PERMANENT *Things*

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

A Fire Somewhere Out There in All That Dark

In the gripping film *No Country for Old Men*, the lead character is a sheriff played by Tommy Lee Jones. Beaten down and weathered by time, the sheriff awakes from a dream and tells his wife about it. He identifies the setting as in "older times," and then paints a spellbinding picture of cursing and hope:

> *I was on horseback, going through the mountains of the nights, going through this pass in the mountains... it's cold, there was snow on the ground...he rode past me and kept on goin' and never said anything goin' by, just rode on past...he had his blanket wrapped around him and his head down, when he rode past, I seen he was carrying fire in a horn the way people used to do, and I could see the horn from the light inside of it, about the color of the moon...and in the dream I knew that he was goin' on ahead, he was fixin' to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold, and I knew that whenever I got there, he'd be there.*
>
> *And then I woke up.*

I have thought often of this scene over the years. The book by Cormac McCarthy and the film both capture the twin themes mentioned above: the desperate depravity of the world alongside the vital presence of courageous hope. In the dream, the sheriff's father is enwreathed in darkness, but he has a horn, and there is fire in it. The setting is bleak, just as the movie has functioned as a nearly unrelenting assault, a *tour de force* display, of the power of evil. In his writing as in the adaptation of his work, McCarthy seems not only to smirk at the postmodern dismissal of the old absolutist morality, but to leer at it. *You think our world is post-moral?*, he effectively says; *Let me show you what a post-moral world looks like.* It looks like evil, not banal evil, but restless and roaming evil, evil that tears society up and hunts down victims for no good reason.

But McCarthy must not be understood as celebrating this evil (nor does the film). In this closing scene, the dream shows the sheriff's father going out into the "dark" and the "cold" to make a fire "somewhere." He is just one lone figure way out in the wilderness, but he has gone ahead, riding with purpose, driving into the bleakness, fire in his possession. The sheriff does not know where his father will ultimately land, but in his dream he knows he can find him. This present darkness veils many things, but far in the distance, a fire will glow in the shadowlands.

The second release of *Permanent Things* celebrates light in the valley of death's shadow. Our esteemed and estimable contributors have not intentionally tackled a common theme, but in one way or another, they each consider the need for Christic renewal, restoration, and hope in darkness. The rich original collection of thought and prose here will, we pray, encourage you to ride hard, go on ahead, and make a fire by the grace of God, somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold.

Owen Strachan is the editor of Permanent Things*, associate professor of Christian theology, and director of the Center for Public Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.*

The Old Script Is Gone: On a Pathway to Maturity for a Generation Without Clarity

By David Talcott

FOR THOSE OF US GETTING ON IN YEARS, it can be difficult to grasp how completely the youth of today are growing up in a different world. The intact neighborhoods of the past are fewer and fewer. More children live apart from their biological fathers than ever before. LGBT ideology from the fringes of the 70s is now a mandated part of the public school curriculum. The college campuses of the past, which were not exactly hotbeds of virtue, are now absolute cesspools. You can tiptoe through a swamp and hold your nose; many of us did. But a cesspool covers you in filth and attacks you with disease—it's pure waste.

Economically, things are similarly unstable. Though the economy continues to grow, the stable jobs of the past are disappearing. Young people today are being told they may need to create their own first jobs out of nothing and plan on switching careers multiple times. The dating and marriage process is harder than ever. Social media, Netflix, and video games have replaced the in-person social mixing of the past (and the dating/courting that resulted from it). The average marriage age is now 30 for men; the fertility rate is at an all-time, crisis-level, low. We are not living in normal times. The old script is gone.

New York Times columnist David Brooks noted this reality in a recent article about the decline of the nuclear family.[1] He writes, "Many people growing up in this era have no secure base from which to launch themselves and no well-defined pathway to adulthood." The breakup of the family has left children more adrift. Mark Regnerus, a sociologist at the University of Texas at Austin, has spent over a decade describing the breakup of the normal pathway that once connected adulthood, responsibility, marriage, and sex.[2] Marriage used to be, and be seen as, a "formative" institution, where marrying young and taking on the responsibilities of adulthood lead to productivity, stability, and a deep sense of fulfillment. Young people today still want to get married, but they often don't think it's possible anytime soon. At a real level, they're finding it harder and harder to get hitched.

The foundation is weakened. The path is unclear. The vision is blurry. The power to launch is lacking. But, if we look to the pattern of life established in creation and revealed by God's Word, this generation can not only survive, it can thrive. We have seen God preserve His people time and time again, through exile and catastrophe, when they dwell in union with Him and obedience to His word. Young Christians today can grow and mature, living in hope and love, in spite of all the chaos that surrounds them and the bad messaging that assaults them.

Today's "Freedom-Affirming" Solutions Don't Work

If we're honest, the popular solutions of today don't work for young people. Perhaps the most common exhortation is that young people have limitless potential and should do what they love: "Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life," "You can do whatever you put your mind to," "Take time to find yourself." These platitudes feel inspirational, and elders may think they are offering freedom from drudgery.

1 David Brooks, "The Nuclear Family was a Mistake," *The Atlantic*, March 2020.

2 Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America,* University of Oxford Press, 2011. Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy*, University of Oxford Press, 2017.

But telling a toddler to fly when they can hardly walk isn't freeing, and telling a young person to be anything when they can't figure out how to be something is demoralizing. You cannot innovate until you've learned the standard forms, just as you can't improvise on an instrument unless you first memorize the scales.

Despite the noble intentions, we should admit that our open-ended affirmation of individual freedom is now hindering our young people, not helping them. In the mid-20th century, American Christians rightly recoiled from the horrifying reality of global communism, including the smothering conformity it sought to impose on the world. Individual creativity and freedom is a genuine good, and ought to be protected in the face of oppressive regimes seeking to refashion humanity in the image of an abstract, rationalistic conception of man rather than the concrete, embodied reality that God has created. But this unchained individuality now runs amok, trailing carnage in its wake.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of this ideology comes from our legal system, in the Supreme Court's 1992 decision in *Casey vs. Planned Parenthood*. Justice Kennedy wrote the following in the court's decision: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." This is an unabashedly existentialist conception of humanity, one where there is no meaning *out there to be discovered*, or *in here written on our hearts*, but merely *to be defined by individual acts of human will*. Authenticity is now the sole virtue – being true to ourselves and our own conception of a good life.

The results of this approach have been anxiety, depression, and uncertainty. The existentialists of the mid-20th century had already found the same. Jean-Paul Sartre was not exactly living a morally upright or stable life. His personal life was filled with sexual sin; his public writing explored the human experience of anguish, abandonment, and despair.[3] When you are abandoned by God and by God's created world, and cast only and entirely upon yourself, it is hard not to feel psychologically destroyed. If the "real world" is simply atoms moving in the void, the picture is pretty bleak. The human will finds itself in a silent, mute, flat world and needs to carve out a path in the emptiness.

This background of existentialist individualism partly explains the rising popularity of internet gurus who offer concrete, hard-nosed direction for young people's lives. The Jordan Peterson phenomena is perhaps the greatest example of this, where a Toronto psychology professor has been able to convince untold scores of young men to adopt such radical steps as "stand up straight with your shoulders back" and "clean your room" (these are two of the recommendations in his bestselling book *12 Rules for Life*).[4]

There is certainly a long story about why Peterson rose as high as he did, but at its core it is because he carried strong, clear conviction about what is of ultimate value, and told young men they needed to change if they wanted to succeed. He didn't just say "you do you"—he said "you are pretty nasty, just like me—we better get ourselves fixed if we're going to get anywhere in the world." His tough-love approach is the opposite of saccharine sentimentality. He has real skin in the game. He risked his Toronto professorship to protest draconian speech restrictions being enforced by the university. He told the truth about what male and female nature is like (both the good and the bad) without candy-coating it.

But, ultimately, Peterson leaves us on our own to struggle against the primeval chaos of the world, having to rely on our own strength to overcome the problems in our lives. He never really leaves this radical individualism behind. As helpful as much of his

3 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Yale University Press, 2007.

4 Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life*, Penguin Random House, 2018.

practical advice is, Peterson's solution is inadequate since he fails to understand the necessity of a life-transforming union with God. In our struggle against sin and the devil, we need to turn from ourselves and turn toward God. God in His kindness comes down to us, transforms us, and His spirit comes to dwell within us, empowering us for a new kind of struggle against evil. It is a struggle in which we are not alone. It is a path that we do not have to create ourselves, but a divinely-established one to walk in.

Peterson's own life shows that we cannot fight darkness with our own strength alone. He recently revealed that for the past year he has been in and out of hospitals after having a catastrophic reaction to anti-anxiety medication.[5] The guru of anxiety himself needing medication to control anxiety? If even Jordan Peterson needs anti-anxiety meds, and has such deep psychological and physical struggles that he's incapacitated for months, can this really be the best solution for young people today? It turns out it's hard to simply "find yourself." Most of us can't live like Nietzschean supermen, recasting the world in our own image. We, in fact, are made in *God's* image, and can be only stewards and caretakers of the things that He has already made.

Encouragements to develop our individuality only function well against a backdrop of stability, moral virtue, and deep communion with our Savior. Without that rootedness, our expressive individualism turns into something listless and destructive. Yes, in one sense we need to "find ourselves," but more importantly we need to find *who God has made us to be.* And the most important part of finding our pathway through this life, is searching for it in union with God and in accordance with His creative and redemptive design. So the first step forward is to turn to God by faith, recognizing that we are not alone in the world, God is with us, and seeing that we are not abandoned in our sins, but through God's grace alone we can be restored and renewed, living a life not of isolation but of communal love.

True freedom and individuality comes to us through God's creative act – it is He that has made us, and not we ourselves (Ps. 100:3). Before trying to make ourselves into anything, we must first accept what *He* has already made us to be. True freedom comes first from a place of stability. In a recent book, Rusty Reno explains this connection, writing,

> Freedom properly understood is based in a pledge of loyalty, not a declaration of independence. Our country's freedoms arise from eternal verities affirmed, not ties severed. As the Declaration of Independence says, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident.' The first and fundamental act is *holding*, not *choosing*, standing fast in truth, not making it up.[6]

Before we can choose well ourselves, we must accept the world that God has already chosen. Some secret things remain hidden and belong to God alone (Deut 29:29), but he has promised that His Word will be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105). We know the ultimate end, God's victory over sin and death, and the Word casts light on the steps right in front of us men – as one song puts it, "using just available light, he can still see far."[7] Most importantly, we are comforted by God's presence in the midst of every turmoil of this life. Any viable pathway forward requires turning to God by faith, recognizing that we are not alone in the world since God is with us, and seeing that we are not abandoned in our sins.

There is a path forward. But, when you're adrift you need to stop and get your bearings. God's revelation is a north star – the thing to orient toward if we want to find our way home. When things are going haywire, as they are today, we must step back and consider the goal at which we are aiming. We know we're doing things wrong. We know the culture around us doesn't have the answers. We need to separate from the chaos to contemplate the proper order, to ask in the midst of all this confusion, what is truly *good*? What should we be

5 Jordan Peterson, "Return Home," October 19, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_6zwVNn88o
6 R. R. Reno, *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*, Salem Books, 2016
7 Big Big Train, "Underfall Yard," English Electric Recordings, 2009.

pursuing? The good news is that there is a path forward, and it is one where true freedom and individual creativity can flourish.

By looking to God's word, and how He has called His people to live during every stage of their lives, we can see a better way – a way beyond the "old" script of the 1950s and beyond the individualism of the internet gurus and Supreme Court justices. Our freedom as finite creatures always exists within limits. Order sets the boundaries for creativity. The "old" script may be gone, but the ancient script remains.

The Ancient Script is the 21st Century Script: The True Path Forward

The way to properly re-orient ourselves is to look back at God's plan in creation. Why did God create man? What were we made to do? Whatever our original purpose is, it is something we can fulfill in *every* age, in *every* social climate, in *every* phase of technological development, in *every* place, and in *every* circumstance of life. No cosmic change, no demonic influence, no scheme of man can separate us from God's divine intention in the creation of humanity. Before creation, God knew there would be cars, factories, computers, pandemics, Zoom meetings, anxiety, depression, and everything else. God knew all this, and still had a plan for mankind. In every age, in every circumstance, we can live for Christ and be a light to the world. What are human being made for? Getting clear on *that* universal vocation casts light on how we, as 21st century Christians, can walk in God's ways.

God's original plan in creation is made clear in Genesis 1 and 2. God has created a world for his own glory, and has placed man as his vice-regent, to form and to fill the world that He has made.[8] Young men and women need to be taught that there is a mandate from God, established in the order he created and spoken to us in His word, to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, and to establish God's loving reign on every corner of the earth to the glory of His holy name. This is the original task of man, and it is the task that God's people have pursued in every age. This was not just pious advice for Adam and Eve, it was the pattern for all of human life. The way it was "from the beginning" (Matt 19:8) is normative and directive for the way it ought to be today.

God's original creative intention manifests itself throughout the history of His people, and a few examples will bring out how potent this divine plan truly is. Even in the worst of times and the worst of places, God's children flourished when they followed the simple pattern of life established in His Word. When famine drove the house of Jacob down to Egypt, so that they had to live among a foreign people, away from the land of promise, what did they do? Scripture teaches us "the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). Genesis 1-2 is present in Exodus 1. God's people are marked by fruitfulness. Ultimately, they grew so numerous and strong that Pharaoh felt threatened by them. Hard work and hard childraising bear fruit and stability in the toughest of environments.

