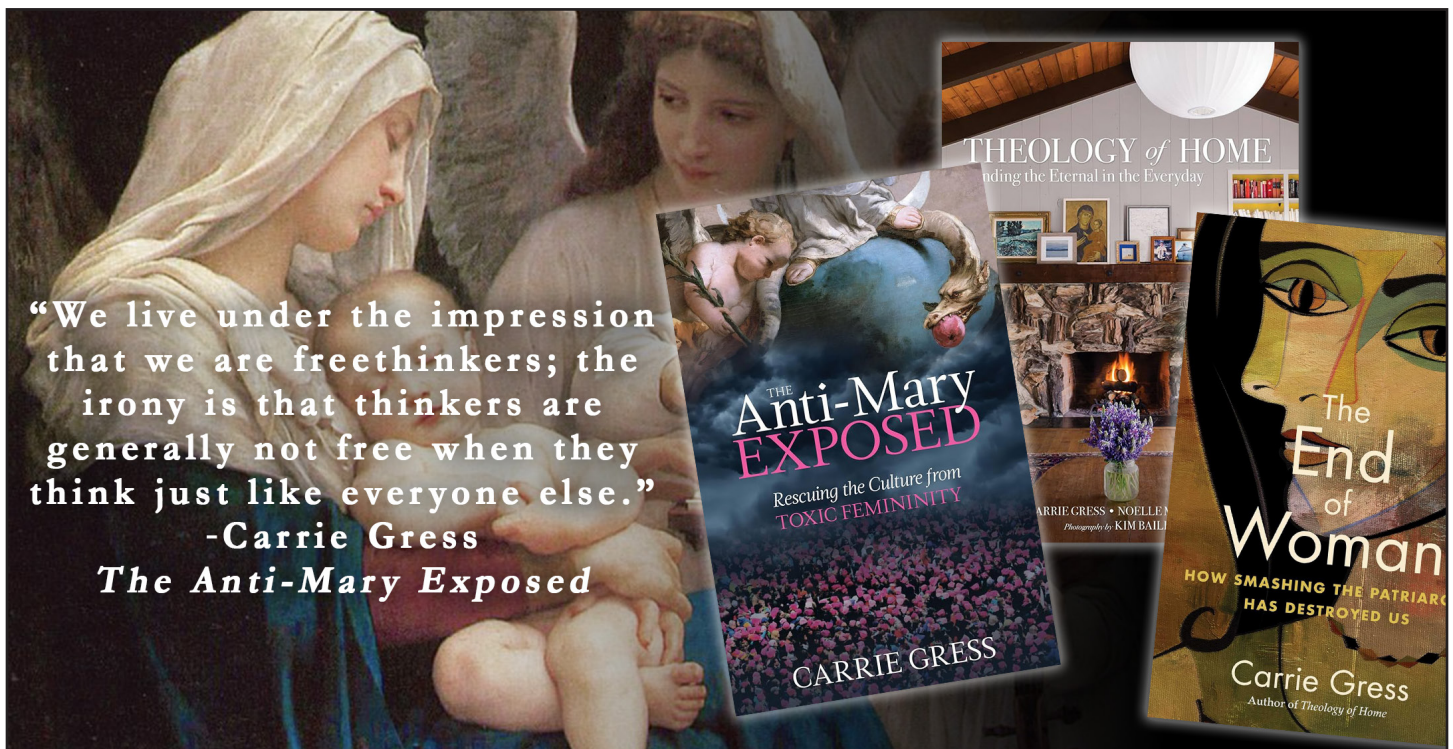
Women today are less happy and more medicated than they were before feminism’s arrival.

Friedan was focused on getting women out of private homes and into “productive work.” In 1963, she published *The Feminine Mystique*, which sold three million copies in the first few years. Its appeal lay in how she used psychology to stir up women’s discontent and tap into their fear of missing out on and envy of the lives men led. She went so far as to call the home a “comfortable concentration camp.” Ironically, for a woman who claimed to hate Hitler, she was promoting the very idea emblazoned on the gates of a real concentration camp: *Arbeit macht frei*. Work will make you free.

Simone de Beauvoir reemphasized Friedan’s point in the 1970s: “No woman should be authorized to stay at home and raise her children. Society should be different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.” Friedan, de Beauvoir, and the second-wavers who followed convinced women that husbands are not important and that children are an obstacle to happiness. For the lifestyle this ideology promoted to work, one measure was needed: abortion. As in the Soviet Union, abortion had to be legalized. Workers’ fertility had to be suppressed.

These second-wave concepts reached a new level with the sexual revolution and the neo-Marxist efforts of influential women like Kate Millett and Angela Davis. Using the ideas of the Frankfurt School, they took the Marxist idea that the world is divided between oppressors and oppressed and applied it to women. Men were considered the automatic oppressors simply because they were men, and women were deemed oppressed because they were women. Driven by this newfound claim to victimhood, the gospel of discontent overtook the culture. Women joined consciousness raising groups and infectiously stirred up anger for themselves and their friends. Meanwhile, good men were silenced, and bad men were emboldened.

The gospel of discontent is alive and well today. Women’s marches are no ladies’ tea party; they are saturated with bitter and acrimonious rhetoric and punctuated by vulgar hats. Abortion activists have firebombed churches and pregnancy



resource centers. The gentleness and compassion for which women used to be known, as well as their care for the smallest among us, has soured into a general bravado and bombast to “shout abortions” and “smash the patriarchy.”

Christian Women

Christians have largely been unable to deflect the shock waves of the gospel of discontent. Most denominations have caved and fully absorbed the feminist/Marxist agenda. The social justice movement, with its woke trappings, has become the active ethos in most mainline churches, and the results are grim. Our churches are emptying, marriages and religious vocations are evaporating, and birth rates are falling. The family is in tatters. There are now more Wiccans and pagans than Presbyterians, and the “nones” outnumber everyone. Even abortion has gone from something liberals hoped would be “safe, legal, and rare” to being hailed by Christian pastors as a blessing. Christian women are aborting

their children at the same rates as secular women, making abortion the greatest cause of death worldwide. Forty-four million children were killed by abortion in 2023.

While the gospel of discontent may feel energizing and enlightening, the one thing it cannot ever provide is real human flourishing. Women today are less happy and more medicated than they were before feminism’s arrival. The desire for motherhood hasn’t been extinguished; it has just been redirected. American homes now have more pets than children as women have become dog moms to fill the gap where children and grandchildren used to be. Try as we might to deny or escape it, women are made to mother.

Christians and conservatives, meanwhile, grapple with how to navigate the new post-Roe waters of abortion, but few are willing to take a hard look at all that women have unwittingly absorbed. Why is it that we have such a hard time defining what a woman is? Why do so many women hold the firm conviction that abortion is a

preeminent right? Women have come to believe feminism is a friend because there are injustices it has righted. Whether or not that is true, what feminism has done is redefine injustice to the mere fact of being a woman. In this respect, feminism has been not our friend but a type of cancer that has robbed us of who we really are and replaced it with something ugly, bitter, and foolish.

Christian women, like most other women — from Barbara Walters to Taylor Swift — have bought deeply into this gospel of discontent. The malignant voice that has whispered to women for decades is not the still small voice of Our Savior. The future of the Church will continue this path until Christians realize that motherhood must be restored back to the beautiful, compelling, and dignified icon it was meant to be. The restoration of Christian motherhood (and fatherhood) might not be glamorous, but it offers a true gospel of hope, peace, purpose, wisdom, and contentment, the very essentials for building a well-lived life, here and beyond. ✨





Pope Francis's Decade-long Reign Removes Church From Crucial Moral Debates

Intellectual rigor and coherence have given way to emotivism.

by Samuel Gregg

On March 13, 2013, I stood among the thousands gathered in Saint Peter's Square who witnessed the moment when Jorge Bergoglio, the Jesuit cardinal archbishop of Buenos Aires, walked out onto the balcony following his election as the 265th successor of Saint Peter as the bishop of Rome.

As I left the square that evening, I was happy. From the limited knowledge I had of this new pope — who had taken the name Francis — it was reasonable to be hopeful. His purported remarks to the College of Cardinals, which emphasized the need for the Catholic Church to not be self-referential and bogged down in internal debates that distract from its central mission, seemed very much on point.

Alas, eleven years later, things have turned out quite differently. Over the course of Francis's pontificate, the Church has become decidedly self-referential. Since the end of 2013, it has been consumed

by endless attempts to relitigate questions that are effectively settled matters as far as doctrine is concerned, from who may be ordained a priest to issues surrounding sex. Segments of the Church — or at least the progressives who dominate those parts in visible decline — are keen to relive the chaos and experimentation of the 1970s.

This approach reflects a very different agenda from that of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Both of Francis's predecessors aimed to establish a definitive interpretation of the Second Vatican Council so as to equip the Church to evangelize the world bequeathed by modernity. The nature of that evangelization is best characterized as "critical engagement." This requires both taking the post-Enlightenment world seriously and pointing out its deficiencies, demonstrating how the answers to each person's ultimate questions are found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Integral to that critical engagement was an examination of Enlightenment notions of reason and an acknowledgement that, for all their strengths, their tendency to reduce reason to empiricism leaves humans unable

to substantively answer moral questions. Likewise, John Paul II and Benedict XVI's emphasis on the necessity of arriving at sound answers about the nature of the human person reflected their recognition that the question "*Quid sit homo?*" — "What is man?" — lies at the core of the highly charged questions that divide humanity, especially Western societies, today.

The end result of the two popes' work was the reestablishment of the Catholic Church as a central player in the intellectual debates defining our post-Enlightenment world. Certainly, the sexual abuse scandals, coupled by the manifest failure of Church authorities to properly address them, severely undermined (and continue to undermine) public receptivity to the Church's message. However, there is no denying that John Paul II's 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* and Benedict XVI's 2006 Regensburg address had intellectual and cultural significance that resonated beyond the Catholic Church.

The prevalence of theories of moral relativism, combined with widespread angst about the relationship between reason and

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faith in an age of violent jihadism, could not help but prompt people — believers and nonbelievers alike — to seek coherent and persuasive analyses and responses. While not everyone agreed with all the arguments made by the papacy between 1978 and 2013, no one could doubt their power or saliency.