Hundreds of years later the people of God were again taken away, this time into Babylon. What was God's instruction then? Jeremiah 29:4-6 tells us,

> *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.*

Here is the pathway forward for a generation without a script. It is the script of creation, the script of life, the one we should have been reading in *every* generation. In the worst of times, when God's people are stripped from their homeland, when they live in the midst of a hostile culture given over to paganism, they flourished

8 Alastair Roberts, "Man and Woman in Creation (Genesis 1 and 2)," *IX Marks Journal*, 12.10.2019.

when they followed the original call of God established in creation. The elements are the same: trust God's sovereignty, establish roots, build businesses, get married, and raise many children in the faith. In other words: love God and love neighbor.

If we feel isolated or abandoned today, think of how the Israelites felt when they were physically taken to Babylon, carried back there by a foreign power. And yet, God says that *He* is the one that sent them into exile. He knew what was happening to them, and despite the horrors they were experiencing, He was still the "Lord of hosts." Babylon might seem powerful, but God is more powerful still, and is working out His divine will. And he is *our* God, He is *for* us, and He reigns over every lesser power this world can concoct. He reigns over every abuse and oppression, over every difficulty and struggle, over every uncertainty and painful thing in life. He is with us in the midst of adversity and He is preparing a future salvation. The people of God will flourish when they trust a powerful and sovereign God, even in dark times.

Because we trust Him, we can follow His instruction: get busy with the tasks of ordinary faithfulness. God tells His exiled people to build houses and live in them, and to plant gardens and eat their produce. We must set down roots and build productive economic enterprises, even as we look to a future hope of restoration to a true homeland. When the path forward is unclear, set down deep roots and build a business. Acquire skills and abilities that are useful and profitable. When you don't know what to do, learn how to do something that effectively produces the necessities of life, something that will enable you to provide for yourself and others. Through this we can be a blessing to those who are in need, and can gift to the next generation everything they in turn will need to follow God in their own time.

Building houses (setting down roots) and planting gardens (building productive businesses) also requires the cultivation of character and wisdom. It is in the midst of this exile that Daniel and his companions rise to the top of the class in Babylon, possessing "wisdom and understanding….ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters" (Dan 1:20). At the time they are taken from Israel into exile they were already "skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace" (Dan 1:4).

Adam's first act of dominion in Genesis 2 is more intellectual than physical: naming the animals. As we grow in knowledge we also grow in our ability to wisely and lovingly govern creation for God's glory. Daniel and his friends eventually rise to the very top of Babylon's government – their faithful devotion to God culminates in God's blessing. When Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, he, too, rose to the top because of his character and wisdom. Build houses, build businesses, grow wise, grow in virtue ("wisdom and stature and favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52)), and plan for the long haul. That's not flashy advice, but it worked in the 6th century BC and it can work in 21st century AD. Whether it is a plumbing apprenticeship or a history degree from an elite university, get to work. With your quiet Bible study and your active cultivation of virtue, again, *get to work.*

But, business was not the only business they were supposed to engage in. They were also to marry and have children, to "multiply there, and do not decrease." Can you hear the reflection of Genesis 1's admonition to subdue the earth and be fruitful and multiply? Can you see the model of the Israelites while enslaved in Egypt? A core task of humanity is to fill the earth with the image of God, first through natural procreation in childbearing and second through spiritual procreation as the gospel is preached. God has made us for the fruitful partnership of man and woman, and we are to give ourselves wholeheartedly to this work, even in difficult times. It's not just about "getting married," it's about glorifying God through following Him and living according to His creational purpose. Fear of theft and high taxation, political oppression, and social marginalization should not keep us from marriage and children, but should rather drive us to it all the more. Surely the danger of those things is not worse now than it was under Pharaoh or the Great King of Persia. Whether in slavery in Egypt or in exile in Babylon, building families is the life script of the people of God.

That our culture no longer values this child-bearing work, and seems to actively conspire to make it difficult, should be of no importance to the people of God. Those who are mocked in this life because of their faithfulness can be confident of God's care for them in the next. When Daniel and the other godly youth arrived in Babylon, they refused to follow the Babylonian pattern of life. They were offered "the king's choice food" and "the wine which he drank" (Dan 1:5), but they refused. When tempted with luxury, indulgence, and drunkenness, Daniel would not "defile himself" (Dan 1:8). Instead, a radically countercultural way of life was Daniel's way, one that seemed an insane rejection of the opportunities afforded by a fabulously wealthy and powerful nation.

He followed God through the joys of simple food and sobriety. Throughout his career of public service, his enemies "could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful." When we walk in the paths of Yahweh, then even though we die, yet shall we live (John 11:25). God preserved Daniel and his friends through horrific persecution – fiery furnaces and lions' dens – and God can deliver us, to, in the 21st century. The pathway forward now is the same as it was then: obedience to God's revealed will and fulfilling the original purposes for which we were created.

Living in Hope and Love

The original created purposes find their completion in God's future kingdom. The Garden of Eden is closed off to man after they sin. But a promise is made that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. Evil will ultimately be destroyed; we have the pledge and proof of that in Christ's sacrifice and resurrection from the dead. Today we can live, in any circumstance of life, with hope and anticipation of that future kingdom, when God will come to dwell with His people forever and ever. There is a future city, with trees and a river, filled with holy saints and with God himself. That future gives us present hope. We are on pilgrimage, sometimes on flat, easy ground and other times staggering up steep inclines. But, we live on with joy and hope, moving ever forward and upward, as God imparts to us His grace, and empowers us to overcome every difficulty.

Until that day we live in love, love of God and love of neighbor. On these great commandments "depend all the law and the prophets." Love calls us to follow God's law and His will. A life of diligent labor and fruitful marriages is the original human embodiment of that love. As we cultivate the garden, build businesses, get married, raise families, and grow in wisdom and holiness we are living out the way of God's people, the way of love. •

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Even Atheists Dream Christian Dreams: A Profile of Douglas Murray

By Esther O'Reilly

IN THE GROUNDS OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY on Parliament Square, London, stands a church building that until a few months ago used to be a church. For 900 years, many of England's best-loved sons were baptized, married, and buried at the Church of Saint Margaret's. But in July 2020, due to the pandemic, the place of Olaudah Equiano's baptism, Winston Churchill's wedding, and John Milton's last repose shut its doors for good.

Nobody was sadder to see them close than the British writer Douglas Murray. At worst, he had imagined people might leave the church. He had never pictured that the church would leave the people. Although, he admitted in his lament at *The Spectator*, his own attendance has been "increasingly irregular." In fact, it has been over a decade since he considered himself a believing Christian at all. But then, Douglas Murray isn't a typical deconvert.

Growing up, Murray was, in his own words, that "rarest of things": a "real, worshipping, believing Anglican." He was raised on the King James Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and the rich tradition of sacred choral music, much of which he performed as a chorister. Asked why he was a Christian, he would say simply that he always had been. What else could he be?

And yet, doubts lingered. Nagging suspicions about the New Testament's reliability wouldn't go away. In high school, one peek at higher critical scholarship had terrified him so much that he stopped reading. But what if the critics were right? As for the Old Testament, increasingly it seemed downright immoral. Meanwhile, he was coming to accept something which seemed to sit in unsustainable tension with all of it: He was gay.

In the end, a deep study of Islam was the straw that broke the camel's back. If the Muslims' text was corrupt, he reasoned, why still cling to the Bible? If he didn't believe their guy had heard voices, why believe his guy had? After that, there was no going back. In his own words, Mohammed had made him an atheist.

Today, Murray looks back on those first "very angry" years after his deconstruction with some regret. Yet even then, he had no ambitions to become a professional atheist, though he's counted most of the New Atheists among his friends. The late Christopher Hitchens was one of the first writers to spot Murray's rising star at Oxford, and the two would become close drinking partners. Murray believed that "Hitch" and friends had effectively buried biblical Christianity. At worst, it was impotent. At best, it was positively healthy for the culture. But Islam was a different story.

After leaving Oxford, Murray established himself as arguably the foremost political rhetorician of his generation. On the debate circuit, he became popularly known as "Britain's only neo-conservative" – fiercely hawkish, pro-Iraq War, and pro-Israel, or as some detractors pegged him, "Zionist." In 2007, he founded the Centre for Social Cohesion, a think-tank which supplied world governments with anti-terrorist intel. As an outspoken polemicist against radical Islam, he won many enemies who, he'll gleefully tell you today, are now "dead or in prison." A 2009 photo captures him in a stare-off with one of them, the infamous cleric Anjem Choudary. Choudary had showed up for a debate with Murray, bringing a crowd of "friends" in tow. The debate was called off due to "security concerns."

Murray was accompanied that day by a former terrorist of another kind—Sean O'Callaghan, a wiry, wispy-moustached anti-IRA spy who gave whispered assurance that he "could still be nasty in a corner." On his death

years later, Murray eulogized him in *The Times* as "the IRA killer ready to save me." O'Callaghan is just one of many remarkable figures Murray has befriended and immortalized in his writing, some well-known, some not, but all worth knowing about. Like all the best journalists, he combines a deep understanding of history with a deep love for the ordinary and extraordinary people who make it.

But history is messy, and that messiness is a recurring theme in Murray's body of work. "I like difficult subjects," he says in one interview. "If you're a writer or a thinker, you want to think about, write about difficult things. And our age, like any age, is laced with difficult things." Whether untangling the web of lies behind a historic massacre in *Bloody Sunday*, carefully analyzing all sides of the West's immigration crisis in *The Strange Death of Europe*, or taking on woke narratives in *The Madness of Crowds*, Murray carries Thomas Sowell's "tragic vision" wherever he goes—the recognition that truth is inconvenient, people are complicated, and difficult problems tend to lack easy solutions.

Politically, Murray writes as a British "small 'c' conservative," meaning American conservatives will find both points of commonality and points of departure with his thinking. Like many gays and lesbians of his generation, he affirms the new sexual revolution to a point, but he rejects post-modern insanity that subverts biology itself. In *The Madness of Crowds*, he argues that the LGBT "rights train" has been derailed by aggressive activists and trans propagandists. His critiques of the latter are righteously angry, sometimes hilariously pointing up the acronym's internal contradictions. And yet, Murray fails to persuade the socially conservative reader that this train was designed with a brakes system in the first place. He writes as if there is, or was, a moderate middle ground in this culture war. But what if it's been a zero-sum game all along?

Still, Murray would rather be in dialogue with a conservative Christian like me than with those who want to shut down dialogue altogether with a woke counterfeit religion, complete with its own creeds, sacraments, and heresies. A humanist of the old breed, he believes identity politics are an assault on the sanctity of the individual, splintering the foundations of our shared humanity. And he frequently presses the point that humanism itself exists "on the embers of Christian thought." Even atheists, in a phrase he steals from Don Cupitt, still "dream Christian dreams."

But the dream is fading. Nietzsche's prophecy is coming true: We still carry the trappings of Christianity, but without the hope of redemption, all we have left is guilt. In this brave new world, Murray is unconvinced that the gospel of "Enlightenment Now" still holds much swaying power. The Enlightenment did not arise in a religious vacuum, and he fears that its ideals cannot survive if we create one now. In one article, he compares the atheist to a man peering queasily over the edge of a cliff, into the bottomless abyss of a world where nothing is sacred, not even life itself. What, Murray asks, are men in such a position to do? Do they jump? Or do they turn "back to faith, whether they like it or not"?

It's a question over which he openly agonizes. At times, he seems divided against himself. He remains pro-choice on abortion, yet he writes and speaks like a pro-lifer on legalized euthanasia. In one particularly barbed exchange with a liberal colleague, Murray sounds positively Lewisian as he insists that our bodies are not our own, and that human life is not just "important." It is "everything."

And yet, he still has the same doubts, the same sinking feeling that we "can't unlearn" the lessons we learned from the likes of Darwin and the biblical critics. Like other public intellectuals such as Jordan Peterson and Tom Holland, he finds himself torn, self-identifying as a "Christian atheist." He can't go back to faith, yet he can't *not* go back either.

But if faith is truly the last, best hope for civilization, Murray feels little of that hope as he looks around his beloved old England. In this year of all years, when people needed the Church to be a beacon of guidance, Church of England leaders seemed embarrassed of their own office. Justin Welby and the bishops reminded

everyone to stay safe and wash their hands, but the people were left floundering for answers to the kinds of questions the health bureau can't answer. The sheep looked up and were fed nothing but Labour Party talking points.

Of course, there are other places in the world where the story is quite different. Places like the persecuted church communities of Middle Belt Nigeria, where vanishingly few of Murray's peers are inclined to travel. Dead and maimed African Christians, in his experience, make for awkward luncheon chatter. Yet by encountering them, he has encountered the radical faith that he is missing, that a part of him still longs for. It is here that he can sit in a pew on a Sunday morning and *feel* the meaning of the words "Deliver us from evil." It is here that he can count the cost of discipleship, in page after page of blurry photos, in name after name, grave after grave. It is here that he can, quite literally, touch the wounds of the church. And though he cannot believe, as Thomas did, he still goes and tells.

Back home, colleagues give him glazed stares. Come Passion Week, the radio adverts give assurances that after Good Friday, shoppers can be sure of a Great Saturday. The bishops give Easter sermons preaching the good news of Christ risen in our hearts. As for Murray, in the morning he will slip into the back of a good church, if he can find one. In the evening, he will consult his library of CDs, pull out his favorite selections and reflect. Each year, he finds the music still no less haunting, the texts still no more divine than Shakespeare. For him, that's divine enough. He can't encourage depressed friends with words of Scripture. But he can still encourage them with the Earl of Gloucester's death scene in *King Lear*. Blind, dying, and despairing, the old man tries to throw himself off a cliff, then realizes he has failed. His son urges him to stand for the few moments he has left to live—not long, but long enough, as Murray puts it, to "discover everything."

When we spoke, Murray recalled a private moment from one of his many visits to the Holy Land. Walking on the shore of Galilee, "I had one thought that I couldn't get out of my head: Something happened here. *Something* happened here." What that something was, he couldn't say. And so he continues to wonder as he wanders, with no Church to come home to—and now, not even a church building.

I wish him well in his exploring. But I hope one day it comes to an end. As it is in a man's nature to explore, so it is in a man's nature to seek the end of his exploring, only to discover that he has arrived where he started from. So it is, to quote T. S. Eliot, that in our end, we make our beginning. So it is that the restless find rest. So it is that the homeless come home, and know it for the first time. •

Esther O'Reilly is a freelance writer and cultural critic. Her work has been featured in multiple national and international magazines, including Plough, The American Conservative, Quillette, and more.

"Standing defiantly month after month": Churchillian Leadership with Dr. Jason Allen

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following is an interview by Owen Strachan (originally on the City of God podcast)

Part One: Churchill the Man

OS **Today we are talking with Dr. Allen about a consequential subject: who Winston Churchill was as a person. He was a real character. He was a unique individual; he was a gentleman. This is something that you and I are going to both be in favor of. It's a model that's largely lost in our time. What do you think of when I say he's a gentleman? What comes to your mind in that respect?**

JA First of all, you mentioned the basic parameters of his life, born in 1874, the late Victorian era. And coming of age in an era that's easy for us to kind of look back on and romanticize in some ways. Obviously, Churchill's era, the late 19th century and early 20th particularly, had clear social issues, clear challenges both domestically there in Britain and then throughout the Empire. Born into a family—an heir of the Duke of Marlborough. And his father—of course, we could do a whole episode on his father, his triumphs and travails, both. And it was a heady era, especially when you get into the early 20th century and the Empire expanding the globe; some 25 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world's geography falling under the British Empire. And again, whether or not you look on that favorably, as far as imperialism and all that entailed (and there's another conversation topic). The consequence of the time, the uniqueness of the era, the sense that Churchill had from a very young age that he was walking with destiny and then able to walk with destiny on perhaps the grandest international stage at that time.

But you asked about what it meant for him to be a gentleman. We think about that in several ways. First of all, Churchill enjoyed, humanly speaking, in relation to the mundanities, the finer things in life. He famously said, "My tastes are simple, I am easily satisfied with the best." I've toured Chartwell and have been in London to some of Churchill's favorite stores and the haberdasheries that he visited and served him. Clearly everything from the cigars that he smoked to the brandy that he drank to the meals he ate to the travel he enjoyed to the house he resided in to the company he kept to the company he kept when he did travel, on and on and on he went, in every little context in life, he enjoyed the finer things in life. What is more, he clearly had the air of a gentleman. How he interacted with people, through letter and conversation, how he treated women, Clementine, in particular. He was a gentleman in that sense. What is more, he was willing to engage in and did engage in a form of gentlemanly exchange in person, in print, on the floor of Parliament. He was willing to mix it up. With that, on the one hand, was an element of panache, an element of courage, a flair for the dramatic. But also a tender side of personal sacrifice,

of tearing up in conversation, of inviting people into his life, and guests with the never-ending cycle of Chartwell and other places. He was a gentleman.

OS **He was, and that's part of the fascinating reality of him. When you see pictures of him today, in many of them, he's wearing a top hat, he's got a cane, he looks like a figure from a different era. He truly was. There's aspects of that era that we wouldn't practice today in different ways, but there are many aspects of that era that we can look back on and recognize something there was unique and good in different ways, and Churchill fits that.**

He was a statesman. That's the next thing that comes to mind for me. This is just a conversation about Churchill and his uniqueness. He was a statesman. He was effectively born on the world's stage, as you said earlier. He was born to lead. And he loved leadership.

JA Right, and he had a keen sense of history, and a keen sense of military history. He saw his father, Lord Randolph, and observed him as he led and as he occupied leading government positions. He observed that from a very young age, and he idolized his own father. He romanticized his own family tree. He was not only pre-positioned to occupy leading roles in the U. K., he was really pre-committed to them. So from childhood, he aspired to those positions. In God's providence—yes, I would attribute this to God's kind providence—he was positioned as a very young man to actually gain experiences, gain stature, everything from being a prisoner of war and being captured in the Boer Wars, to his pen and his journalism. He landed at a very young age on a very large platform. And in God's providence, he preordained for Churchill to be positioned throughout the decades when the darkest hour does arrive in the context of Hitler in World War II. He was not just ready as far as personal resolve, personal conviction, he was ready as far as a national and international reputation to be the one man who could speak—indeed, had spoken—to the horror of Nazism and Hitler.

OS **Absolutely. His lowest hours prepared him for the darkest hour. The 1930s and being the lone voice, really, against Hitler, meant that he then had the credibility to lead in 1940.**

JA Right. The three-volume biography that Manchester wrote, volume two is titled "Alone". And it is the wilderness years—he's out of office, he's a back-bencher, and he is year after year gaining no friends by not only pointing to the danger of Nazism but also pointing to the danger of his own colleagues, his own friends in Parliament. Their unremitting unwillingness to acknowledge not only the growing threat abroad but the lack of a militaristic resolve at home. The collective collusion for everyone to stick their head in the stand over how ill-prepared this nation truly was to the growing threat abroad.

OS **That's exactly right. It's interesting that you were talking a few minutes ago about God's sovereignty and divine providence in raising up Winston Churchill in this particular moment in history. I agree with everything you said. There are questions when you are a Churchillian—as I am and you are—that you will get in evangelical circles, and they are good questions, about how we understand him and why guys like us would appreciate him, though he wasn't necessarily as we can tell, an evangelical Christian, for example. How do you assess him spiritually in light of God using him but Churchill not necessarily claiming to be a born-again believer? How do you handle that?**

JA Here's what we know: Clearly he was born into a cultural context where a basic Christian worldview was common. Certainly, I think we can say Churchill had an appreciation for the Scriptures. And in some sense, a belief in the Scriptures. Now Churchill famously quipped that he was better positioned to support the church from the outside than the inside. And so I don't feel like we have to nor do I romanticize Churchill so much that I try to label him as a card-

carrying evangelical. There are theories floating around. I've read some of them. Stephen Mansfield would even go a little farther than I do as far as seeing in Churchill more signs of a relationship with Christ. Of course, there are the theories and stories of Churchill's encounter with Billy Graham and that conversation and what came of that. Only the Lord knows. But clearly, even with that notwithstanding, there is throughout Churchill's life not just an appreciation for the King James Bible, not just an appreciation for Western civilization and Christian civilization (and yes, he did see himself as defending that in the context of World War Two).

There's also a sense that he—and I don't think it's some strange narcissism—I think it is a genuine belief that he is walking with destiny. That he is indeed fulfilling some divinely ordained role, not just in the context of World War Two, but before and after. Then, of course, there is that journal entry that Churchill made in the hours after the king asked him to form a government. He went home and said, "I feel as though I am walking with destiny, that all of my life has been in preparation for this very hour, this very trial." So Churchill understood that, he believed that and I don't think it's some strange sense of narcissism. I think he genuinely perceived his life, especially in the vortex of World War Two, he saw his life in hindsight building up, everything from his previous experience of positions he held in the context of World War One and First Lord of the Admiralty and so forth. He saw these experiences building toward this great, climactic moment in World War Two.

OS **It's really a cinematic life. It's a life that if you read about it a didn't know that it was backed up by history, you might wonder if it was invented or embellished. It's that dramatic a life. And the circumstances that you've especially highlighted here about his being prepared for this dramatic conflict to lead Western Civilization against the tyranny and the festering evil of the Nazis in particular sounds too fantastical to be true, but it's all true.**

JA Right. So, I don't read a lot of fiction. I just don't. I'm not opposed to it. It's just that I've always found non-fiction more gripping to me. And perhaps there is no more gripping non-fiction story than the story of Churchill. Then again, there are so many good biographies out there, whether it's the Roy Jenkins work, the Martin Gilbert work. Now, my favorite one-volume biography is by Andrew Roberts, and he's even themed it *Walking with Destiny*. And as a story it's just too compelling, every step of the way. It's truly remarkable. The different interests he had. The different relationships he had. The span of decades of public exposure and public service. The stage he was placed on. In reading biographies of President Clinton here on our side of the Atlantic, he talks about how he regretted not having some grand conflict that would occupy his presidency. And not that he was wanting an international war, but to truly be a Lincoln or a Roosevelt or a Washington, you have to have some major conflict where the future of the nation is in doubt. Churchill had that in World War Two. He had that in World War One. He had that to a lesser degree in other issues throughout his life and career.

OS **It's really one of the last moments about which basically most people in the West on the intellectual divide on either side are going to agree: That the Nazis and other foes that arise during this period really are evil and are not ideal. So he really does escape in that sense, such that everybody can recognize that he really does have this cataclysmic effect and impact. You can't really deny that.**

JA And as Christians, those who seek to think biblically and theologically about conflict and have a working knowledge of Just War Theory, if you look at the conflict throughout the last 100 years, and certainly throughout the twentieth century, which was a century of warfare, there was not a conflict more obviously morally right to pursue as Americans than World War Two. And the same clearly for Churchill

as well. The maniac in Berlin named Adolf Hitler, the slaughter and genocide he inflicted on the Jews, his outright aggression towards surrounding countries and beyond, was also very clear. And then, their attack and relentless aerial campaigning in the Battle of Britain by the *Luftwaffe* over London. And then Churchill standing defiantly month after month after month. Rallying his nation, not just for their preservation, though yes, that was most urgent, but really keeping at bay Hitler and Nazism, and keeping them at bay from what they would wreak on the rest of Europe and the rest of the world once London fell.

OS **He was a man of conscience. Everybody knows about his heroic stand as Prime Minister, but what is so compelling to me, and we've alluded to this several times, is that in 1930s, particularly as the decade plays out and it becomes clear what the Nazis are really up to in Germany, Churchill is a friend of the Jews. He is a friend of the Jews at a time in Great Britain when the upper class, the leadership class, the elites, really aren't all that favorable to the Jews. That's not unique in Europe in that time; it's more common in many ways. But Churchill was a man of conscience, and the same man that he was in the shadows when he was far from power is the same man that he was when he was wreathed in power. And that's part of his legacy that stands out to me.**

JA Absolutely. The early twentieth century, and Churchill's era, I'll refer to it as a "polite anti-Semitism," was basically everywhere. And I'm not referring to the genocidal work of Hitler, but more of a polite, sort of skeptical view of the Jewish people. To some extent, perhaps, Churchill reflected that. But at the same time, he did see and call out and seek to act upon the overt aggression committed by Hitler and Hitler's regime upon the Jewish people.

And more broadly, he was a man of conscience. At times, that led to political transition. He changed party affiliation twice. But other times he took positions that were unpopular and maintained them. His relentless commitment to Edward VIII during the abdication crisis, that did not serve Churchill well politically at all. But he would take a position, he would stick to it, he would fight for it, and more often than not, it was right for him do so.

OS **That's right. Far from a perfect man. There are various blemishes in his life, failings in his life. From a theological standpoint, sins that you can identify in Churchill's past and his existence. And yet, a figure I believe with you, who is worthy of study, and even worthy of emulation in a lot of ways. A unique figure, a unique gentleman, a unique statesman.**

JA Yes. If you can't be inspired by Churchill, you are uninspirable.

Part Two: Churchill's Accomplishments

OS **We've talked about Churchill in broad form already together. But I want to walk through some quick things that we can extract from the life and work of Winston Churchill, and even kind of apply to our lives. Dr. Allen, I don't know about you, but I read Churchill as, I won't say as kind of a secular guide to life and ministry; that would be too strong. He's a complicated figure, as we've already discussed together. But I go to his life and his ups and downs and his challenges and the way he weathers such tremendous storms and the way he was under such fierce pressure for his principles, and honestly, that ministers to me. I draw lessons from his life all the time. Is that true of you?**

JA Absolutely. And Churchill is the type of individual that if you are not inspired by him, you are uninspirable. That's the way he lived his life. And again, we view him—and sure, there's probably a touch of romanticism in our view, because we love military

history, we love world history, the era of World War Two, especially because it was so clarifying and so much was at stake. And Churchill's era, the late Victorian era and the early twentieth century, it was just a unique time in the world and a unique time in the United Kingdom, a unique time in London. All of it was so consequential. Everything was so consequential. Then, Churchill, in that setting was particularly inspiring.