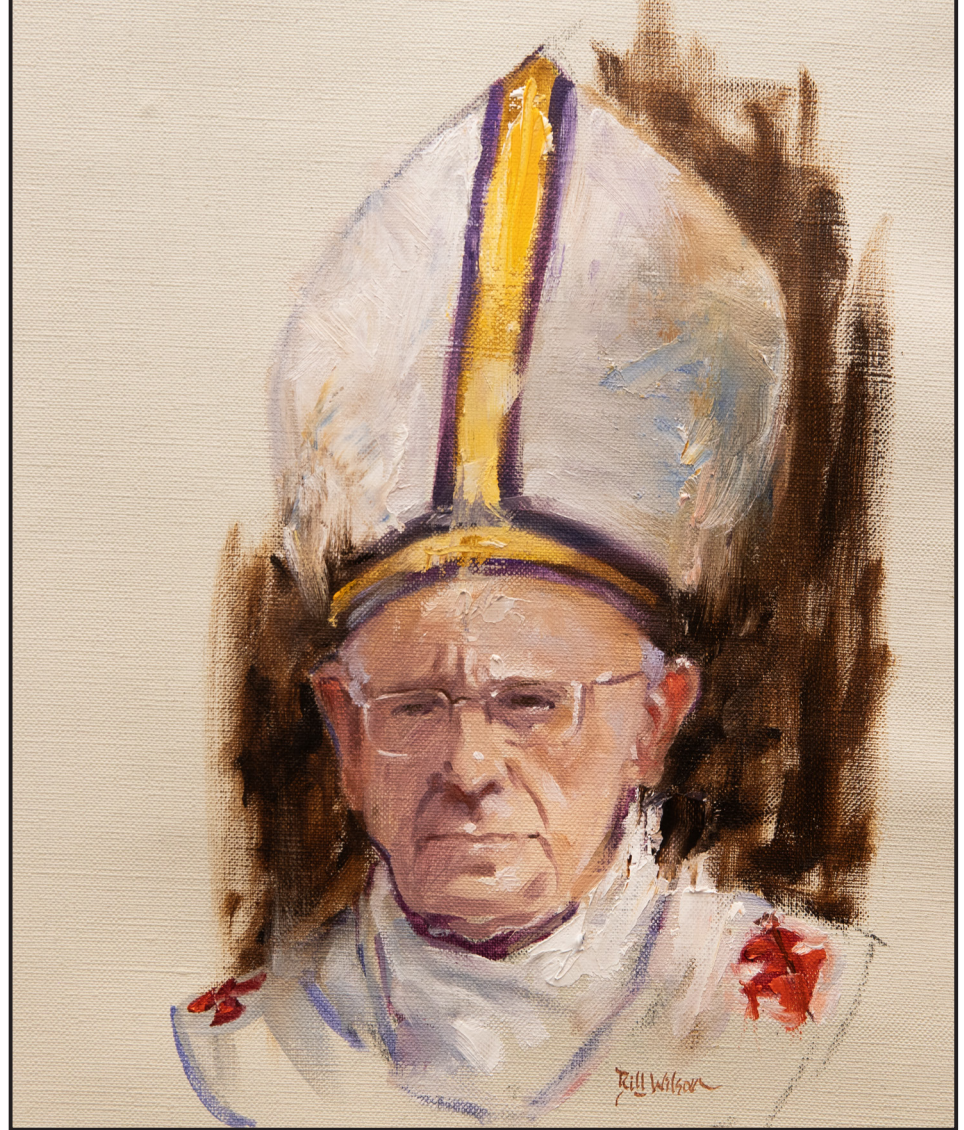
Those days seem very far away now. In the Catholic Church, intellectual rigor and coherence have given way to emotivism and discussions centered on feelings. There is no question in my mind that the impetus for much of this shift comes from the top down. Clear arguments are regularly dismissed by Francis as mere rationalism, exemplifying rigidity of thought or reflecting ideological mindsets.

That, however, is only one facet of the story. The other is the resurgence of those who believe that the best way for the Catholic Church to address the various challenges associated with modernity is to adjust the Church and its teachings to align with secular progressive priorities.

The rationale behind this approach is that the Church should dispense with anything and everything that its adherents believe impedes the willingness of the world (or, more specifically, the Western progressive world) to embrace it. In effect, this means not only casting aside Christ's hard teachings but also subordinating the Church's dogmas and doctrines to whatever happens to be the zeitgeist.

The fallacy of this approach is vividly demonstrated by what has happened to every single Christian denomination that has embraced what John Henry Newman denoted as "liberal religion" over the past one hundred years. If a church has nothing to say that is not already being said by any number of secular organizations, its voice becomes indistinguishable and loses its appeal. Pandering to secular progressives also results in the degeneration of such religious bodies into mere NGO-ism, produces a mass exodus of adherents, and reduces clergy to the status of political activists, invariably of the left-leaning type.

For an example of what this looks like in the Catholic world today, consider the Catholic Church in Germany, which has been dominated by progressive bishops, theologians, and lay activists since the early 1980s. The number of Catholics in Germany has continued to plummet rapidly, even as the German Church's tax-funded bureaucracy has grown such that



it is now one of the largest employers in Germany. The Church in Germany may have a great deal of money, but it is also locked into a vision of the world that guarantees its decline.

What's worse (and, frankly, hubristic) is that Germany's Catholic bishops seem to think that their model and priorities should be embraced by the universal Church. For them, the future of Christianity lies in the embrace of sentimental humanitarianism. But that simply cannot be the Church's future, not least because Jesus Christ was as far removed from the sentimental humanitarian conception of man as one can possibly imagine.

To what extent is Pope Francis responsible for this state of affairs? First, progressives have been around for a long time and never went away during the pontificates of Francis's predecessors. Also, it has never been clear to me that Francis embraces most of the progressive agenda or view of the world.

That said, Francis has certainly given them the oxygen to pursue what one of the greatest twentieth-century theologians, Henri de Lubac, called the "autodestruction

de l'Église et d'apostasie interne" — "self-destruction of the Church and internal apostasy." Furthermore, Francis's Vatican has notably refrained from forcefully refuting progressives' ideas, and there are instances when Francis succumbs to NGO-ism himself. This is exemplified by his interventions into environmental issues, which are largely indistinguishable from statements that might be issued by a United Nations committee.

But whatever Francis's role, there is little doubt about the consequences. In many respects, much of the leadership of the Catholic Church is now missing in action from crucial debates at precisely the time when its steadfast faith in full-bodied conceptions of reason, commitment to the idea of moral absolutes, and understanding that there are truths that transcend history are needed more than ever.

That is not only an impediment to the Church's ability to carry out its fundamental mission of bringing the Gospel to the world. It is also a loss for civilization. ❧



How a Church Fought Back Against a Liberal Takeover — And Won

The tale underscores the vital importance of safeguarding biblical, not human, authority.

by Tom Raabe

Rarely if ever in American religious history has a Christian church body been able to repulse a concerted attempt by professional theologians to lead that church into the darkness of theological liberalism.

But that was what happened fifty years ago this February when theologically conservative laity and pastors rescued the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod from such a fate. In 1974, 90 percent of the faculty (forty-five out of fifty professors) at the denomination’s foremost seminary, Concordia Seminary, and approximately 80 percent of the students walked off the St. Louis campus and into “exile” to start their own theologically liberal institution. Eventually, the group took about two hundred of the church body’s six thousand congregations with them, thus forming the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

It is a story with all the drama one would expect from a modern church splintering in plain sight. It featured

tempestuous church conventions, rebellious student convocations, pompous faculty orations, protests and press conferences, and all the militant accouterments — black armbands and the like — one would expect of a winner-take-all showdown in the tumultuous 1970s. It ended with a theatrical exodus event that included a mock funeral for the seminary, boarded-up arches and gateways, the planting of memorial crosses on campus grounds, defiant speeches, and a triumphal march away from the campus into self-imposed exile.

The Theological Tempest

In a time when churches split over positions on sexual proclivities or thinly disguised political issues, if there is a silver lining to this particular ecclesiastical fissure, it is that, in a bizarre way, it is refreshing to see a church body fracturing over what the church should be about in the first place, that is, theology — or, more specifically, biblical interpretation.

That’s how this squabble started. It stemmed from the adoption of a hermeneutical method called historical

criticism by certain members of the faculty of Concordia Seminary.

Historical criticism is a product of the Enlightenment, the age when science and reason were in ascendancy. It focuses on biblical hermeneutics, treating God’s written Word as though it is to be interpreted as a merely human document that is in principle no different from any other piece of ancient writing. By rejecting the notion of divine inspiration, historical criticism undermines the Bible’s authority, denies its miracles, and dismisses its historical accounts.

This method is a cornerstone of liberal theology and is widely utilized in the hermeneutical practices of mainline Protestants, including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and liberal Baptists and Lutherans. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod had avoided its taint until, in the early 1960s, reports began to filter through pastoral and lay ranks that certain professors at the seminary had embraced this interpretive method. Some professors were giving speeches and publishing papers asserting a troubling notion: that the Scriptures are not God’s

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written Word verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit but, rather, are self-contradictory.

From 1962 to 1969, synodical conventions — that is, biennial gatherings of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod at large, comprising pastors and laity — centered around the reports emerging from Concordia Seminary. Many attendees expressed concern about this doctrinal retreat into liberalism, prompting the convention to pass repeated resolutions reaffirming longstanding tenets of biblical orthodoxy. These resolutions included assertions that the biblical events were, in fact, historical and that the authors cited in the Scriptures were indeed responsible for their respective books. In short, the conventions declared that the Bible presents an infallible, historically accurate account of the Christian faith.

Preus v. Tietjen

In 1969, tensions within the synod mounted, as new men were elected to its two high-profile offices. They would face off — both as figureheads of their respective sides and personally — over the future of the church’s theology.

John H. Tietjen, a known ecumenist who promoted union among Lutherans despite doctrinal disagreement, was selected as president of Concordia Seminary. While Tietjen’s election was met with foreboding in traditional circles, the mood on the seminary campus was gleeful. According to the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod’s official history of the walkout, “The expectation was that Dr. Tietjen’s election marked the beginning of a new day in which the more liberal theological and ecumenical views of the St. Louis faculty would triumph in the Synod.”