OS **That's exactly right. And so it's a unique go-round all the way you slice it. Churchill knew tremendous adversity. That's the first thing, and, honestly, one of the major things I extract from his life. That yes, he's this very successful politician of course. I think something like 58 years in Parliament, if I'm not mistaken. So that's quite a track record in and of itself. But in all of that, he knew a lot of ups and downs. I mean, World War One, for example to take just one episode in his life. The Dardanelles, where there's this failed expedition to kind of crack the war open. And almost went to the brink of near suicide because of that. That's intense.**

JA Right, and I still maintain that he gets a bad rap. The plan to force the Dardanelles, I think, was a brilliant plan. When you get into the mechanics of what happened, and the lack of infantry support, the waffling that took place, that it wasn't a decisive maneuver but took place of a period of days, and weeks, and even a month or so. And some biographers, including Andrew Roberts, who we mentioned earlier, he argues similarly that Churchill gets a very bad rap on the Dardanelles, or the Gallipoli Crisis, as it's also known. But that tumbled him from office. Churchill is depressed. He does what the thinks is the honorable thing to do and takes a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel and goes and mans a trench on the Continent and leads people there in the war-zone for a period of months. Then he comes back and ends up getting back in the war effort in a leadership role.

OS **He shows us what it is not just to walk the heights but also to travel the depths.**

JA Right. And we have to be careful. You and I are in this conversation, we're gospel ministers, your listeners are, I'm sure, largely believers, if not largely ministers as well. And it's easy to view someone of historical importance and whip ourselves up into emulation. We view Edwards getting fired from his church and think, "I have to get fired too, so I can be like Edwards." And similarly, with Churchill, it's perhaps a bit tired in 21st century America for people to make never-ending comparisons to Churchill, or more particularly Neville Chamberlain: "You know, this is a Munich moment." We are all weary of that. But there is a lot to learn from Churchill. There's a lot to learn about his highs. There's a lot to learn about his lows. We also acknowledge that some of his challenges were self-inflicted. He lived as an adult with a never-ending sense of financial challenge. There's the great book, *No More Champagne*, which is a fascinating read. You have to be a total Churchill geek to enjoy this book. But it's a fascinating read because it's not just the broad story of Churchill's financial issues, which most biographies touch on, but it is a play-by-play of his financial issues. I mean, the guy lived one step ahead of the hounds, financially speaking, his whole life. It's like, "Buy less champagne; smoke fewer cigars; tamp down your travel entourage. This is entirely avoidable, Winston! You don't have to live like this."

And he occasionally took political positions that were questionable. His steadfast support for Edward VIII in the abdication controversy, being one. But then again, he staked out turf and he took positions that were necessary to take. Of course, we think about the 1930s leading up to World War Two.

OS **We think of that, and we also think about what happened in this state of Missouri in 1946, when, after being ousted from his Prime Ministership, shockingly, following the successful prosecution of World War Two. He then has this time where he is out of office, but he's kind of footloose and fancy free. And he ends up, by invitation of Harry Truman, speaking at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, of all places. A tiny school, actually a pretty**

strong academic school in this state. This is where he takes the train with Truman and gives one of the most consequential speeches in the world: "Behind the Iron Curtain."

JA

And there's even a story behind that speech and the machinations leading up to it, which are fascinating. Most people, if they know of Churchill, it's kind of a general knowledge and they know he was Prime Minister during World War Two, but they don't that he returned with another five-year stint as Prime Minister. It's sort of like, when you're a kid, you learn about the Kennedy assassination in school, and then five years later in a more thorough reading of history, you learn that actually there's a second Kennedy assassination, too.

With Churchill, most people don't even know that he had a second five-year stint as the British Premier, from roughly age 75 to age 80. But in the Lord's kind providence, and I know it didn't feel like kind providence when he was put out of office, when his wife, Clementine, quipped that his losing elections was a blessing, he responded by saying, "and a very well-disguised blessing, at that." But those five years enabled him to write his war memoirs, enabled him to step back and reflect, enabled him to come and deliver this "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri. And even the invitation, how Truman involved himself and promised to meet Churchill there and be a part of the event and to go—as we've done—to Fulton, Missouri, and not only see the Churchill Library and Museum there, but actually go in the gymnasium where the speech was delivered. It is a chill up the spine moment to get to retrace those steps and take that in.

OS

It is completely a chill up the spine moment. Any folks who are currently vibing with what we are discussing regarding Winston Churchill need to assemble self, friends, church members, or family, and plot a visit to Fulton when the museum is all the way back open. And visit this great little museum. It's not huge, but you need to visit. And then, absolutely, you need to walk over to the gymnasium, almost nobody knows this. If you go into the Westminster College gym, where they play basketball, you will actually see scaffolding that is left over—it's really just about the last hallmark of his visit—where there were major news station cameras that were hung in the gym. The scaffolding is still there from Winston Churchill's visit. So that's right where he gave the sinews of peace, the speech that reshapes America's—and the West's—approach to communism.

JA

This is a brief digression, but if you were to ask me, "Where did your appreciation for Churchill begin?" It began as a kid, I loved military history; I've always had an appreciation for military history. But it really went into overdrive in college when I began reading Churchill biographies more intensively. In college, I picked up a CD of Churchill's speeches. The Ben Silver Company and their magazine used to always have a CD of Churchill's speeches; it was an excerpt of his ten or twelve most famous speeches. It was gripping to listen to that speech. I'd encourage your listeners: Maybe at this point, you're not willing to buy into an 800-page biography or a three-volume biography, but you need to buy into a brief download of Churchill's most famous speeches, and you will be moved.

OS

I remember reading about his speechifying, his process, and how he would write out his speeches. And this is relevant for you and me, we do a fair bit of speaking, and anyone out there who's preaching or teaching listening now: He wrote out his sentences in Psalm form. So the first line is a normal sentence but the second and third lines are indented significantly. And when I read that in Manchester's trilogy, I realized that's part of why he talks with such poetic weight, because he's emulating the Psalms.

JA

That's right. And if we were to have a digression on this point: Just how much Churchill was influenced by the King James Version of the Bible in the figures of speech he uses and word structures he employs. But also, he began one of his very first speeches in Parliament—he was giving this without notes—and

he froze and forgot his lines. He never again wanted to do this. So he would take his notes in. Churchill would often give the appearance of it being extemporaneous, but it was far from it. Every pause planned out, every point of humor planned out, every point of sarcasm planned out. He was the most well-scripted guy on the planet. And there's a lesson there for preachers, for those who have responsibility for public speaking. Maybe you don't have to have notes written out manuscript-style in Psalm format. But never be under-prepared.

OS **I remember a friend saying to me when I was flirting with the idea of not writing anything out for a particular sermon about 15 years ago. "I want to be free; I want to have that ability to kind of riff in the pulpit." And my friend said, "You know those politicians, those speeches that you cite, that we all enjoy from Reagan or whoever from history"—Churchill probably—"those guys wrote their speeches out. You're going into a pulpit. You're not Reagan and Churchill, in point of fact. Maybe you should write your speeches out."**

JA Right. And there's a big difference between Reagan and Churchill. Churchill actually wrote his speeches. Reagan, who I adore, and the modern politician, they all have speech-writers. But back to Churchill's ability and his own gifting: Truly a wordsmith. Truly a craftsman when it came to the English language.

OS **Another lesson from Churchill's life: He persevered for a really long time in his life goal. He wanted to be Prime Minister all his days, and he is, in his early- to mid-60s and it's looking not very likely in the 1930s and different points that he's ever going to return to power. He held most of the cabinet positions in the UK government, not all of them, but most. He had a fantastic round of preparation to be the Premier. Yet, he was almost 70 when he was elected. He was 65 and served until he was about 70. So that tells us something. That teaches us a lesson about persevering for a really long time.**

JA Remember, Churchill's father, Lord Randolph, obtained high office, including Chancellor of the Exchequer, which is like their Secretary of the Treasury. And generally understood to be the position just below the Prime Minster. Many people thought that Lord Randolph would become the Prime Minister. That was in an era when it was not uncommon for a member of the House of Lords to be elected Premier. Now, you have to be a member of the House of Commons, politically speaking, to be elected. But Churchill, from a young age, saw his father reach the heights of power, but not quite all the way. Then, of course, his father suffered from syphilis which led to mental derangement and a relatively early death. But Churchill was not in want for ambition. He wanted the reins of power. Not just in some grand exercise in self-aggrandizement, but because he believed in his country, his people, Western civilization. He believed in his own ability to lead. He had a sense of destiny about his life. He desired that authority and that power.

As a young man, he looked well on his way. He was First Lord of the Admiralty during World War One and occupied several positions in high office as a young man including Chancellor of the Exchequer. Then the Dardanelles happened, and you get into the late 1920s and the 1930s, he is just altogether marginalized. And it's as though, to ascend to the top of the mountain politically, he had to go to the deepest depths of the valley. Because, in the final analysis, when the nation finally woke up to the fact that the threat of Hitler was not only real, but more real than we ever imagined and we've been duped by our politicians, our leading class, for a decade, there's one man who had clearly, from the beginning, again and again and again, in prophetic foresight and prophetic conviction, called out the evil of Hitlerism and called out his own people for sleep-walking towards a catastrophic collision with it. So that voice, that voice, that voice; that pen, that pen, that pen which led to his political marginalization is exactly what catapulted him into power in the hour of greatest need.

OS **That's exactly right. The trait we could really draw out from what you've just said is that of courage, which is**

not going to shock anybody who is familiar with discussion of Winston Churchill. We've discussed that trait, that virtue. This is just a man of nothing less than fantastic courage. There are a few biographies written about Anthony Eden, who was a fantastic politician in his own right, in terms of popularity. There a few biographies written about Lord Halifax. A few written about Neville Chamberlain, not many congratulatory. There are hundreds written about Winston Churchill. There are dozens written each year about this man. There are many reasons why. We've covered many of them already, but courage stands out. Take away the courage, and he's like those other figures. He's another very gifted, quite consequential politician who nonetheless did not sit astride the world. But because of his courage, he changes world history. He saves the West.

JA

With that courage, there was a credibility that amplified it, and made it believable. And the credibility was his courage not being within him but being projected from him to the great issues of the day, the issue of Hitlerism in particular.

OS

And the fact that he is not just trying to be this heroic leader. Though he is a man firmly of the upper class with upper class tastes and all these things and sensibilities, he nonetheless channels the common spirit of England.

JA

Right. He could've easily just taken his weekends at Blenheim Palace. But it was a combination not just of the conviction but the gifting to speak and write in a compelling way. The foresight to see an issue come together. The platform to actually have a platform to speak and write in a compelling way. That's where I go back to the providence of God. You have to conclude that God in his kind providence had orchestrated not just the events broadly, but this man. William Manchester's biography *The Last Lion* ends his opening chapter on Churchill, where he talks about this pent-up need for a man, a Manichean who saw evil for what it was, black and white. Manchester pens some of the most moving paragraphs in American literature. And it ends with, "In London, there was such a man." And it became, in that crucible, where even Churchill's stiffest political adversaries kind of all came around to see that this was Churchill's finest hour.

OS

It was his finest hour. And that's why we're still talking about and we will continue to talk about him. I would encourage fathers to read *The Last Lion* with their sons when they can. Maybe that's even into college. But this is a man whose legacy is worth passing on. There are unhealthy aspects, to be sure, of imperial Britannia. We can say that straight up. We can talk about colonialism and identify real problems in it. We can also identify major strengths. For example, in the career of Churchill and the country he fought for. He fought for a greater cause. He committed himself to a people. Leaders today, by the way, should draw the lesson form his life that we're not leading against the people. We're not trying to act as if we're better than the people. We're trying to help the people. We're trying to speak for them. So this is a figure, in sum, who is worth studying, worth learning about. It's worth learning about his flaws, but it is definitely worth learning about his epic strengths as well.

JA

Well said. We are mature individuals. We are adults. We can look at Churchill in full color. And yes, that's not a full affirmation of British imperialism or colonialism, and so many other things of the era that we would find objectionable. But we can also, with awareness, look to how dark the hour truly was. Not just for London, not just for England, not just for the UK, not just for the Empire, but for the world. And thank God that he takes a man with all his warts, and that man helps to lead a people and the Allies to final victory. •

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C. H. Spurgeon, Ecclesiologist: On Revival, Membership, and the Church

By Geoff Chang

Every pastor's prayer is to see revival come to his church. The Word is preached with power. The Holy Spirit is poured out. Once sleepy Christians are now awakened. And now, the surrounding community is intrigued at the signs of life in the church. Visitors are coming in and are being converted by the power of the gospel. Hundreds are coming forward to be baptized and join the church. This is every pastor's dream.

But have you thought about the challenges that this would produce? On a practical level, pastors would need to think through issues like facilities, seating, safety, accessibility, and many other logistical difficulties. But even more important, pastors would need to think through pastoral and ecclesiological issues: How do we bring so many people into membership? How do we make decisions as a church? How do we shepherd all these people?

These were the questions that Charles Haddon Spurgeon faced amid the revival in the first seven years of his ministry in London.

Revival in London

Spurgeon was called to pastor the New Park Street Chapel in April 1854. The congregation had been sitting under his preaching for several months as he served on a trial basis. In that short time, this once dwindling congregation was now awakened to the glory of Christ. They could not stop talking about what they were hearing and eagerly invited their friends and neighbors to listen to the young preacher. Now, he had officially become their pastor and was relocating to London.

By the time of his arrival, the whole city was stirred at the news of the boy-preacher from The Fens. The roads and bridges leading to Spurgeon's chapel were blocked by traffic each Sunday. Before long, the congregation outgrew their space and needed to expand. During construction, Spurgeon rented large venues, like Exeter Hall and the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, to accommodate the growing crowds, but hundreds were still being turned away. No sooner was the building expansion finished than the congregation once again outgrew their space.

The challenge of space vexed Spurgeon. But this wasn't merely about being able to draw the most massive crowd possible. Instead, this was Spurgeon's recognition that he was not a traveling evangelist, but the pastor of a church. At one point, he lamented how membership had grown to exceed the seating at the New Park Street Chapel by 300. This meant that if they were to observe the Lord's Supper in their building, 300 members would not be able to participate. Not only that but with so many being converted, Spurgeon feared that he could not responsibly bring them into church membership and care for them properly. The only options he could think of was either to build a larger building or to quit the pastorate altogether and become a traveling evangelist.[1]

Unsurprisingly, his congregation would not let him quit. Rather, they would approve the construction of a magnificent new building, seating well over 5,000. The Metropolitan Tabernacle would be finished in 1861, marking the end of these early revival years and ushering in a new era of expansion in Spurgeon's ministry.

1 *Autobiography* 2:313.

Revival and Church Membership

Spurgeon's insistence on building the Metropolitan Tabernacle reflected his commitment to a well-ordered church, even amid revival. If a revival is like a raging river, then church structures are like the dam which channel and harness that power. In Spurgeon's case, the flood of revival overflowed the banks,[2] but Spurgeon was still committed to maintaining and enlarging the dam.

One of the structures that Spurgeon prioritized was church membership. Church membership was what distinguished his congregation from the crowds. Even as his congregation was unable to meet in their building, church membership reminded them they were a church and not just a preaching station. Spurgeon writes,

> Touching all the members of this select assembly there is an eternal purpose which is the original reason of their being called, and to each of them there is an effectual calling whereby they actually gather into the church; then, also, there is a hedging and fencing about of this church, by which it is maintained as a separate body, distinct from all the rest of mankind.[3]

This "hedging and fencing" was the structure of church membership. To join Spurgeon's church, visitors typically had to six-step membership process: 1) An elder interview; 2) a pastoral interview; 3) a proposal to the congregation and the assignment of a visitor (also known as a messenger); 4) a visitor inquiry; 5) a congregational interview by the chair and visitor report, and congregational vote; and 6) baptism (if necessary) and the right hand of fellowship was given at the next communion service.[4]

The rigorous membership process on the front end resulted in greater clarity for the elders about an individual's profession of faith and greater commitment to the church for the new members. In other words, Spurgeon was not afraid to build high fences, even if it meant a tremendous amount of work for him and his elders. On one occasion, Spurgeon interviewed forty people for membership in one day and "felt as weary as ever a man did in reaping the heaviest harvest."[5] In the first seven years of Spurgeon's ministry, he took over 1,400 new members into the church.

Revival and Elders

Bringing people into church membership was only the beginning. Now, Spurgeon faced the challenge of caring spiritually for all these members. He did not merely want names on a membership roll. Instead, he wanted to know that his people were faithfully serving Christ and growing in holiness. Initially, he functioned as the lone pastor or elder of the church, working alongside a board of deacons. But in 1859, he led the congregation to institute the office of elders, who "are to attend to the spiritual affairs of the Church and not to the temporal matters which appertain to the deacons only."[6] This division of labor would enable Spurgeon to give spiritual care and oversight to the growing congregation. He stated, "it would have been utterly impossible for that Church to have existed, except as a mere sham and huge presence, if it had not been for the Scriptural and most expedient office of the eldership."[7]

To care for the church, Spurgeon divided the membership of the church geographically and each elder was assigned to a different district. He describes their work in this way:

> The seeing of inquirers, the visiting of candidates for church membership, the seeking out of absentees, the caring for the sick and troubled, the conducting of prayer-meetings, catechumen and Bible-classes for the young men—these and other needed offices our brethren the elders discharge for the church. One elder is maintained by the church for the especial purpose of visiting our sick poor,

2 "Souls are being saved. I have more enquirers than I can attend to. From six to seven o'clock on Monday and Thursday evenings, I spend in my vestry; I give but brief interviews then, and have to send many away without being able to see them." *Autobiography* 2:98.
3 *MTP* 24:542.
4 *S&T* 1869:53-54.
5 *MTP* 30:310.
6 *Autobiography* 3:22.
7 *MTP* 7:261.

> and looking after the churchroll, that this may be done regularly and efficiently.[8]

Additionally, the elders met regularly together to discuss any issues of pastoral care that needed pastoral attention. Sometimes, these issues would surface as elders met with people in their homes. However, not infrequently, some members would simply stop coming to church. To track attendance, members were given tickets that were to be turned in at the Lord's Supper. If someone had missed the Lord's Supper for more than three months, the elders would be notified so that they could follow up and call them back to Christ.

As the church grew, Spurgeon did not hesitate to lead the church in calling more elders to labor alongside him in caring for the church. Elders served 1-year terms and were elected each year. This allowed Spurgeon to add more elders easily from year to year. In 1859, the congregation appointed nine elders. By 1868, 26 elders were called to serve the church of 3,860 members. Spurgeon confessed, "Without the efficient and self-denying labors of the elders, we should never be able to supervise our huge church."[9]

Conclusion

Spurgeon's example is a reminder not to neglect the church, even during times of revival. This is how we ensure that the effects of revival are captured and sustained for the long haul. Too many pastors today are willing to compromise how they lead their churches either to try to produce revival or accommodate revival. But such efforts end up leading not to revival, but revival*ism*, which is no true work of the Spirit.

Every pastor should continue to pray for revival in his church. But we must not forget that true revival is the work of God, not the result of our innovation. The pastors' calling, then, is to preach the gospel and to shepherd the church faithfully, whether thousands are coming or only a few. •

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8 *S&T* 1869:53.
9 Ibid., 52.

An Angry Age: Critic Joseph Bottum on the Fading Mainline and Raging Youth

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following is an interview by Owen Strachan (originally on the City of God podcast)

OS **Dr. Joseph Bottum is one of the nation's most widely published and influential essayists. He's published works in journals from *The Atlantic* to the *Washington Post*. He's an Amazon.com best-selling author of several Kindle singles, and he's written books, poetry, short stories, song lyrics. He lives in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He is a contributing editor of the *Weekly Standard* and holds a Ph.D. in medieval philosophy.**

JB Thanks for having me.

OS **It's my joy. I want to specifically focus in on your 2014 book, *An Anxious Age: Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America.* I very much enjoyed this text several years ago. I thought it was a brilliant critique, and one that almost nobody had really offered, especially your main thesis that the mainline has disappeared, and that accounts for so much of why America has changed. As I read culture and society, I think that that thesis has only come more to the fore since you've published the book. Do you think that's accurate?**

JB Certainly commentary on that book. There's a thesis I run through the book—especially the first half which is about Protestantism, while the second half is about Catholicism in America, specifically the attempt of Catholics and Evangelicals to provide a substitute for the failing mainline in the 1990s and 2000s. The first half of the book was a more historical analysis of American religion and its role. I proposed this thesis that I call the "Erie Canal Thesis." I call it the "Erie Canal Thesis" because I thought all of American religious history—all the threads of it—passed through Upstate New York in the 19th Century.

The thesis is essentially: If you want to understand American society, you need to look at American religion, and if you want to understand American religion, you have to ask yourself, "What is happening with Protestantism at this moment?" As a Catholic, I feel a sense of a profoundly Protestant nation. I asked that question, and the answer I came up with is, "Protestantism has passed through the Social Gospel movement so profoundly that it doesn't even realize that its religious anymore." All of the radicalism that we're seeing is a form of post-Protestantism. I put that book out in 2015, I think, and it got nicely reviewed, but it seems to have made a comeback right now. It was Ross Douthat in the New York Times recently that devoted one of his columns to the book, resurrecting the book. Ross and I had debated the book at Georgetown when it just came out, but he went back to it and said, "My objection at the time was that it was kind of abstract. It did not seem to have any objectivity to it. It was just a thesis. But to look at the protesters now, and their kneeling and their hand-waving and their singing of

hymns in ecstatic transport while they wave candles over their heads."

To look at a lot of this is to see religion being performed by a lot of people who don't know that it's religious. That thesis, and my explanation of post-Protestantism and its religious roots, comes back to the fore, and in fact now has a particular instance by which we can judge the thesis. And that didn't seem possible in 2015.

OS **Yes, things have gotten terrifying particular in recent days. If you want particularity, it abounds. I think what you just said about what the writer and commentator Alan Jacobs said recently, name that "wokeness is a kind of secular counter-reformation." Something to think through there. In your book, in terms that are shockingly prescient about how things have played out, you say in commenting on Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel of the 20th century, "Sin is the evil of bigotry, power, corrupt law, the mob, militarism, and class contempt." Conversely, this is me speaking to frame this: redemption isn't being saved by faith in Christ as in a traditional Protestant formulation in some form, but redemption, you argue is "essentially an attitude of mind; a personal, interior rejection of social evils."**

I think of how Roger Scruton famously identified the central animating conviction of so much 20th century thought as that of resentment. And the Marxist class that was massing in the 20th century and was making its arguments so powerfully in Europe resented the existing order. When I read that in line with what you say there about sin and redemption, again I cannot help but think about our current moment where sin is effectively societal evil, corrupt law, bad history—even if we can extend it there—and redemption is an attitude of mind, as you said six years ago. Isn't that how people think about how our societal problems are going to be fixed: you need to have the right cast of mind?

JB And that all comes out of Rauschenbusch. And I want to talk about Rauschenbusch if we get a chance, because I'm really fascinated by him. In speaking of resentment: I think Roger Scruton was thinking of what Nietzsche would call *ressentiment*. He felt that the German word for resentment wasn't enough, so he had to use a French word for it. So in the German text of Nietzsche, there's this French word *ressentiment*. It conveys more of deep, welling up of an attitude toward the world. Of course, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* is the classic study of it. But, that doesn't preclude religion. And I offer you this, American folk songs (Robbie George at Princeton is a semi-pro banjo player and knows the corpus of American folk songs. He and Cornel West teach, every couple years at Princeton, a course together on American folk music, which is just one of the great American courses that I wish I could've taken), which came out of Wesleyan hymns and folk melodies from the British Isles and even some African influences as well (although the influence typically runs the other way, from the American folk tradition into the African song to create various later streams of music). The Appalachian folk song falls into three categories: "I've lost my love and I'm going to go weep under the willows," "I'm going to get drunk and wrestle a bear," and "God is going to punish the rich." And the third theme is very religious and very resentful. So these are not necessarily in contradiction. That religious feeling can still incorporate or allow for, at least, in some forms, resentment.

A lot of American traditions says that the rich are seldom good and never happy. This is why Richard Cory in E. A. Robinson's poem (of the same name) shoots his brains out. This is how this feeling works. We have a religious feeling here that I think I've successfully identified, and it doesn't preclude the resentment that you're speaking about. In fact, in some ways, it's an answer to resentment. You acknowledge the resentment, and then you say, "How do we solve it?" Well, the elite are the ones you're resentful against. These protestors in the big cities are not protesting against conservatives exactly. The conservatives are the boogeyman but they're directing this protest at something else. Portland hasn't had a Republican mayor since something like 1948. *National Review* shares this meme every once in a while of all these cities and the last time they had a Republican mayor. And it's hilarious.

But where the protests are going on is not against conservatives. It's against a class of people they're resentful of. Because all of these protestors—the white

protestors in particular, the "woke people"—have elite degrees. Or at least they have some of the trappings of an elite class. But they don't have any of the real markers of it. They're not worth one hundred billion dollars; they don't have important careers in politics or business. What they've got is a law degree in a field in which there's too many lawyers right now, anyway. Their financial hold on elite-ness is very tenuous. They don't think of themselves of elite in the sense that they have power. But they do think of themselves as something, some class that is sort of elite. But it's elite because it has the right attitudes toward the moral construction of the universe. They think of themselves, I argue, as elect. They form part of what Rauschenbusch called the "vast web" that he wanted to create of redeemed personalities.

It was a wonderful phrase, redeemed personalities. If we take Max Weber's kind of analysis seriously, which I do (I think Weber's seriousness about religion needs to be revived in ways that this whole field of sociology is uncomfortable with). But Weber, in several of his analyses of the beginning of the modern age, looks at the world and says, "Religion is driving a lot of this." This, of course, is the famous *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. But he says, "Why does capitalism happen?" Marx said, "Capitalism caused Protestantism." Weber turns that on its head and says, "No. Religion caused capitalism." Because these people were filled with spiritual anxiety, which is not just, "Are they saved?" but "How do you know that you are saved?" Not the justification language, to use Calvin's language, but the sanctification language. "How are you saved?" The Dutch Reformed answer is: "Through faith in Jesus Christ." But how do you know that you are saved? How do you manifest your salvation? What are the fruits of it that show that you have it? That's an anxious question.