A few months after Tietjen’s ascension, the synod threw a cloud over liberals’ “new day” by electing Jacob A. O. Preus II as its next president. He was steeped in biblical orthodoxy and politically savvy — his father had been governor of Minnesota. At the time Preus was elected, he had been serving as president of the synod’s other seminary in Springfield, Illinois. Many pushing the synod leftward saw the election of Preus as a setback to their cause, while conservatives saw it for what it was — a reaction to the growing fear that the theology emanating from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis was departing significantly from the Scripture-based doctrinal position of the synod.

It did not take long for conflict to arise between the two men. Shortly after the convention, Preus, spurred by reports from conservative faculty members regarding the teachings at the seminary, commissioned a fact-finding committee. Their task: to interview Concordia Seminary professors about their doctrinal views.

When a church allows humans to usurp the authority rightfully belonging to the Bible, it becomes vulnerable to the prevailing social causes of the day.

The committee’s findings, which were reported by Preus, indicated that some faculty members were guilty of many of the charges leveled against them. These charges included confusion regarding the doctrine of Scripture, especially its verbal inspiration and inerrancy, as well as a commitment to the historical-critical method. Additionally, they cast doubt on Old Testament history; questioned whether Jesus actually spoke the words attributed to him in the Gospels; minimized the predictive prophecy of the Old Testament; and insisted that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, Isaiah did not write all of the book of Isaiah, and the apostle Paul did not pen all of the New Testament books attributed to him.

The theological crux of the matter centered around the authority of Scripture. Under Preus’s leadership, the conservatives staunchly maintained that the Bible serves as the foundation and guiding principle of the church’s doctrine. They emphasized that the essence of the Christian faith lies in the gospel of Christ, and they argued that Sacred Scripture, rather than human reason, defines the content of this salvific message.

The seminary professors tended to narrow the church’s teaching to just the gospel; this practice is known as “gospel reductionism.” In this view, the gospel alone is the standard that determines the church’s doctrine. Consequently,

this approach marginalizes the teaching authority of God’s commands toward Christians and disregards certain aspects of the written Word, such as the Bible’s proscription against homosexual relations.

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod fact-finding committee, however, emphasized the authority of Scripture: “Whatever the text says is the meaning of the text. [That meaning] is to be accepted as such because it is the Word of God. Whether a text should be taken literally or in some other way is determined by the text itself — its grammar, context, etc.”

Watershed at the Rivergate

Everything came to a head at the 1973 synodical convention, which was held at the Rivergate Convention Center in New Orleans. The convention denounced the faculty majority’s position as contrary to the synod’s doctrinal position, as they deemed it “not to be tolerated in the church of God.” In addition, conservatives were set to oust Tietjen from his presidency via a floor vote. However, time constraints intervened and the matter was turned over to the seminary’s Board of Control, which had shifted, by a vote during that very convention, from liberal to conservative. Still, the convention offered Tietjen the opportunity to present his perspective. Standing at a floor microphone, he initially claimed that he had been “grievously wronged” by the convention. But then he declared that he also had good news for the delegates: “I forgive you,” Tietjen said, “because I think you really do not know what you are doing, and I think it is so that in time you will recognize what you are doing and you will grieve over this day.”

Tensions escalated rapidly. It took less than a week for the faculty majority at Concordia Seminary to stage a massive protest rally on campus — complete with processions, TV cameras, and the announcement of a protest movement calling itself Evangelical Lutherans in Mission. Subsequent to the protests, several Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod pastors complained about Tietjen. Tietjen refused to meet with the pastors to hear their complaints, and, because of his refusal, the seminary board could suspend Tietjen on the basis of a synodical rule.

The seminary board was eager to proceed with the suspension, but legal complications forced the board to back

off. While it awaited confirmation of its authority to suspend the seminary's president, multiple protests ensued, confidential reports were leaked to the press, Evangelical Lutherans in Mission launched its own alternative newspaper, and fifteen professors left their classrooms in the middle of the school year.

The Walkout

When Tietjen was finally suspended on January 20, 1974 — temporarily; he was still paid and enjoyed his benefits — the liberal majority at Concordia Seminary was ready for it. Student groups had already prepared “contingency plans” for “an eventual and expected crisis” at the seminary. At 8 a.m. on January 21, the morning following Tietjen's suspension, the student body met in the seminary's chapel and voted 274 to 94, with 15 abstentions, to boycott classes. The students then assembled in front of the seminary's statue of Martin Luther for a “Here I Stand” moment. They read “A Student Resolution,” which detailed their grievances.

Later that same evening, the faculty majority voted to strike as well. Inventively, they attempted to shift blame for their decision to strike to the board. By suspending their boss, the faculty majority claimed, the board “had suspended all of us from our duties as teachers and executive staff members.”

While the five faithful faculty members continued teaching classes to the fewer than one hundred students who also refrained from striking, student leaders marshaled about 250 seminarians to disperse around the country and spread their message. The faculty majority, meanwhile, began preparations for establishing a seminary-in-exile.

The penultimate act of defiance came on February 12. The faculty dispatched an ultimatum to the Board of Control declaring that they would return to teaching duties only if the synod agreed that they had all along been teaching “in accord with [the] doctrinal standard” of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. If this did not happen by February 19 and if Tietjen was not restored to the presidency, then the faculty would continue to teach their students, “but it will not be under your auspices and not at the customary location,” they wrote. The theologically liberal faculty members were going to walk away from Concordia Seminary — and take their students with them.

The chairman of the Board of Control, E. J. Otto, summarized the board's feelings in an interview on the synod's radio station, KFUO: “We could not in good conscience bow to their ultimatum. Therefore, we in effect said to the faculty, ‘You will be in the classroom on Tuesday the nineteenth. You already have not worked for a month. If you are not in the classrooms on Tuesday, you will have terminated your connection with the seminary.’”

On Tuesday, February 19, neither the forty-five liberal faculty members nor the rebellious students of Concordia Seminary were in the classrooms. Instead, students and professors, some of the latter vested in academic garb, assembled in a long line and, preceded by a crucifer and banners, processed toward the campus quad, where some of the marchers, holding small white crosses, each with their name on it, planted them funereally in the campus quad. The solemn line then proceeded to the Luther statue, which was draped in black crepe. Several professors read from the Bible — one from Jeremiah, another from Lamentations. This was followed by prayers, the singing of the Common Doxology, and the sound of a dirge from the carillon bells.

And then the exiles tramped back to the seminary cafeteria for lunch.

The Aftermath

The seminary-in-exile, also known as Seminex and, later, Christ Seminary-Seminex, lasted for thirteen years. In 1987, it was incorporated into the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. The denomination spawned by the walkout, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, which comprised about 250 congregations, served as the catalyst for the formation, in 1988, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is proudly on the left these days, and it is beset by all the maladies of other mainline Protestant churches — plummeting membership, social-justice obsession, and sexual adventurism (endorsing same-sex marriage, transgender bishops, drag shows, and the like). Among the many lessons this story teaches is this: If the authority of the Sacred Scriptures is diminished, then the causes du jour take over.

Concordia Seminary, after a rocky year or two in the mid-1970s, quickly regained

its stride and, within five years, returned to its pre-walkout enrollment. Its mother church, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, has suffered membership dips, as have almost all American denominations in this secular age, but it has remained adamant in its conservative biblical theology. This commitment to orthodoxy was facilitated by the departure of the vast majority of the synod's liberal faction fifty years ago in February 1974.

This chapter in church history imparts several lessons. First, it demonstrates that a church body equipped with theological education and fortified against criticism can effectively resist attempts by the Left to undermine its character. Additionally, it underscores the vital importance of safeguarding the sanctity of the Scriptures. When a church allows humans to usurp the authority rightfully belonging to the Bible, it becomes vulnerable to the prevailing social causes of the day. Evidence of this is as close as the nearest Protestant mainline church. ✎





A Clash of Sacred Sounds: Ancient Liturgical Music vs. Contemporary Praise and Worship

It may be that it will prove difficult, or even impossible, to return to the Church of the early 2000s.

by **Aubrey Gulick**

The Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, California, is astonishing. From the outside, it appears as though a spaceship decided to land on the banks of Lake Merritt, while the interior reminds the visitor of an upside-down boat. Maple-stained slats rise high in the air, punctuated by light; at the front of the church, suspended above the altar, is a massive image of Christ, two fingers raised in blessing. The depiction looks like a projection onto a screen, but eager staff members assure visitors that the pixelation is a trick of the light.

Gregorian chant, the ancient song of the Catholic Church, feels out of place here, surrounded by the cold trappings of modernity. I know because I had the opportunity to play the cathedral's magnificent organ, and the simple notes of *Anima Christi* drifted erratically in the alien space.

If you've been in a Catholic church in the last sixty years, none of this is surprising. Chant doesn't fit in the boxy, unadorned modern churches with which many Americans are familiar. The acoustics are too dry. What does mesh well is a drum set, an electric piano, and *On Eagle's Wings*.

This disjointedness between ancient practices and art and their modern counterparts has been at the center of a burgeoning identity crisis within the Catholic Church. Some Catholics — perhaps inspired by the oft-invoked “spirit of Vatican II” — are eager to celebrate a contemporary liturgy that fits into a modern context; others are uninterested in anything created after the Council of Trent; and most fall somewhere in between.

Of course, this debate is not at all new. Plenty of Catholics (and non-Catholics) never liked the liturgical reforms that flooded the churches after the Second Vatican Council. In a rather famous instance in 1971, fifty-six British writers, musicians, and artists affixed their signatures to a letter asking Pope Paul VI to allow some parishes in England and Wales to continue celebrating the Mass in Latin. Paul VI agreed and issued what became known as the Agatha Christie indulgent.

But the indulgent was the exception, not the rule. For most Catholics, the latter half of the twentieth century was an age of innovative liturgies with brand-new music. Guitars, drums, and pianos found their way into churches, and organs were quietly removed or never even installed.



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When the Oakland diocese completed its cathedral in 2008, it was intended to be a space that catered to that new form of music. But even as the new cathedral opened its doors, things were changing.

Just months before, Pope Benedict XVI issued what was arguably one of the most pivotal documents of his pontificate: *Summorum pontificum*. In that document, Benedict XVI stated that the Church had never abrogated the Latin missal promulgated in 1962 and that any priest in any diocese could offer Mass according to that missal.

Many in the Church felt (and perhaps still feel) that the traditional movement was small and even inconsequential, and, in their eyes, *Summorum pontificum* made hardly a blip in the path the Church has taken since Vatican II. But to the growing contingent of Catholics who were in the process of rediscovering tradition, including my parents, *Summorum pontificum* was a lifeline.

I grew up attending Mass from the choir loft. I sang my first Mass at the age of seven — the setting for the ordinaries (*Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei*) was Mass VIII, or *Missa de Angelis* (a medieval Gregorian chant) — and began playing the organ for Mass before I was in high school. While my family primarily attended the Latin Mass, I grew up singing for both liturgies; in college, the schola I directed did the same.

A post-*Summorum pontificum* world made this kind of flexibility possible, and its impact on the liturgy and young Catholics has been undeniable. There has been a welcome revival of traditional music among many young people regardless of which liturgy they attend. At the same time, many young adults in the Catholic Church participate in contemporary praise and worship happily and without restraint.

Young Catholics and families looking for thriving parishes frequently attend Masses (in either English or Latin) where they can find bells, incense, and Gregorian chant. These churches are incubators of orthodoxy: kids scream in the background, families take up entire pews, and the average age of the choir is well below thirty. One wonders if this may have been what the fathers of Vatican II intended when they signed *Sacrosanctum concilium*, which declares that “the Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy; therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.”

Music, and by extension art, is technically not an integral part of the liturgy — but it is a vital aspect of the act of worship and impacts the way we think about our beliefs. As Gregorian chant and more traditional forms of liturgical music, including polyphony, experience a revival, they will undoubtedly shape the way young Catholics see and experience their faith.

What remains to be seen is whether Pope Francis’s 2021 motu proprio (papal decree), *Traditionis custodes*, will impact the budding revival of ancient liturgical music. While the document does not mention (or even pertain to) sacred music, it severely limits diocesan Tridentine Masses, which could have an impact on the organic rediscovery of more traditional forms of music in parishes where both forms of the Roman liturgy were celebrated.

On the other hand, it may be that it will prove difficult, or even impossible, to return to the Church of the early 2000s. Too many young Catholics have fallen in love with traditional forms of music and culture. They want incense, Gregorian chant, beautiful stained glass, and bells in their churches.

In 2017, the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, dedicated its own brand-new cathedral. From the outside, it looks how one would expect a church to look — it’s shaped like a cross, and a massive dome rises out of its center. Inside, white pillars rise to the ceiling and light streams in through stained glass. The *Salve Regina* or *Anima Christi* fits in this space.

As you walk into the Raleigh cathedral, you’re transported out of our increasingly existential and nihilist world. The individual is no longer the center of the universe; he is coming into contact with the Divine. ✨



God's Call to the Heart: Pascal's Insight Into Faith Beyond Reason

All the reasons in the world, valid as they may be for the head, will not move the person one inch unless the heart assents.

by Anthony Esolen

Recently in my humanities class at Thales College, we read selections from Pascal's *Pensées*, including that famous and mysterious assertion of his that the heart has its reasons whereof the head knows not. I explained to the students that by "heart" — French *coeur*, as it were the core and center of your being — Pascal did not imply anything like a romantic feeling. It was similar, I suggested, to what the schoolmen meant by *intellectus*, the immediate apprehension of a truth. That is what you have when you recognize, without rational proof, that the whole is greater than a part, or that you do indeed exist. They are the axioms of knowledge.

C.S. Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, will call the axioms of moral action "the Tao" and will say that they are not the results of moral reasoning but rather are the principles, to be grasped or seen without the mediation of argument. If, for example,

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somebody asks us *why* we should honor our parents, we might adduce some reasons to help him understand, such as that our parents have cared for us when we could not care for ourselves, and, therefore, we ought to be grateful to them; but really it is something that any healthy person must see, without arguments. Anyone who denies it is either lying or corrupt, or he is like a color-blind person who insists that there is no such thing as green.

How is such a vision like faith, and what does it imply for how we are to live?

Pascal does accept the rational force of arguments that prove that God must exist, but he says they are of no force for the person. We agree with them, and in a moment we doubt. They are reasons of the head, rational deductions from self-evident premises. The trouble is that God is, for Pascal, as he wrote in his famous *Memorial*, "not the God of the philosophers," but the epitome of personhood, the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." That God, the only God, is not to be reached by reason. For nothing proves that a person must act thus or so; and man

longs for God, not for the answer to a theological theorem. Otherwise he walks on a precipice, with an abyss on each side, the darkness from which he came, and the darkness into which he is going.

Man, wretched as he is, turning from one distraction to another to keep away the ennui, the awareness of his insignificance — man, noble as he is, the "thinking reed," as Pascal calls him, who in a thought that occupies neither space nor time can embrace the whole universe of space and time — man, by his own power, cannot span either abyss. He needs God to come to him to raise him up. God reveals himself to those who earnestly search for him; he is "a hidden God," who calls and would be sought. The appeal is from the infinite and divine Person to the person who is his creature. It is an appeal to man's heart, the center of his being, from the fiery heart of all life and all existence.

Therefore does God reveal himself to man and reveals man to himself; not wholly but in part, not yet clearly, not yet face to face. This revelation is, in the strict sense of the word, the content of faith. Now, it will not do to insist that God cannot enlighten

the mind of man with such truths. Pascal has no respect for a deist supreme being unable to do what any mere child can do: to speak. An atheist earnestly seeking God is, for Pascal, worthy of honor, but not the deist who no longer seeks God because he has reduced him to irrelevance.

Granting, then, that divine revelation is possible, the content of faith is no mere finite set of affirmations. It is a light: and then we may say, with the Psalmist, that it is in the light of God that we see light. Those who find the faith find more than the answers to a few questions. They find light. They are like people wandering in a dark wilderness who have been brought, not by

their own power but also not in violation of it, to the summit of a high mountain,

A life flooded with the light of faith is a beautiful thing, and some will see it — some; not all.

whence they see more than this or that but an entire vista; they see the mutual relations of hill and valley, brook and river, town and

countryside. I know by painful experience that mankind is not perfectible because I am not perfectible, but the account of man's fall in Genesis, an account both unfathomable and endlessly illuminative, shows me what I could hardly have learned on my own: for example, that I am compromised in both mind and body, in my appetite for knowledge and in my appetites for food and sex, and that I, therefore, must hide myself from God, from others, and from myself: "I hid myself, because I was naked." I know I am unjust, and I cannot stand upright before God or man, but I am apt to forget this, and to play dress-up in righteousness, to dim my eyes or to distract them with the flash and glare of worldly honor. Yet what worldly honor, what Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius can stand against the piercing light and darkness of Calvary? And when the overestimation of man's unaided powers proves an illusion, as optimism is ever one false step from yawning despair, what mere materialist can shed such light on us as to summon us back to our glory? The materialist reduces man to beast, and beast to vegetation, and vegetation to inanimate stuff, meaningless, world without end. But the same faith that sheds light on our wretchedness sheds light on our glory: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," says God, and "you have made him little less than the angels," says the Psalmist, and "he shall abide in me and I in him," says Jesus.

Now, then, if a thing is true, and if its truth is revealed by faith, so that the eyes of the heart are opened, it is sheer mulishness to insist that we must not act upon that truth until everyone sees it, or to ignore or deny that truth because we do not approve of the way it has come to us. We are told quite clearly that not all people will see: we are told that the heart may be hard and the eyes blind. What then? If they say to us, "Produce your reasons," meaning the reasons of the head, "and we will assent," how will that do? All the reasons in the world, valid as they may be for the head, will not move the person one inch, unless the heart assents with its whole and immediate grasp of the rightness and the beauty and the power of the truth. We must then make an appeal to the heart, the core. A life flooded with the light of faith is a beautiful thing, and some will see it — some; not all. The same is true of a culture or a nation.

America, open your eyes again. ✎





Living Crucifixes: The Phenomenon of Stigmata

Stigmatists have issued dire prophetic warnings about the end times and the Second Coming of Christ.

by Paul Kengor

The date was September 14, 1224. For the Catholic Church, it was the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross — the cross of Jesus Christ, whose bleeding wounds made expiation for the sins of the world. On that date, something extraordinary happened to a remarkable man in his early forties named Francesco di Bernardone, who would one day be known worldwide and through the annals of history as Saint Francis of Assisi.

The penitential friar had taken a liking to a retreat spot nestled in the beautiful Umbrian region mountain of La Verna, where he and other Friars Minor would frequently pray. In 1224, Francis hiked to La Verna for a forty-day fast to imitate Christ's own forty-day fast in the desert. Francis was no stranger to mortification and self-sacrifice, but what happened next would astonish even him.

Suddenly, while in deep prayer and contemplation, Francis experienced an intense pain in both his hands and feet; perforations had materialized in both, and blood poured from the wounds. His hands and feet were pierced, as if by nails. He was stunned, overwhelmed, and shocked.

And yet, despite the relentless pressure into his flesh that left him in constant agonizing, debilitating pain, Francis pressed on, preaching the Word and offering up his sufferings. His already weakened frame grew only weaker; although he was still in his early forties, he felt much older. He would endure the pain for two more years before he died.

Brother Leo, Francis's closest companion, witnessed the saint's suffering. Such first-person witness was crucial because the humble Francis refused to write about the phenomenon himself and forbade fellow friars from discussing it. This included those few who touched his subsequent wounds and cared for him during the final years of his life.

Of course, once Francis died, they would no longer keep silent. How could they? Many pilgrims gathered around the friar's corpse and stared in awe at the visible wounds.

Brother Elias, leader of the Order of Friars Minor, immediately sent a formal letter to the order and to the world describing the spectacular wounds. He issued his encyclical letter on the very day of Francis's death, October 4, 1226. He wrote jubilantly: "I announce to you a great joy, a miracle of a new kind. One has never heard tell of a similar wonder in the whole world except in the person of the Son of God, Christ our Lord." As Elias described it, Francis bore "in his body the five wounds which are truly the stigmata of Christ.... In fact, his hands and feet had had something like perforations made by the nails, front and back, that retained scars and showed the blackness of the nails. As to his side, he seemed to be pierced and blood often flowed out."