Now translate that into these post-Protestant terms. What makes you a good person? What makes you a good person in this post-Rauschenbusch world is that you have the right social attitudes and the right attitudes for the social sins. And how do you know that you are saved? That's an anxious question. The previous generation of elites sort of paid lip service to this idea of the social wokeness. But the people in the streets are not putting up with that anymore. They're rebelling against those elites. They're saying, "You're hypocrites. You're not sanctified." And a lot of what they do are forms of sanctification, like cancel culture. Now, there's always been shunning, but in different forms from excommunication to actual exclusion from the community. Shunning, which has old roots in the Jewish tradition, has continual history in the Christian line. But one of the things I say is when the mainline churches collapsed, their old function in the democracy ceased to be performed. They used to corral a lot of these dangerous ideas. Once they no longer do—they no longer corral them and they no longer answer those anxieties—so the churches collapse and get these demons let loose to enter the public life. If you think of it in terms of shunning, in your church, you're not going to give over the pulpit to a visiting Satanist to debate the goodness of Satan. The life inside the *fanum*, that wonderful Latin word for temple, doesn't allow that. You don't let the holy of Holies be used by Satanists. That's in the church; that's in the *fanum*.

But for these people, now, public life and politics is the temple. The idea that we need to shun this from our church is still holding, it's just that the church is public life. So we need to banish these people from public life we need to cancel them in the same way that you wouldn't let the Satanists in or debate the Satanists in your church. It's the same idea, but the church is this monstrously large public square aggravated by all the technological changes.

OS **Yes, and along with what you're saying, the enemy is not simply Wall Street, CEOs, politicians, conservatives of various stripes. The enemy, actually, of many of the protesters on the streets, are their own fathers and mothers, their childhood instructors, the people who are engaged in the society but are not woke. That's what is so fascinating about the linkage of wokeness to the concept of a secular elect, which is a linkage that your thesis fosters.**

JB I think that's quite, quite intelligent, and a nice way to put it. I also don't think I fully agree. To some extent, these kids are being dutiful. They're dutiful children. This is a thesis that Midge Decter put back in the 70s in a book called *Liberal Parents, Radical Children*, which has completely disappeared, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to revive this forgotten book. Her argument is that these kids aren't rebelling against their parents. They're fulfilling what their parents

wanted. Their parents had a vision of what a good person is, and it was like a radical environmentalist. Someone who was fighting for the environment is a good person. And the kids are just carrying out the next step. This is how great awakenings work. Remember Jonathan Edwards says in the famous letter about the events in Massachusetts: "We began to see a greater discernment and instructability to think about these issues all the time among our young people." Their seriousness, their sense that the parents may have mouthed this and may have really believed it but they didn't really live it and we need to take the next step. Like Midge Decter's idea that that actually makes them dutiful children instead of rebellious children.

OS **Perhaps there's room for further complexity in what we're talking about here. I'm going to guess—I'm not a child of the left in a direct, domestic way—that some parents really do see their kids as making good on the revolutionary wave said parents wanted to surf years back. I think that's true, and I think that's an important point.**

I also think, though, following developments on various campuses, that there's a kind of older, more traditional leftism that is frankly shocked at how fast things are moving and is surprised to find itself, for example, landing in the cultural penalty box under the banner of sayings like "Silence is complicity." So in other words, any failure to join the resistance, any failure to be right there on the front line, is effectively not standing for what is right. And I think that is shocking a good number of folks who would be more centrist or more genially left, and that spirit of resentment we were talking about—however you define that in terms of origins or linkage with religion—has hardened, concretized, and is moving faster than I think many even would have expect, even those who were training the rising generation in this kind of body of thought, this kind of religious activism that actually isn't very theological, intentionally.

JB They're certainly obeying their teachers. If you look at the penetration of this post-Protestantism into America's educational establishment, it's so deep and so profound that these kids are being dutiful and not rebellious. They're fulfilling what their teachers had preached, in a way that would shock the preacher. Like someone said, "The French Revolution is like Saturn: it always devours its children." Some of these professors are surprised in ways you just described, when the revolution eats them up for being insufficiently woke.

But even that is a fulfillment of a line that's been developing for some time; I argue it's been developing since Rauschenbusch, although I would want to defend Rauschenbusch himself. He was a believer and he was profoundly steeped in the Bible. He perceived the problem of the age. The trouble is, with what Rauschenbusch did, is when you re-describe the Christian message as social, you address certain problems of the age in which you wrote—and remember, this is the age of the Triangle Fire and the abuse of the working class. He went to New York City to take over a parish there, and he is radicalized by the child funerals that he has to perform. He is trying to address the problems of the age. But his way of doing that is identifying sin. The sins that crucified Jesus are social sins. He will actually sometimes go as far as to say that is meaningless to say that Christ died for the personal salvation of a drunkard in Tennessee who beats his wife. Christ died was crucified by these six or seven social sins. The list of social sins was like an accordion, sometimes it was shorter. That's what crucified him. Christ died to break the power of these social sins; not to redeem individuals. Individuals get redeemed through recognition of the social sins that Christ died to expose and answer. That move has consequences.

Rauschenbusch preached that to a biblically trained audience and achieved certain wonderful results. But the consequences of it are really obvious now and should have been obvious to him up there in Rochester. The consequences are that if Christ is the ladder by which we climb up to a higher ledge of moral understanding, once we're there, we don't need the ladder anymore. We are already on the higher ledge! I love that ladder metaphor, which is a metaphor of an entirely different context I got out of Wittgenstein. But the ladder metaphor is very helpful for describing what happens here. Christ is the ladder of higher moral understanding: we climb up, we stand on the new ledge, we see the social sins, and once the ladder is below us, we don't need it anymore. And the next generation will stop going to church and the generation after that will stop bothering with Jesus. They have the redeemed personality without him.

OS **Yes, I think that's right. Richard Wightman Fox, the biographer of Reinhold Niebuhr and others, has made the point that it's not so much that leftist politics sort of overtook the social gospel movement; the social gospel movement was always destined to become leftist politics. A very provocative thesis, but one that has a lot to back it up in terms of what has actually played out in America. I want to ask you this, as well: It's fascinating to me that Hofstadter and others have famously and very successfully defined evangelicals—I'm an evangelical clearly in this world, in the Baptist world—as paranoid. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* is the title of Hofstadter's work that is influential in framing, especially conservative, evangelicals as paranoid. There can be truth there depending on what we're talking about and what said individuals are promoting. Nonetheless, it's fascinating to me to think about paranoia in terms of how these great social movements are playing out today. In other words, you think of climate change hysteria, what is happening with these protests in cities, wokeism; it seems very paranoid to me.**

You've thought a lot about the conservative cast of mind. You edited *First Things* for a number of years, sort of a lynchpin of the conservative movement. It strikes me that conservatism, of course, is trying to reform society in different ways—Buckley's famous "Stop!" to various initiatives and drives. And yet, conservatism is actually happy, to a significant degree, with the world as it is. Obviously, there's going to be distinctions--Catholics and Protestants, Evangelicals--in terms of what shape that contentment takes. Do you think there's anything there to think through, liberalism as a fundamentally restless, activist, even paranoid mindset versus conservatism as an attitude of thankfulness, rootedness, even restfulness in some form?

JB If one allows the idea that the conservative is perfectly capable of saying, "We live in a terrible world." In conservative circles for many years, it was common to quote a line of Eric Voegelin's how the danger of politics is when we try to "immanentize the eschaton." When you try, through political means, to make the end times happen and build the New Jerusalem. Because that always ends in blood. If all we have to do is reset time and build a New Jerusalem, then when it doesn't work, the answer must be that there were people that were stopping us, so we must kill them. It always ends in blood. I do think there are elements of this here of both sides. Hofstadter wrote that essay as a vehicle to express his anti-conservative thought. But he knew, and that's why you remembered the essay. If you want a nice measure of this that also fits my thesis about these Christian ideas that have escaped the churches and wander around as demons unattached to any limiting principles, I would look at apocalyptic feeling, which is paranoid in the way you described. But it's also very visible on a form of the radical left environmentalists. They've got this apocalyptic feeling. It's also noticeable on the right—and right is a funny word because I don't know many of these people—among the survivalists. They, too, have this apocalyptic feeling. And if you think about it, the apocalypse is a wonderfully powerfully moral idea that needs to be constrained the ways the old mainline churches constrained it. In other words, they gave it meaning, they tied it to other concepts in Christian theology.

This is what I mean by constrained. But let loose, it becomes this powerful political idea, social idea. Because after all, if we're facing the end of the world, there's no time for manners. Manners are in fact complicity with evil. There's no time for thoughtful engagement for those who think differently. That's complicity with evil that's going to kill billions because we are facing the apocalypse. There's something wonderfully morally freeing about apocalyptic feeling. If we're about to face Armageddon, we are set free in very interesting ways, emotionally, in our religious emotions. And the paranoia that you describe is one of the features of that apocalyptic feeling. I think you're right but I'd even want to extend it to my theological analysis and say, when you see it, it's always wrapped up in some post-Protestant theological term; some post-Christian idea that is escaped from the mainline churches as they collapsed, and entered public life in extraordinarily dangerous ways.

OS **Yes, I went to Bowdoin College for my undergraduate, and here again, touching on that matter we were discussing and even debating a little in a very profitable way: is the left fundamentally radical or is the radicalism surprising at least some portion of the left today? I think of**

professors I had a Bowdoin, who were I'm sure, out and out left in political terms—there were perhaps five to six meaningful conservatives out of a faculty of 150. I think about how many of them, nonetheless, led contented lives in Brunswick, Maine, and in some form believed that everybody at Bowdoin was pursuing the common good, and that a place like Bowdoin is supposed to foster dialogue about the humanities and about the good life.

And I just think now about what it would be like, twenty years after I was at Bowdoin, to be a student, and how the curriculum is going to be much more activist, and even militarized. You think about what happened at Middlebury College a few years back with Charles Murray. There has to be a divide—not simply on a campus like Middlebury—but in American society between those who are on the left and would broadly support leftism and those who are radicals. That's a tension that you've brought out not only in your book but in this conversation. I think it's a tension that is very much evident in the Democratic Party today, with the radical edge pushing the mainstream very hard and effectively winning, it seems to me. This is a tension in this anxious age, as you call it, that is going to continue affecting American life in days ahead.

JB I think you're absolutely right. In its best form, this old balance of liberalism kind of nodding genially to radicalism, like your professors at Bowdoin. In its more mockable forms it's what David Brooks described in his first book as the "bohemian bourgeois." He captured something there, too, which is the bad form of what you just described, in which these people say, "We need to tear down the whole system; by the way do you like my new granite countertops in the kitchen?" They perceive themselves as bohemian while they lived an upper-middle class life. They were allowed to do it, according to Brooks, because they were living in paradise. Twenty years on, we don't have paradise anymore. Suddenly they're exposed and denounced by the young as hypocrites, which they were, of course. Young people are not idiots. They're following a logic that, in fact, is accurate. It's just a logic that's not going to take us anywhere, and it's going to destroy a whole lot along the way.

OS **That's very well said. Thank you for your time. I very much appreciate your writing and thinking coming, as I do, from an Evangelical and Protestant vantage point. I find your cultural criticism stimulating to read and I'm thankful for this conversation that I've had with you. Catholics and Protestants are looking at the current order—though we have different convictions on core matters—with nonetheless shared horror in many respects. So I'm thankful for a book like yours from 2014, that I think accounts in a significant way for why we are where we are. Humanity has not ceased to be religious; our religion, at least in America in terms of the mainstream, has migrated out of the mainline in substantial form, and even out of Evangelicalism and Catholicism to a point. It has migrated into hard-edged, smashmouth activism. And that is, indeed, not a development that is to be taken lightly. Thank you very much for your time.**

JB Thanks for having me. •

Joseph Bottum is author of An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America.

"Written into the very foundations of the world": Raising Boys in a Gender-Neutral Age

By Colin Smothers

Twenty-seven years ago, historian and biographer William Manchester wrote the cover article for the 60th anniversary edition of *U.S. News & World Report*. Looking back over a little more than a half-century history, Manchester chronicled the considerable changes that had taken place in America since the magazine's beginning in 1933 and opined on what it all meant. Nestled in the middle of this fascinating time-capsule of analysis is an absolute barnburner that takes a couple of read-throughs to truly appreciate: "the erasure of the distinctions between the sexes is not only the most striking issue of our time, it may be the most profound the race has ever confronted."

What is particularly notable about Manchester's observation about the collapse of sex distinction is not his assessment of its meaning, which lacks a certain depth and is surely limited in part by the medium, although he rightly notes the role that technology played in the rapid acceleration of this trend, most especially the development of modern contraceptives—the consequences of which were far from realized when he wrote in 1993 and are still not so today. No, what recommends Manchester's statement to us today is just how sweeping it is in scope and fiber.

Manchester, a lauded student and custodian of history, could hardly have made a more daring statement unless he eschewed his understated style. But we can't afford to miss the urgency here. Is the most striking and profound issue ever to face the human race the recent move toward gender-neutrality and sexual interchangeability—in a word, toward androgyny? If so—and it would certainly make, if not top, my shortlist—are we prepared to hear the warning in Manchester's decades-old claim?

Living in a world still reeling in the wake of the sexual revolution—a project that certainly cannot be said to be complete in 1993, let alone 2020—it may be difficult to comprehend just how radical the change Manchester highlights, and why it is such an existential issue that demands our attention. But to read carefully the news headlines today is to be made aware of the challenges all around. Declining marriage and birth rates, which are merely societal fruits of the gender-neutral enterprise, are a particularly foul and menacing bunch to the continued health of society. But the stock and branches of this "erasure of the distinctions" is functional interchangeability (the myth that a woman can *do* anything a man can and vice versa); and the taproot is formal interchangeability (the myth that a woman can *be* a man and vice versa). We might summarily call this particular specimen the "gender-neutral" weed. If you don't think you've got it in your backyard, you might want to check again.