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Brother Elias did not hesitate to affirm that these markings were of supernatural origin. In life, the humble servant could try to hide the wounds he had received at La Verna, but, in death, it was time for his associates to shout the news from the mountaintops.

Incredible? Certainly. That's why eyewitness testimony was so significant. To that end, three years later, in 1229, Thomas of Celano produced the first biography of Francis that went into further detail. He likewise affirmed of Francis:

His hands and feet seemed to be pierced by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing in the palms of his hands and on the upper sides of his feet, the points appearing on the other side. The marks were round on the palm of each hand but elongated on the other side, and small pieces of flesh jutting out from the rest took on the appearance of the nail-ends, bent and driven back. In the same way the marks of nails were impressed on his feet and projected beyond the rest of the flesh. Moreover, his right side had a large wound as if it had been pierced with a spear, and it often bled so that his tunic and trousers were soaked with his sacred blood.

That miraculous event occurred eight hundred years ago. That time is so long ago, truly into medieval times, that contemporary readers today will be inclined to doubt it. Less easy to doubt, however, is the experience of another Italian Franciscan some seven hundred years later. His name was also Francesco. Like Saint Francis, he one day would attain worldwide renown.

Padre Pio's Passion

The thirty-one-year-old Francesco Forgione, better known as Padre Pio, received the stigmata on September 20, 1918, while alone in front of a crucifix in Our Lady of Grace chapel, the church of the Franciscan friars in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy. Like Francis, the humble Pio felt thoroughly unworthy to share in these sufferings and attempted to conceal them. However, much like Francis, this was a secret plainly impossible to keep. Fellow friars and parishioners began to notice, and word spread to the town, the bishop, Rome, the Vatican, and the pope.

Under the order of obedience, the bandaged Pio spoke about the moment when he received the stigmata. His testimony occurred in a formal deposition at 5 p.m. on June 15, 1921, as part of the Vatican's official investigation into his wounds. He said this to the Holy See's official apostolic visitor, who filed this verbatim transcript:

On September 20, 1918, after celebrating the Mass, I stayed in the choir for the due thanksgiving prayer, when suddenly I was overtaken by a powerful trembling, then calm followed, and I saw our Lord in the posture of someone who is on a cross (but it didn't strike me whether he had the Cross), lamenting the ingratitude of men, especially those consecrated to him and by him most favored. This revealed his suffering and his desire to unite souls with his Passion. He invited me to partake of his sorrows and to meditate on them: At the same time he urged me to work for my brothers' salvation. I felt then full of compassion for the Lord's sorrows, and I asked him what I could do. I heard this voice: "I unite you with my Passion." Once the vision disappeared, I came to, I returned to my senses, and I saw these signs there [Pio shows his stigmata], which were dripping blood. I didn't have anything [markings] before.

The Lord had chosen an intimate moment when the young friar was alone to bestow His wounds upon him. Father Benedetto, Pio's

superior, had left town for several days for a mission trip. Brother Nicola, who would have been in charge in Benedetto's absence, was out making his rounds. Students at the friary were outside in the courtyard. In the sanctuary, it was just God and man, alone.

The young Franciscan was, of course, astonished. The markings he had received immediately began to bleed profusely. Pio struggled to drag himself back to his cell; no one saw him, though his fellow brothers were soon alarmed by the sight of a trail of blood leading from the choir through the corridor and, ultimately, to Pio's closed door. There inside, in pain and weeping with mixed emotions of joy and distress, Pio frantically and futilely nursed his wounds, wrapping them in whatever makeshift bandages he could pull together. He tried to stop the hemorrhaging but only managed to soak the handkerchiefs, which he would find impossible to hide. The friars as well as Pio's superiors soon saw the bloodied clothing.

Pio begged the Lord to hide his wounds, but that was not God's plan. The news spread like wildfire. People flocked to tiny San Giovanni Rotondo. Everyone wanted to see the miracle for themselves.

Indeed, by the end of Pio's life fifty years later, in September 1968, countless souls — pilgrims, parishioners, European visitors, World War II servicemen, friars, outside clergy, high-level Church officials, doctors, psychologists, scientists, believers, skeptics, and atheists — ventured out to see and touch his wounds, which were photographed and documented. There are numerous pictures and videos of the phenomenon, none of which (of course) exist from the time of Saint Francis.

Sure, moderns can easily shrug off Saint Francis's alleged marks from the thirteenth century, but they can't do the same for Pio's from the twentieth century. The evidence of Pio's wounds remains widely viewable.

'Transformed Into a Living Crucifix'

What I'm describing here is a miraculous phenomenon known as stigmata. Stigmata are physical marks reflecting and representing a participation in the sacrificial Passion of Jesus Christ at His Crucifixion. The marks are wounds, and they are granted to the rarest victim soul as a spiritual gift. These specially blessed individuals are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sins of others, as their Lord did at Calvary.

"The stigmata is not given to the stigmatic for his or her benefit but for the benefit of others," writes Deacon Albert E. Graham in his *Compendium of the Miraculous*. "The stigmatic represents the Crucified Christ to a world continually in need of a loving sacrifice that atones for our sin." The stigmatic, "transformed into a living crucifix who shares in the Lord's Passion for the redemption of the world," becomes a sacrifice unto himself or herself.

From a Christian theological perspective, it is important to emphasize that the phenomenon of stigmatism does not suggest that the stigmatist replaces Christ or imply that His atonement is insufficient for us. Francis and Pio certainly would never say that, nor would any Church-approved stigmatist. The chosen stigmatists are intensely holy souls who are willing to give themselves entirely to Christ to help atone for the sins of the world.

Is the phenomenon difficult to believe? Of course. That's why miracles are, well, miraculous.

Personally, I always found claims of stigmata fascinating but hard to believe. I was an agnostic for many years; like Thomas the Apostle, I needed to see to believe. As Thomas said to the other disciples after Christ's crucifixion, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:24).

That was me, too.

And yet, over the years, I have seen photos of various stigmatists and read at length about stigmatic saints, including those from the twentieth century who were thoroughly scrutinized by medical authorities. I eventually compiled so much material that I felt I had to write a book about stigmatists.

It is widely said that Saint Francis of Assisi was the first stigmatist. However, some have argued, not unjustifiably, that Saint Paul might have been the first, many centuries earlier, in the first century AD. Note Paul's words in Galatians 6:17: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

We do not know for certain if Paul was referring to what we today call stigmata. It is possible that he was speaking more figuratively, asserting that he suffered as Christ

did. As Paul made clear elsewhere in the Scriptures, he endured a multitude of hardships: he was flogged, imprisoned, stoned, left adrift at sea, beaten three times with rods, shipwrecked three times, lashed five times, forced to go without food and water and sleep, and still more (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). Paul in his Epistle to the Romans urged his fellow Christians to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. He certainly did the same — perhaps to the point of stigmatic sacrifice.

Throughout the centuries, countless stigmatists have continued to follow in the footsteps of Francis, such as three well-known stigmatists born in the fourteenth century: Saints Catherine of Siena, Rita of Cascia, and Frances of Rome. All three of those women became major figures in the Church. Then, to cite just a few examples spanning the coming centuries, there were Blessed Lucy of Narni, born in the fifteenth century; Saint Catherine Dei Ricci, born in the sixteenth century; Saint Veronica Giuliani, born in the seventeenth century; and Blesseds Anna Maria Taigi and Anne Catherine Emmerich, both born in the eighteenth century. They were followed by four prominent stigmatists born in the nineteenth century: Saint Gemma Galgani, Saint Padre Pio, Blessed Elena Aiello, and Therese Neumann. In my book, I focus on a handful of stigmatists who each receive individual chapters: Francis, Catherine of Siena, Gemma Galgani, Padre Pio, Elena Aiello, Therese Neumann, and Saint Faustina Kowalska. Of these, Galgani, Pio, Aiello, Neumann, and Faustina all died in the twentieth century. Faustina, the so-called Divine Mercy messenger, was the first canonized saint of the new millennium, sainted by her fellow Pole, Pope John Paul II.

Importantly, these names represent only a fraction of the men and women reported to have borne the wounds of Christ. The actual list is far more extensive and numbers in the hundreds. So, how many stigmatists have there been?

One notable work on the subject is a 1989 book by Michael Freze titled *They Bore the Wounds of Christ*, which was published by *Our Sunday Visitor*. Freze's work is valuable and inspiring, and, similarly to my own study, he struggled to find reliable, up-to-date estimates on stigmatists. There is no authority, other than perhaps the Vatican, that keeps a running tab of alleged or even Church-approved stigmatists. Freze quotes the renowned Parisian scholar, Dr. Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, who achieved groundbreaking research on the subject a century earlier. In his monumental two-volume work *La stigmatisation*, Imbert-Gourbeyre reported that there have been 321 authentic stigmatists in Church history. But, alas, that work was published back

in 1894. It is long outdated. As Freze acknowledges, since that time, "numerous others" have borne the marks of Christ.

In fact, there have been so many since that Freze suggests the twentieth century might rightly be called the "era of the stigmatist."

Freze notes more than two dozen reputable cases of stigmatism that were reported and investigated in that century. The rising number of cases does make one wonder why there are seemingly more stigmatists than ever before. Some might argue that we simply know of more cases today because of the mass media, but the reality is quite the opposite. The vast majority of these individuals receive little to no media attention — and, when they do, they are often subject to ridicule.

Quickly noticeable when examining lists of stigmatists is the predominance of women, who compose nearly 90 percent of

the cases. In addition, a significant majority, around 70 percent, hail from Italy. And nearly all have been Catholic.

The fact that so many stigmatists have been women is intriguing. It also seems odd that the first stigmatist, whether it was Saint Paul or Saint Francis, was male, and that the most famous stigmatist, Padre Pio, was male. Nonetheless, Imbert-Gourbeyre calculated that of his 321 authentic stigmatists, 280 were female. Why so many women? Fr. Ulrich Veh, a German Franciscan-Capuchin who was the vice postulator for the cause for beatification for stigmatist Therese Neumann, offered one explanation. "Women have been called to love in a more sensitive way than most men," said Veh. "They seem to be able to suffer more at the same time they love."