Gender-neutrality may seem like a harmless concept, but it sails under a false flag of "neutrality" that cannot go unchallenged. Mark it down: there is nothing neutral about gender-neutrality. The term masks a total war against gender that is after nothing less than the destruction of recognizable manhood or womanhood, boyhood or girlhood. Many today think it a laudable aim to raise gender-neutral — it has quickly become the cosmopolitan way. But beware: you cannot have a gender-neutral childhood without neutering your child.

Raising Sons in a Gender-Neutral Age

The effects of gender-neutrality are all around us: in our children's classrooms, in the neighbor's house down the street, showing up to our family reunions. Boys and girls who are not recognizably so—and this

intentionally—encouraged to downplay the differences instead of playing comfortably within them. Our children are paying attention, and they are wondering if this is the way of wisdom.

As a father with both sons and daughters, I am particularly concerned for my sons. As many have observed, although a form of androgyny is often the goal, gender-neutrality doesn't tack straight down the middle between masculinity and femininity. It skews feminine. As gender-specific spaces have become rarified and, in some quarters, completely extinct, the resulting confluence of mixed-society tends toward feminization. This has been observed in spaces as diverse as churches and social clubs to online discourse. While there is nothing inherently wrong about feminization—by all means, may females abound in femininity!—at issue is the collapse of any distinctly masculine spheres where boys can be formed into men, learning the ways of manhood through osmosis as men shape boys through countless interactions.

While much of what I say below can be inflected through distinctly feminine forms to apply to daughters, I am specifically addressing raising sons. Because of the historical realities outlined above, intentionality is now the key to raising sons in our gender-neutral age. But wasn't this always the case? Consider Proverbs 29:15: "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." According to the Scriptures, a child left to himself—to his own self-exploration, his own self-definition—does not inevitably pursue what is wise and good. Instead, a father and mother must use the God-given tools of discipline, the rod and reproof, to impart wisdom—to instruct their son in the ways of God and the world as God intended. The rod in particular represents both retrospective and prospective correction: it is used to chasten away from a wrong step taken and to guide along the paths of righteousness, which run in line with God's revelation in nature and Scripture. This approach is intentionality of both word and action.

Proverbs 29:17 puts a fine point on it: "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart." Discipline is more than merely corrective; it is also instructive. And the instruction starts early, when the son is still a child. While Christian virtue and Christlikeness are the ultimate aim for Christian men and women, we practice such as embodied creatures who are created male or female. Manliness is not womanliness, even though both were created by God. And a boy must be taught to channel his God-given, natural strengths and drive toward God-ordained ends.

To be sure, blue trucks and pink dolls do not epitomize a kind of platonic form for boyhood and girlhood. But neither must we go to the other extreme and downplay the real, good, and natural differences between boyhood and girlhood. These differences, when rightly conceived, prepare children for and actively disciple boys and girls into godly manhood or womanhood. The medium is not the substance of discipleship — but the medium is not without form. And every form will have a forming effect.

Discipling a boy toward manhood must at times be gender-specific and gender-exclusive. What, after all, is a boy in contrast to a girl? There are things for boys that are not for girls, and things for girls that are not for boys. We must not let gender-neutrality tell us any different, thus neutering both boyhood and girlhood. While we must not construct a legalistic list of dos and don'ts, there will be dos and don'ts, because there must be a distinction. When God commands the Israelites in Deuteronomy 22:5 that women must not wear the clothing of men, and men the clothing of women, he does not go into sartorial detail. But God is clear that a distinction must exist and be observed—consistent across society. To eliminate, therefore, the difference, or what Manchester calls the "erasure of the distinctions between the sexes," is not of God.

It is good and right that boys gravitate toward certain more physical activities which our society (still) associates with boyhood — teaching them at an early age to lead, provide and protect. They need space not only to scratch this natural itch, but to do it in a constructive way. This is not "letting boys be boys"; when men are present—fathers and grandpas and uncles and pastors—this is "letting boys become men." But neither is this a call toward strict sex-segregation at all times. Boys are born of a mother, many have sisters in the home, and

most will grow up to marry a woman and perhaps even raise daughters of their own. They must be taught how to encounter aright and properly revere the "other" sex. Showing honor to and adoring the "weaker vessel" is an instructed—if dying—art that the Christian man must not neglect, and the boy would do well to learn early.

Certainly, it would be good for us to recognize the ways our culture—evangelical sub-culture included—has contributed to gender confusion through definitions of boyhood and manhood, girlhood and womanhood, that have more in common with Hollywood (read: worldly) stereotypes than with the Bible. We do not want to do the work of the gender-activists for them: a boy who deviates from his peers slightly should not be encouraged that he is actually a girl inside. But we also must recognize the world of difference between wisely expanding the boundaries of boyhood and girlhood to include experiences beyond blue cars and pink dolls and erasing all differences between boyhood and girlhood.

Boys should be discipled to act and dress like boys becoming men, and girls should be discipled to act and dress like girls becoming women. Raising sons in our gender-neutral age is a charge that will take intentionality and, above all, prayer. But we shouldn't neglect the "ancient paths" when squaring up the task. A cultural stereotype shouldn't automatically be thrown off just because it is stereotypical. For what is typical may be pointing to what is wise, what is in keeping with the ways of creation, what is stubbornly chafing against the "erasure of the distinctions between the sexes." For some things are not merely written with pencil, but written into the very foundations of the world from the beginning when God made them male and female. •

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An Intellectual in Full: A Symposium on Philosopher Roger Scruton

By Andrew T. Walker & Bryan Baise

How did Scruton's thought shape you?

ANDREW WALKER Scruton taught me how culture is a volatile ecosystem dependent on the tradition preceding it. In a section on *How to be a Conservative*, Scruton writes how the freedom of Christian civilization "depended upon a cultural base that it could not itself guarantee. Only if people are held together by stronger bonds than the bond of free choice can free choice be raised to the prominence that the new political order promised. And those stronger bonds are buried deep in the community, woven by custom, ceremony, language and religious need. Political order, in short, requires cultural unity, something that politics itself can never provide."

Scruton profoundly illuminated my understanding of the delicate balance that is liberal democracy and ordered liberty: It needs sustaining by something outside of it to give it meaning, coherence, and accountability.

BRYAN BAISE It is difficult to separate where my thoughts end and Sir Roger's thoughts begin. I've read nearly everything he has written and so much of my mental furniture has been shaped by him. If I had to distill his influence then I would say that Sir Roger Scruton gave me categories to love beauty and understand conservatism. I'll expound a bit on the latter.

I cut my political teeth in the early-mid 2000s. It wasn't until the end of college and during seminary that I discovered the witness of the conservative tradition. I read this tradition in reverse because it came to me that way, first through Sir Roger's writings. It was through Scruton's work that I realized what I imbibed was a form of conservatism disconnected from its roots. I learned conservatism is first and foremost a posture before it is a politic. Conservatism is an invitation to view politics from a broader lens than mere legislative and political processes; indeed, that's the least interesting and important part. It's a recognition that, in spite of the frailties and failures of human history, there are good things worth preserving and defending. Such work, as he writes in *How to be a Conservative* is laborious and dull, but it's good and true work. He writes,

> "Conservatism starts from a sentiment that all mature people can readily share: the sentiment that good things are easily destroyed, but not easily created. This is especially true of good things that come to us as collective assets: peace, freedom, law, civility, public spirit, the security of property and family life, in all of life which we depend on the cooperation of others while having no means singlehandedly to obtain it. In respect of such things, the work of destruction is quick, easy and exhilarating; the work of creation slow, laborious and dull."

The conservatism I knew was not ready or willing to do the long, slow, laborious work of creating good things. In many ways it wished to short-circuit the process through its focus on policies and politics. Scruton offered a different path, one paved by those who'd gone before us and left bread crumbs of goodness, truth, and beauty along the way. On this path, the focus was on recognizing that before we shape policies, we shape *homes*. We are beings who love home, those around us, and the places we inhabit. We love our homes because they are, in some sense, reflections of us and what we love. This is good and right and stimulates a sense of shared obligation. Those spaces are affected by politics,

but they are not first protected by policies. Loving one's place means loving *actual people and actual places.* Conservatism is not a project but a posture. That's the paradigm shift he offered.

Where did you find tension points with his ideas as an evangelical?

ANDREW WALKER I have to be honest and confess that I never understood Scruton's religious trappings. He professed to be an Anglican. But with a person as institutionally conservative as Scruton, it is hard to know whether his Anglicanism was confessional or merely part of the ecosystem of British aristocracy. The lack of clarity about whether his faith was orthodox concerns me. Moreover, if one is orthodox, that is typically not hidden.

BRYAN BAISE While Scruton identified as a "skeptical Anglican," and often wrote or said things I disagreed with, I never approached the British philosopher with the intent to discover tension(s) with my evangelical commitments. Instead, I let the man speak in full measure. In doing so, I certainly came across concepts or ideas that were stated with certainty where evangelicals might suggest otherwise. Disagreement is part of reading deeply; I knew the moment I read Scruton's work for the first time that this was not a man sharing my window into the world and I was perfectly fine with that. I wanted *him* to help *me* see clearly out of my window; if he happened to suggest adding a pane or two that didn't fit, that's to be expected and I kindly passed on the offer. I would have loved a deeper dependence on theological anthropology or that he showed less of an affinity for Kantian metaphysics. But expecting for that would be expecting someone who was not Sir Roger.

We may *hope* those things would develop or pass away, and I would often finish reading Scruton and think "Ah! He's so close!" There are passages scattered throughout his writings where an evangelical might render hopeful conclusions that Sir Roger was much closer to Truth than his counterparts. More than anything, though, I wanted him to teach me. That was enough while I waited in hope for greater clarity.

What about Scruton the man—a man in full, as Tom Wolfe would say—influenced you?

ANDREW WALKER Roger Scruton's thought shaped me primarily by better understanding that conservatism is as much an aesthetic and cultural repository as it is a set of ideas. All through the Scrutonian canon, one finds constant overtures to beauty and culture as an inheritance. This reflects a conservative metaphysic in the "unity of the transcendentals;" that is, what is true, good, and beautiful are all the same. In Scruton, this thought comes alive. It is so surprising and unsurprising that his intellectual brilliance was joined with a deep, philosophical understanding of music. They are packaged together in Scruton, and moreover, his conservatism was one of high culture and refined taste. We can roll our eyes at this but considering the death of the gentlemen in Western culture, I am willing to trade UFC culture for the affectations of gentlemanliness.

BRYAN BAISE As I watched and read him over the last decade I saw how patient he was with criticism, or how he carefully walked through a difficult philosophical issue with someone. More than this, though, is a little known essay he wrote in 2001, "Becoming a Family." In it you see a man reflecting on his past mistakes, the prospects of a new life distanced from them but still shaped by the past, and some of the best modern reflections on marriage and family I've read. And I think that essay demonstrates what I want to emulate most from my time reading and studying this man: a life of reflective judgments that are neither hasty nor hyperbolic but honest, prudent, and patient. Sir Roger offered a life rhythm that encouraged a person to stop, slow down, look around, and consider. •

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They Created a Monster: Review of an Important Scruton Work

By Samuel Parkison

They created a monster. In May, 1968, Roger Scruton (1944-2020) was a twenty-four-year-old student in Paris, while the hopes and dreams of progressive revolutionaries unfolded in the form of riots. The old system had to go, so that—up from the ashes—a socialist utopia could arise. But ashes, after all, are made in only one way, so in May of 1968, Roger Scruton looked down from his balcony and watched as his peers set the streets of Paris ablaze.

Many a zealous student saw the same sight, and the effect was (and *is*) all too common—a moth-like romance for fire burns in the bosom, and in they go, piously chanting whatever slogan happens to ring out at the time. For Scruton, however, the riots in Paris had the reverse effect. Instead of them being the devouring fire of self-destruction and judgment they were for so many, they became for him the refining fire of consecration. A veil was lifted, and Scruton saw not a burgeoning and promising future in the revolutionary mindset, he saw a petulant adolescence, a child-like tantrum on the scale of genuine social upheaval. The instigators of these riots thought they were burning down all things conservative, but they were rather forging steel-spine conservativism at its best. Roger Scruton found his purpose.

This purpose is set on full display in *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left.* The book can be described as a history of (very bad) ideas. In this work, Scruton offers a summary and analysis of leftist philosophical and political theories prevalent in the last half of the twentieth century until now. He shows how, despite their differences and unique terminology, Marxism and existentialism and postmodernism are all cut from the same cloth. Though they bite and devour one another at various points, they at least stand in solidarity in their opposition to the "Other."

This "other" goes by many names. He is a "creature" who "has undergone considerable transformation." To Marx, he is the economic enslaver who forces the separation between the *proletariat* and their production; to Sartre, he is the inauthentic self; to Foucault, he is the arbiter of power in whatever oppressive *episteme* happens to reign at the time; but whatever you call him, he is the problem. He is the "bourgeois," and he somehow manages to "inspire every variety of renewable contempt" (pg. 96). These thinkers share a disdainful glare, and conclude that "whatever had gone wrong in the world, it was the Other who was to blame" (pg. 74).