As for why more stigmatists have been Catholic than Protestant, that doesn't seem to be a great mystery. Modern evangelicals puzzle over questions such as: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" (I'm a former evangelical myself.) Catholics, however, fully understand that bad things happen to good people all the time, from the Old Testament's Job to Christ Himself. Jesus told His followers that if they truly want to follow Him, they need to pick up their cross. Look at the sufferings captured in Catholic art. Look at the Pietà. Suffering is captured in Catholics' omnipresent portrayals of Christ's bleeding, beaten body nailed to the crucifixes displayed in their parishes and homes. Many Protestants criticize Catholics for having Christ's corpus on their crosses, as Protestants instead prefer an empty cross that symbolizes Christ's glorious resurrection.

Catholics uniquely embrace the cross of Christ. Compared to Protestants, Catholics are plainly more willing to accept suffering, fast, honor Lenten sacrifices, and even undergo mortification. When they suffer, they often willingly "offer it up" — meaning they willingly present their suffering to their Savior for a heavenly purpose.

In fact, in many cases of Catholic stigmatists, they begged Christ to permit them to join in His suffering. That is not something commonly heard among evangelical Protestants, especially those who adhere to the "health-and-wealth" gospel.

Stigmatists Today

That brings us back to the central question: How many stigmatists have there been throughout history? Indeed, how many such victim souls — living crucifixes — exist today?

Freze's research was published in 1989, and Imbert-Gourbeyre's dates back to 1894. More recent research has been conducted by the Ruusbroec Institute of the University of Antwerp in Belgium,

These specially
blessed individuals
are willing to
sacrifice themselves
for the sins of
others, as their Lord
did at Calvary.

which specializes in academic research on religion and mystical spirituality. Even this data is outdated, however. The institute has compiled a database that lists stigmatists from the period of 1734 to 1934 and estimates just over 200 legitimate cases from that period.

A very contemporary source is Deacon Graham, author of the 2013 volume *Compendium of the Miraculous*, which I mentioned earlier. Graham shared his research on stigmatists with me and my publisher, TAN Books.

Regarding twentieth-century stigmatists, Graham identified eighty-nine in total. Among them, eighty-two were women and only seven were men. All but two were Catholic.

As for stigmatists currently living or who lived into the twenty-first century, Graham identified forty-five individuals as of 2021. Once again, most of these individuals were Catholic and female. Quite different, however, was the diminished representation of stigmatists from France, Germany, and Spain. This seems to be a fitting reflection of the aggressive secularization in those countries today. More prominently represented than in previous centuries were stigmatists from South America, Africa, India, the United States, Syria, and South Korea.

In other words, stigmatists are now more widespread, reflective of the truly universal nature of the Church. I discuss in my book several cases of claimed living stigmatists, some of them controversial, such as Luz de María de Bonilla and Gisella Cardia. I also look closely at Sister Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa, the Our Lady of Akita seer, who is still living in Japan.

In all, when looking at the data, the list of known stigmatists since the time of Saint Francis of Assisi seems to run in the range of four to five hundred, and it is still growing today.

With all of this said, do we have more to learn from these stigmatists? Specifically, have they left messages that speak to us today?

Yes, absolutely, and that may be the most significant part. What really strikes me about so many of these individuals is that they were (and are) not only stigmatists but also visionaries. It is quite intriguing, revealing, and, I would venture to say, no coincidence — and, above all, something not to be ignored — that almost all Church-approved stigmatists have been just that: visionaries.

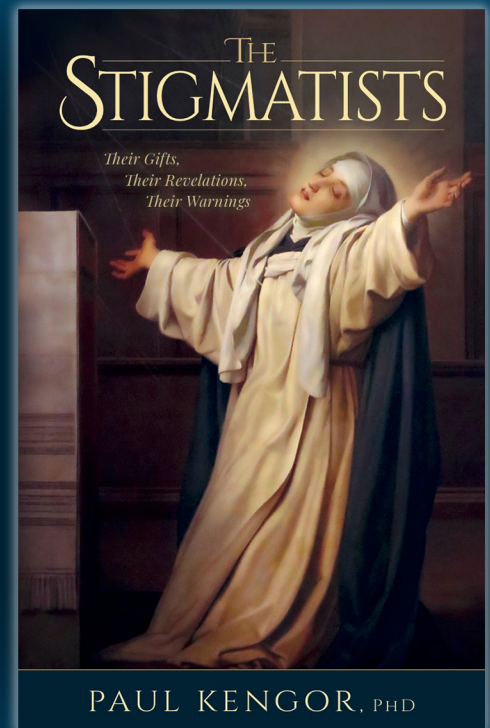
My study gives special attention to Church-approved stigmatists — especially those declared blessed and saints — and their visions, revelations, messages, and warnings. In some cases, the prophetic warnings dramatically relate to the end times and the Second Coming of Christ. The messages of Saint Faustina, for instance — that first saint of our new millennium — are downright apocalyptic. She speaks of the end times that may well be upon us.

Yes, that's a very dramatic statement. Take it or leave it. Or, maybe better put, wait and see.

The sobering reality is that many stigmatists have issued dire prophetic warnings that they claimed were given to them by Christ Himself, or His Blessed Mother, regarding a final-days fire from the sky that will chastise man for his sins, purify the earth once again, and initiate the Second Coming. And, as I see it, one might rightly interpret the mark of the stigmata as a heavenly affirmation of these saints' authenticity, in turn adding credibility to their expressed visions. Personally, I'm inclined to take very seriously the words of warning from a saintly man or woman who visibly bears the wounds of Christ. That person has my attention. How about yours? ✨

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Life Is Short, But Eternity Is Forever

Eventually, I came to the conclusion that God has been at the center of my life.

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

The following is an excerpt from R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.'s new book, *How Do We Get Out of Here: Half a Century of Laughter and Mayhem at The American Spectator—From Bobby Kennedy to Donald J. Trump*.

When I was a young boy, I was often visited by a vision of the Virgin Mary standing by a stone well on a dusty road by her home, scooping up water in a jar to take back to her family, which of course included a rather illustrious child. In later years, the child appeared at the temple to the distress of his mother, and later still when he was a grown-up, he relieved his mother's anxieties on at least one occasion by changing water into wine, which Holy Scripture tells us was eminently potable. On and on, these visions flickered. Today I envision them again with increased frequency. They come unbidden. As if from nowhere.

I am not claiming some sort of supernatural experience, rather I believe that these images are probably the residue of holy cards I collected in school in my youth. I think they are a part of the memoirist's accumulated baggage. While writing this memoir, I have been reintroducing myself to my past and the more I think back over the years, the more images come forth. In some ways, I am now a different man than when I began disinterring my past. Sometimes the memories are painful. Most often, they are reassuring. I got through one adventure, for instance: the Clintons' attempt at putting me in jail. I proceeded on through another. You might recall my successful effort to crash Bill's sixtieth birthday party in Toronto, where I wowed the assembled Clinton brain trust when I told them that I was the author of *Finnegans Wake*. No one doubted.

Most of the adventures were a lot of fun, as you have doubtless noticed. Certainly, the images drawn from Biblical times on a dusty road in Nazareth were

reassuring. In fact, every thought drawn from Biblical times is reassuring. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that God has been at the center of my life. As the Bible says, He is always with us whether we invite Him or not. He was with me through the raucous times and the more painful moments. Sometimes, I owe Him an apology. Other times, I thank Him for his consolation.

In my early years, I was troubled by very little, though some questions continued to nag at me. For instance, there is the question that I touched upon in Chapter I: "How do we get out of here?" Another is, "How did I get here?" Or, "Why am I here in the first place?" Finally, there is my objection, uttered evermore weakly through the years, "I never asked to be here," which left me with one more question: "So, what is it all about?" Fortunately, I came across the seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal. Many young skeptics are never fortunate enough to find Pascal.

I was, and he supplied the initial answer to my question. The answer is God. I took Pascal's wager. According to Pascal's formulation of the wager, if one lives by what are commonly called God's laws and believes in God's existence, God will be satisfied. If God does not exist, it costs the fellow who took Pascal's wager nothing. Here thereby avoided the hassle of living on the margins. On the other hand, if God does exist — and He is not playing the greatest practical joke of all time on us — He rewards the fellow who took the wager with eternal life and all the blessings that go with it. Intriguingly, the famed skeptic George Jean Nathan, Mencken's sidekick, and a founder of the first *American Spectator*, took Pascal's wager toward the end of his life. He became a Catholic. Allegedly, George — ever the pleasure-seeker — did it because he "wanted to go to Heaven." Or, as that mysterious woman said to Bob Novak at Syracuse University so many years ago: "Life is short, but eternity is forever."

Taking Pascal's wager was my first step. My second, which deepened my belief in God, was to consider the Thomistic proofs



R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., is Editor-in-Chief of *The American Spectator*.

for his existence. They were formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century and deposited in his *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas argued that the existence of motion requires a first mover, that the existence of efficient causality requires a first cause, and that the design evident throughout the visible world requires a designer. St. Thomas marshaled other arguments for the existence of God, but by the time I had mulled those over, I was a believing Thomist. Anyone who takes the time to think about St. Thomas's five ways to prove God's existence will find them convincing. I knew Christopher Hitchens for years, first as an opponent, then as a friend. The Clintons could have that kind of seismic effect on rational minds. I am sorry I never took up the arguments of Blaise Pascal and St. Thomas Aquinas with Christopher. My guess is that he got to them eventually on his own.

But why did God create us? I would think that running the universe was pretty much a full-time job. We are told by people who ponder such questions that God is a loving God. He created humans to share His life with them. He made us rational and free — in His “image,” as the Bible says. That makes sense. Otherwise, He created us for less generous reasons, to thwart and frustrate us, which makes no sense. Thus, I am putting my money on God, and if I am wrong, it costs me nothing.

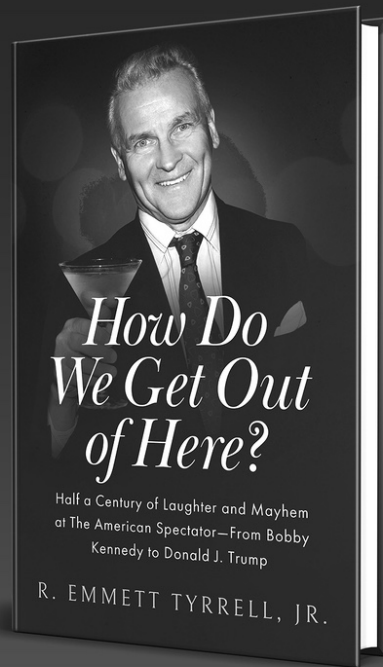
Now, at the end of this memoir, I see Bob Kennedy standing before those massive black curtains of yesteryear. I wonder how he would have changed had he lived through the life I have lived through. Would he indeed be somewhat conservative, as Paul Corbin said he would? Or would he follow the path of the standard-issue liberal, leftward, leftward, ever leftward? Would he still pray the rosary at night? How about abortion? Where would he be on that vexed question? What about Sunday Mass? What would he think of me, the young guy who put a Reagan button in his outstretched hand before his driver drove him away from the IU auditorium? Would he still laugh? I like to think that he would, but given the contents of this book, I have my doubts. 🐛



Portrait of Blaise Pascal (Palace of Versailles)

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How Do We Get Out of Here? is R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr.'s intimate memoir, detailing his leadership in the conservative movement and his relationships with its major personalities from 1968 to the present.



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Anthony Esolen Exposes Modern Liberal Fallacies in *The Lies of Our Time*

The theologian writes in a lyrically beautiful manner, peppering his pages with biblical and literary references.

by Leonora Cravotta

The Lies of Our Time

By Anthony Esolen

(Sophia Institute Press, 224 pages, \$19)

Catholic scholar Anthony Esolen refutes the lie that there is no God and disproves seven other popular falsehoods widely disseminated by today's progressive ideology in his latest book, *The Lies of Our Time*.

The God whom we meet in Genesis, Esolen posits, has several unique characteristics: He has no beginning, no end, and, by definition, no progenitors. He is associated neither with any theogony nor with the establishment of a city or empire, and he lacks any connection to the natural world. As Esolen writes:

He is not a sun god, because He made the sun. He is not a corn god, because He made the earth and every living thing in it. Everywhere you go in the world, wherever you investigate the myths of mankind, you will find a theogony, entangled with cities and the vines that give the people their food, smudged with soil and soaked in blood. But God is, and that is all.

Propagating the notion that God does not exist and that the practice of organized Judeo-Christian religion is the stuff of mythology endangers society, Esolen argues, because those who eschew God and the Judeo-



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Christian tradition must still seek guidance and redemption elsewhere, despite their protestations to the contrary — and they often do so through political structures. The state thus becomes the god to whom they metaphorically bow their heads while unwittingly sacrificing their liberties.

Esolen writes in a lyrically beautiful manner, peppering his pages with biblical and literary references. He buttresses his argument with an analysis of the Ten Commandments in which he systematically illustrates society's present-day defiance of them. For example, the Fourth Commandment, "Honor the father and mother," has been trivialized, Esolen argues, through the breakdown of the traditional familial relationships of husband and wife and parent and child.

Sunday or Saturday, depending on one's faith, used to be the time when families would gather not only to worship God but also to enjoy a communal meal, walk, or sporting event. Furthermore, factories, stores, and offices would close for the Lord's Day. Now, stores are open seven days a week. Parents are constantly working, and children are either attending scheduled playdates or playing electronic games. Even if families are gathered for a group activity, they are not fully engaged. Everyone is on their cell phones or iPads. Esolen is concerned that if children do not fully bond with their parents during their childhood, they will not be as devoted to them fifty years later when the roles are reversed, and the children become the caregivers.

He also reiterates the central argument of his 2022 book *No Apologies: Why Civilization Depends on the Strength of Men*: that society's, and the family's, survival is contingent upon the participation of husbands and fathers who are both intellectually and physically powerful.

Society needs those men to step up to protect "the million children snuffed out by abortion in the United States each year," as Esolen writes, to fight back against a society that lives in violation of the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Esolen emphasizes that culture of death by referencing the rise in deaths from violent crimes, and he strongly denounces the euthanasia advocates who "peddle death as a comfortable way out of your despair."

Lastly, Esolen dissects the lie that "cultural progress is inevitable" by arguing that technological advances, cross-cultural pollination, and wealth have neither reduced suffering nor advanced moral virtue. The author allows that society has benefited from some of the technical innovations of the last two hundred years, such as "the steam engine, the combustion engine, refrigeration, electric power, the automobile, the train, the airplane, the camera in all its many forms, radio, television and now the high-speed computer," alongside the scientific research that has eradicated so many childhood diseases. However, he argues that the mere possession of transformational tools is insufficient and even dangerous in the wrong hands.

Anthony Esolen's *The Lies of Our Time* demonstrates once again that its author is a marvelous, provocative writer who consistently stands up for traditional values in the face of an increasingly large and angry mob. He possesses an intimate understanding of not only the joy that a relationship with God brings but also the dangers of a world that seeks to replace Him with the golden calf du jour. Although Esolen understands the precarious composition of our contemporary landscape, he remains ever-hopeful of divine intervention. All is not lost. And *The Lies of Our Time* can serve as a dependable beacon to guide you through the wilderness we face. ✎

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Current Wisdom

Special religious edition.

by Assorted Jackasses

Twisted Sister

Just about anyone with common sense and decency, particularly among the vast swath of Christendom and notably among Catholics, was deeply offended by the Los Angeles Dodgers's decision to honor a group of hairy-legged, bearded men who pole dance on crosses while dressing as nuns and calling themselves the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. But then there's the twisted perspective of Sister Jeannine Gramick, who wrote:

Dear friends,

I am aware of the controversy regarding the L.A. Dodgers and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

I am a member of the Sisters of Loretto, a Roman Catholic congregation of women religious, have been a Catholic nun for more than 60 years, and ministered to and with the LGBTQ Catholic community for more than 50 years.

While I am uncomfortable with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence using the nuns' old garb to draw attention to bigotry, whether Catholic or not, there is a hierarchy of values in this situation. The choice of clothing, even if offensive to some, can never trump the works of mercy.

Just as I have great respect for Catholic nuns because of their compassion and good works over the centuries, I applaud the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence for their financial assistance to those in need. I support them because of all their good works. I believe that any group that serves the community, especially those who are

less fortunate or on the margins of society, should be honored.

I support your honoring the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Peace,

*Sr. Jeannine Gramick, SL,
May 27, 2023*

Pints, Kids, and Drag Queens — Who Could Object?

This profound, probing question was raised by yet another brilliant mind at the inestimable British rag (or perhaps “drag rag”) the *Guardian*. Look out Thomas Aquinas; it's time to make room for history's next great moral philosopher. In his own words:

In February 2020, I took my three-year-old daughter to a local pub for an event that sounded intriguing. It was called Drag Queen Story Hour. I thought it may be right up her street — glitter, stories, wigs — and offer her the chance to learn something about difference and respect along the way. I also liked the idea of doing something different, although the main appeal was free child entertainment and the fact that my partner and I could have a roast and a pint of Guinness while we watched.

As predicted, the kids in attendance went absolutely wild: screaming and dancing during the interactive bits, rushing to get their pictures taken afterwards with Aida H Dee, a fabulous character whom my daughter insisted was a “dragon queen”. Two years on, she still does a good

impression of the funny voices Aida H Dee would adopt for the characters.

I might not have thought of that day again, but Drag Queen Story Hour has recently been hauled into a culture war. This summer, groups including the far-right and conspiracy theorists calling themselves “sovereign citizens” have been holding up signs saying “Welcome groomers” and “Once upon a time” outside libraries in places from Bexleyheath to Reading when Drag Queen Story Hour events were due to take place. Parents entering the libraries had questions shouted at them about why they were taking their children to see a paedophile. Videos of the protests in Reading were posted online and looked terrifying. It was a scene you might expect to see in the US, where homophobic Christian groups have long maligned large parts of the LGBTQ+ movement and their allies as “groomers”. But in Reading?

Then I realised the drag queen at the centre of it all was Aida H Dee, the same performer who had entranced my daughter two years earlier. How could such a joyful event be causing such controversy?

—*Guardian*, August 11, 2022

French Arrogance

The Religious Left and secular liberals continue to destroy American culture. They push full steam ahead with “abortion rights,” same-sex “marriage,” Drag Queen Story Hour, the “right” of your six-year-old to “transition” genders, and on and on. But the

ever-sanctimonious David French knows where the real threat to America lies:

Where are America's most dangerous political radicals? Rallying in churches, by the thousands, in city after city. In church after church. The seeds for the next insurrection are being sown by the MAGA Christian nationalists. Right before our eyes

—David French on X, February 13, 2022

Blessing Same-Sex Married Couples

Utterly unsurprisingly, LGBTQ-obsessed Jesuit priest Father James Martin wasted no time in seeking out a same-sex couple — a “married” one — for a blessing immediately after Pope Francis approved blessings for same-sex couples. He then blatantly ignored the Church’s teaching when he said of the couple on *Good Morning America*, “They’ve been married for two years.” The *New York Times* reported:

As a Jesuit priest for more than two decades, the Rev. James Martin has bestowed thousands of blessings — on rosary beads, on babies, on homes, boats, and meals, on statues of saints, on the sick, on brides and on grooms.

Never before, though, was he permitted to bless a same-sex couple — not until Monday, when the pope said he would allow such blessings, an announcement that reverberated through the church.

On Tuesday morning, Damian Steidl Jack, 44, and his husband, Jason Steidl Jack, 38, stood before Father Martin in a living room on Manhattan’s West Side. The couple, running a bit late because of subway delays, dressed casually. Damian, a floral designer, complimented Father Martin on the pine smell of the Christmas tree....

“May the Lord bless and keep you,” Father Martin began, touching the two men’s shoulders. They bowed their heads slightly, and beld hands.

“May the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his countenance to you and give you joy and peace.

“And may almighty God bless you,” he said, making the sign of the cross, “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

And then, with emotion evident on their faces, the three men hugged....

Father Martin had waited years for the privilege of saying such a prayer, however simple, out in the open.

“It was really nice,” Father Martin said on Tuesday, “to be able to do that publicly.”...

Damian and Jason Steidl Jack, who were married last year, had previously

discussed the possibility of a blessing with Father Martin, a longtime friend of Jason’s. When Father Martin texted on Monday afternoon and asked if they wanted a blessing, they leaped at the offer.

—*New York Times*, December 21, 2023

‘Abortion Is a Moral Good’

Presbyterian minister Rebecca Todd Peters has conceived (no pun intended) a fascinating new theology of child sacrifice that would have made the ancient Aztecs blush. Move over, Moloch! Even worshipers of Baal might deem the Right Reverend Peters too debauched for their tastes. Her sermon, outlined below, should disgust you:

Peters gave a sermon July 9 at the Community Church of Chapel Hill in North Carolina, explaining why she believes Christians should support abortions for any reason without restriction.

“Abortion is a moral good. Abortion is an act of love. Abortion is an act of grace,” Peters told the congregation. “Abortion is a blessing.”

As she spoke, she wore a bright pink stole displaying the logo of the billion-dollar abortion chain Planned Parenthood, according to the report.

Peters is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), an Elon University professor and an abortion activist. She has given speeches and written books and columns for years about why she believes it is moral and ethical to kill unborn babies in abortions.

She told the news outlet that [she] believes it is her duty to counter the pro-life beliefs taught by the Catholic Church and evangelical Protestants.

In the past two years, Peters has given at least 55 similar sermons and lectures, and the Spiritual Alliance of Communities for Reproductive Dignity, a pro-abortion group that she co-founded, hosts training seminars and provides a curriculum to churches that makes a Christian case for abortion, according to the report.

—*LifeNews.com*, July 14, 2023

A Nun’s Story

This account is from Monica Hingston, an ex-nun who renounced her vows and her “homophobic” Church to embrace the rainbow faith of LGBTQ lunacy — with a fellow ex-nun whom she wanted to “marry.” Hingston was also purportedly a cousin of the long-suffering Cardinal George Pell. Oh, and by the way, why is this article in *Business Insider*?

One of the other nuns was named Peg. She’d been a nun for 25 years, and I had reached my 21st. We shared a passion for empowering oppressed women. We’d talk for hours. I hated leaving her at the end of each day.

One day, she confessed: “I don’t want you to leave, but I’m afraid to ask you to stay.”

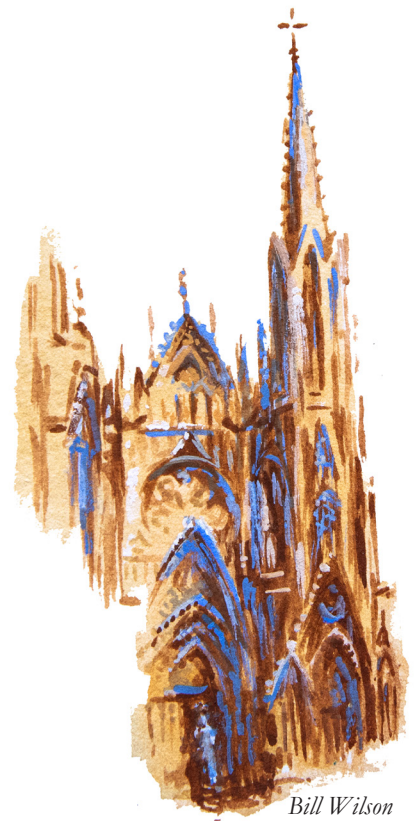
My entire life changed at that point. Every road had led me to her. I realized I was falling deeply in love, and she felt the same.

We moved to Torquay, Australia, to live happily as a lesbian couple. There, Peg and I connected on every level. We hugged five or six times a day. We shared our fears and hopes. I’d never known happiness like it.

We wanted to get married — not in a church; by this point, I was firmly an atheist, and Peg was more agnostic. But in 2003, the church instructed Catholic politicians to actively oppose laws recognizing gay unions, calling those seeking them “depraved.” My cousin Pell aggressively backed these sentiments.

I wrote him a private letter challenging his homophobia by describing my relationship with my beautiful Peg.

—*Business Insider*, April 1, 2023



Bill Wilson



Christianity Is Simply More Fun

I love being part of a religion whose leader's first action was to bless wine.

by Itxu Díaz

I just saw a typical protest march in some Arab country on the news. I think it was Jordan, but it could have been Tunisia; I tend to get them all mixed up. I was late to the report, so I don't know what they were protesting, but it matters not. That lot are always angry. They scream like someone just raised their taxes. They elbow each other. And if the police didn't contain them, they would likely eat someone alive without even bothering to cook them first. Even when their countries manage to stay peaceful for a time, most of them don't experience that same peace in their souls. They always seem as though they have just been stung on a testicle by a wasp.

I'm sure you have occasionally seen an imam preaching in a mosque. There are thousands of such videos on the internet. It is indeed very rare to see an imam instructing his people without raising his voice. The body language is aggressive even if you don't actually understand anything he says. Sometimes, it is even more aggressive when you do understand it. When I have watched them on occasion, I have caught myself muttering under my breath: *Dude, why don't you calm down a little? Have you tried enjoying life?* Even when preaching about how one should love one's brothers, they speak with such vehemence that it's unclear whether to love thy neighbor or headbutt him.

Every time an Islamist attack occurs in Europe — lately, almost daily — some cretin always jumps up to say: “All religions are to blame for this. They all bring about violence.” And I feel like reminding them that the religion that has caused the most violence so far is secularism, but they would not understand. In any case, I am amazed at the progressive Western mentality that, in the face of a jihadist attack, decides to condemn Christianity as if we Christians were also hell-bent on trying to behead babies in suburban Parisian parks.

I'm not attempting to present a theological confrontation between Islam and Christianity. Michel Houellebecq already did that, and he now lives with a permanent police escort — undeniable proof that Islam is so much more peaceful than Christianity, just as some leftists claim. On the contrary, my thesis is that Christianity is much more fun, even for those who are cultural Christians living on the fringes of religion. You will always have a better time if you have a Christian nearby.

Every morning, I thank God for giving me the Christian faith because I love being part of a religion whose leader's first action was to bless wine. Muslims, I'm sure you know, are forbidden alcohol, gambling, tobacco, and pork. Come to think of it, no wonder they are so bitter.

And then there is sharia, the Islamic law, which is already enforced in several European neighborhoods not even the police can enter. In Berlin, for example, these



Itxu Díaz is a Spanish journalist, political satirist, and author. His latest book, I Will Not Eat Crickets: An Angry Satirist Declares War on the Globalist Elite, is now available in English.

no-go zones are a horror for women. Often, even wearing the Islamic veil and lowering one's eyes when passing by a man does not save a woman from being insulted or threatened — simply because she is wearing a little eye shadow. In these places, polygamy is rampant. This might also explain the general moodiness: in Christian marriage, it is almost impossible to keep your cool while trying to keep things right with your wife. Now, imagine three wives complaining in unison because you left your underpants hanging on the TV again.

As for me, I could not be prouder to practice a religion whose third commandment is crystal clear: "Thou shalt keep holy the Lord's day." If Hunter Biden had tried to create his own religion, he could not have found a more fitting commandment. Somehow, not celebrating certain holidays might even constitute a sin in Christianity. Isn't that fabulous?

Even our Lenten fast is much more bearable than Ramadan, whose Arabic etymology already hints that you are not going to have a good time: *ar-ramad* means "scorching heat." During the thirty days of Ramadan, poor Muslims cannot eat, drink, or have sex from sunrise to sunset; some cannot have sex even after sundown, and that's where the problems begin. Nor can they consume anything that enters the body through the mouth, but, on advice from my cardiologist, I will not expand on this part of the tenet.

By contrast, my Christian Lent consists of a fairly reasonable slimming diet that also, if you make a little effort, buys you front-row tickets in Heaven for all eternity. As for its etymological origin, the Old English root of *Lent* comes from *lencten*, meaning "spring," which is neither hot nor scorching but pleasantly mild, except for the reminder that I can no longer spring into action on the dance floor because my belly has grown and my joints ache. In any case, we Christians go through Lent in a purifying mood, but deep down we are just looking forward to Easter, when we throw another huge party that lasts for weeks.

Everywhere you look, as I wrote some years ago in *The American Spectator*, Christianity is a party religion. When we

are in a bar having a drink and some half-drunk idiot appears saying that Christianity is a strict, oppressive, and backward religion, I tend to reply politely, but very clearly, "You dumbass, if it weren't for the strict, oppressive, and backward medieval monks, you wouldn't have been able to drink all that beer." There are still many people who do not know that the recipe for the beer we drink today only exists thanks to the expansion

of the monasteries in Europe and the way in which Franciscans, Benedictines, and Trappists brewed it and used it as a nutrient. Later, St. Hildegard added hops to the recipe and managed to save a lot of people's lives thanks to its bactericidal qualities and aseptic character.

I recently ordered a poster of St. Arnold, to whom these wise words are attributed: "Beer came into the world by the sweat of man and the love of God."

I said at the beginning that I do not intend to turn this into a theological

confrontation between religions. Faith is often conditioned by the environment into which you are born, and the good Lord is not always in time to send you falling from a horse to bring you into his fold. But, yes, now that the Left is going on about how we should promote Islam in the West, I would like to stress that even for an atheist or a secularist, living with Christians is more bearable than living with Muslims. Christianity has a much more elaborate notion of freedom, and, unlike others, we do not consider all those who do not identify as Christians to be infidels.

Christianity is peace of soul, joy in the home, a good turkey on the table at Christmas, and mountains of mercy. Well, it's all that, and it's Chesterton. I have needed a lot of lines to try to say something similar to what he was able to summarize in a couple of sentences: "The outer ring of Christianity is a rigid guard of ethical abnegations and professional priests; but inside that inhuman guard you will find the old human life dancing like children, and drinking wine like men; for Christianity is the only frame for pagan freedom. But in the modern philosophy the case is opposite; it is its outer ring that is obviously artistic and emancipated; its despair is within." I'll raise a glass to that. 🍷

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