Scruton begins his plunge into the literature of the Left with his own countrymen, surveying the works of Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) and E. P. Thompson (1924-1993). These men were not the originators of new ideas, but rather functioned as propagandists who revised history through the non-reality of a Marxist lens, and "where the facts run directly counter to the Marxist story [they] explicitly try to evade them… Marxist history means rewriting history with class at the top of the agenda. And it involves demonizing the upper class and romanticizing the lower" (pg. 27). At this point, Scruton turns his attention to the United States with a hopeful sentiment:

> Thanks to the American Constitution, and the long tradition of critical thinking inspired by it, American leftism has more often than not taken the form of legal and constitution argument, interspersed with reflections on justice that are mercifully free from the class resentment that speak in the works of the European left. Hence… Americans on the left are described on the left not as socialists but as liberals, as though it were freedom, rather than equality, that they promise (pg. 37).

Alas, this is one of the few places where *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* is tragically out of date. *If only* such a description of the left in the United States were still true. Though Scruton is right to point out that the "political structure" in America is "inimical to the creation of longstanding hereditary elites"—which means "classes" remain "fluid, temporary, without apparent moral attributes"—and thus "America lacks the multiple barriers to social advancement that have existed in Europe" (pg. 40), this has nevertheless done little to slow down contemporary thinkers who invent such barriers in their ever-active imaginations. As it stands, the landscape of the left in America sounds far less like John Galbraith (1908-2006) and Ronald Dworkin (1931-2013) than they do Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984).

Speaking of Sartre and Foucault, Scruton's analysis of the thinkers clamoring for "liberation" in France reaches its stride in terms of wit when he reduces their work to their natural absurdity. "Whenever Sartre's prose shifts from slavish submission to would-be criticism," notes Scruton, "it lapses at the same time into mumbo-jumbo. 'The totalizer' then perfects his own 'totalization,' by totalizing again de-totalized totalities, emerging at last exactly where we might have known he would emerge, an unrepentant advocate of 'totalitarian *praxis*'" (pg. 87-88). To scratch one's head is to get the point exactly. Scruton is here to point out that Sartre is "up to something" (pg. 89), and what he is up to has little to nothing to do with the (non) content of his prose. "He is trying to turn our attention away, not only from the real theoretical critiques of Marxism… but also from the terrible practical consequences to which Marxism has led" (pg. 89).

Much the same irreverent babbling is apparent in Foucault, whose "rhetoric is calculated to mesmerize us into a sense that there is some intrinsic connection between 'bourgeois,' 'family,' 'paternalistic' and 'authoritarian.' Historical facts… are kept out of mind" (pg. 104). Foucault is driven by an "urge to hunt for the power behind the mask" (pg. 106), and therefor finds nothing but masks masking power. The world for Foucault is cast in the grayscale of power—there are no colors besides the black and white of "oppression" and "victim."

Scruton then turns his attention to Germany, with particular attention to Gryörgy Lukás (1885-1971)—who hissed with a disdainful hatred for capitalism—and Theodor Adorno (1903-69)—who despised the fetishism of consumer society to which capitalism gave rise—and Jürgen Habermas—who dazzles the reader with page upon page of intellectual-sounding critiques of capitalism with no alternative to offer.

In chapter six, Scruton returns to France to consider the revolution of language in the works of Louis Althusser (1918-1990), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), and Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995). These three men, according to Scruton, conspire to build the nonsense machine, assembled from "discarded fragments of Freudian psychology and Saussurian linguistics, and attached to Kojève's Hegelian wind-bag, with which to pump it with hot air." "Nothing means anything and that is the revolution," says Scruton, "namely the machine to annihilate meaning." He is right to point out that a version of the nonsense machine "survived its inventors," and "can be found in virtually every humanities department today" (pg. 174).

In chapter eight, Scruton shows how this nonsense machine has been handed over into the capable management of Alain Badiou and, particularly, Slavoj Žižek, whose "defense of terror and violence," and "celebration of Mao's Cultural Revolution, the thousands of deaths notwithstanding and indeed lauded as part of the meaning of a politics of action," all "might have served to discredit [him] among more moderate left-wing readers, were it not for the fact that it is never possible to be sure that he is serious" (pg. 261).

Words, for the operators of the "nonsense machine," are not meant to be understood, they are meant to be used. They are a means to an end, and the more esoteric they are, the more impenetrable. The words that come out of the nonsense machine are not food for the hungry mind, or an attempt to persuade the freeman, they are goads and prongs to push the masses into a tightly measured utopian pin. Just *how* reality within that closed gate will be "utopian" is never argued for, and is everywhere assumed. Indeed, it is positively declared in Luther-like zeal as a confession of faith: *This time, socialism will work because it must, because the alternative is wicked, because it is. Here I stand, I can do no other.* But the one thing that is for certain is that the free ranging habits of the masses outside the pin is unacceptable.

Scruton's final chapter ties up the entire leftist ideology, in all its various forms, with a neat bow, and then burns it to crisps. "The final result of the culture wars has been an enforced political correctness, by which the blasted landscape of art, history and literature is policed for the residual signs of racist, sexist, imperialist or colonialist way of thinking" (pg. 275). This is unavoidable, for (as Scruton points out) when Adorno offers us the absolute alternative between the capitalist system and utopia, he is being honest—and this honesty amounts to the absolute alternative between freedom and slavery.

Scruton is not silent about the genuine concerns raised by thinkers of the new left, even if he has no confidence in their diagnosis or prescription. It is true that capitalism is hospitable to a kind of vanity and materialistic decadence that commoditizes humans. In many ways, this is the definition of a twenty-first-century problem. For the leftist, this is proof that capitalism is Western society's original sin, and confession and repentance is therefore expressed as a culture of repudiation, which is committed to denouncing all things Western, and praising every culture but Western culture.

The problem is that justification, for the leftists, is by faith alone in the non-reality of utopian wish-thinking. It does not matter how many times the ideology is allowed to run its course—leaving body counts of millions in its wake—its utopian ideal provides an escape hatch for its proponents. "That was not *real* Marxism" is like a magic serum to raise dead philosophies that have no business getting up out of the grave. Christians should take note and be warned.

Appropriating language and categories of the left, while promising as a socially beneficial strategy in the short term, is a very bad strategy in the long run. We would be wise to heed Scruton's advice, and answer the unhealthy residual effects of sin working through a capitalistic society not with a society of slavery, but rather by strengthening those institutions and traditions that operate through free-association. Schools, clubs, and most centrally for the faithful Christian, local churches. This means hierarchy, of course, and we can say so cheerfully. But a defense of God's marvelous decision to make the cosmos hierarchical is for another book, and another review.

In sum, we should not let Sir Roger Scruton fool us with his gentle tone, his philosopher's tussled hair, his irenic smile. What stood before us until January, 2020 as a beauty-loving, horse-riding, music-composing, wine-drinking gentlemen was actually an intellectual juggernaut. In *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* he lends the full force of his wit for our benefit. While many are dazzled by the illusory smoke-screening jargon of "anti-capitalism," "anti-hegemony," postmodern, utopian tomfoolery, Scruton walks into the room like a Marshwiggle with a burnt foot and declares in no uncertain terms (to mix metaphors): "the emperor is in his birthday suit." •

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The Theologian as Biblical Exegete: A Review of a Classic John Murray Text

By Jeff Moore

Beneath the shadow of Old Princeton and the legends of Hodge and Warfield is a theological legacy that, although less familiar to contemporary evangelicals, is no less robust. Such is the legacy of Westminster Theological Seminary and its first full-time Professor of Systematic Theology, John Murray (1898–1975).

Murray, a Scotsman by birth and an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, became one of the most formidable evangelical theologians of the twentieth century. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* is divided into two parts, with Part One featuring the accomplishment of redemption with an eye toward the necessity, nature, perfection, and extent of the atonement; and Part Two highlighting the application of redemption with a focus on the order of salvation, namely: calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. The present review will analyze Murray's classic treatise, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, from the standpoint of the author's theological methodology. What was Murray's approach in crafting this landmark work?

First, John Murray's theological presentation of the atonement is built upon a rich exegetical foundation. Before systematizing his findings, it is evident that Murray has first soaked in the details of the biblical text. Although he is conversant with earlier theologians such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas (11) and does not shy away from academic engagement (see esp. 24–34), Murray wants prime of place to be given to the words of Scripture. In his section on the category of reconciliation, Murray devotes several pages apiece to the pertinent passages of Romans 5:8–11 (38–40) and 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 (40–42). Murray's later chapter on regeneration is at root an exposition of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3:1–13 (95–105). On a macro level, Murray's entire book may be properly viewed as one extended theological reflection on Romans 8:28–39. It is fascinating to observe that Murray begins the first page of Part One ("Redemption Accomplished") with a reference to Romans 8:31–32 (9), he features an extended exposition of Romans 8:31–39 in his section on definite atonement (65–69), he ends the last page of Part One with three different citations from Romans 8:32–39 (78), and he explicitly grounds all of Part Two ("Redemption Applied") in Romans 8:30 (82). This approach is no pie-in-the-sky speculative theology but is deeply and thoroughly exegetical.

Second, Murray's treatise on the atonement is grounded in a sensitivity to redemptive history and biblical theology. Unlike some of his theological forebears in prior centuries, Murray frames his entire work around a careful distinction between the history of salvation (*historia salutis*) and the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*). Pushing against notions of the psychologized "me" and experientially based theologies of the twentieth century, Murray grounds his presentation of the atonement in what he calls "historic objectivity" (52). Murray notes that in the biblical story, "History with its fixed appointments and well-defined periods has significance in the drama of divine accomplishment" (53).

Christ's work of redemption must be understood as a historical event in real time and space (Gal 4:4–5) before the student of Scripture can properly ascertain the existential value of the cross on a personal level. For Murray, an understanding of "the historic accomplishment of redemption by the work of Christ once for all" must precede any systematizing of "the

various actions of the application of redemption" for the believer (79–80). Thus, the order of presentation for Parts One and Two of *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* is of utmost significance.

Third, the astute reader will note that a polemical concern runs throughout Murray's work on the atonement. The deft Scotsman does not hesitate to name names and point out adversaries amid his exposition of Scripture. Ever the gentleman scholar, Murray did not have an argumentative personality. Why, then, is there an apologetic bent in his methodology and approach?

The simple answer is that Murray viewed his writing enterprise as one for the church. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* is aimed at pastors and laypeople alike, and in it, Murray routinely points out threats to the purity of the faith once-for-all entrusted to the saints, including: perfectionism's disregard for the presence of sin in the believer's life (143); antinomianism's failure to understand biblical perseverance unto holiness (155–56); and Roman Catholicism's multi-pronged threat to the finished work of Christ in its emphasis on purgatory (51), the sacrifice of the Mass (53), and justification as a combination of faith and works (126). Murray is a watchman on the wall and understands that truth must be presented to the people of God over against error.

Murray's only substantive oversight in *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* is not a deficiency in terms of content but in his order of presentation with respect to the theme of union with Christ. Murray states, "Union with Christ is really the *central* truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ" (161, emphasis added). However, it is curious that Murray does not place union with Christ at the center of his book. Rather than being oddly sandwiched between perseverance and glorification (161–73), union with Christ would be best suited as the logical outflow of Part I ("Redemption Accomplished") and as the ideal segue into Part II ("Redemption Applied"), the primary theme that encompasses all actions in the order of salvation.

One final point must be made about Murray's theological method, perhaps the most important of all. His approach to Christian doctrine is one that is intended to lead the reader to doxology. Murray is not only working out profound truths on paper, but it is apparent that this is a man who has internalized the implications of biblical teaching in his own soul. Speaking about Jesus' cries of agony both in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:39) and on the cross of Calvary (Mt 27:46), Murray notes with profound reverence: "Here we are the spectators of a wonder the praise and glory of which eternity will not exhaust" (77).

In a day in which theological discourse is often characterized by flippancy and casualness, the most riveting lesson that theological students and pastors can learn from Murray is his sense of awe in handling the deep things of God. His theological method is one of exegesis, biblical theology, systematic theology, polemics, and praise. He is a distinguished teacher and guide but also a fellow spectator, encouraging the reader to behold the unparalleled excellencies of the Son of God in his finished redemptive work. •

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Should Churches Sing Bethel and Hillsong Music? A Conversation with Costi Hinn

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following is an interview by Owen Strachan (originally on the City of God podcast)

OS | **My friend and colleague, Costi Hinn, is Executive Pastor of Discipleship at Redeemer Bible Church in Gilbert, Arizona. As I said, he's a dear friend and a faithful voice in our movement. Not long ago, Costi made some statements—did some videos, made some posts on social media—that helped a ton of people, but they did so by drawing some lines, some surprising lines. In particular, Costi, coming from the prosperity gospel world (by way of background—not anymore, but by way of upbringing), encouraged evangelicals in a gracious but convictional way, to think hard about singing music from groups like Bethel, Hillsong, Jesus Culture, Elevation (associated with Steven Furtick), and some others. And a lot of people responded.**

A lot of people were thankful for some clear words along these lines because there often isn't a lot of discussion in evangelical circles about what music to sing. Even groups that we disagree with, can we sing their music? And there is room for some difference of opinion on some grey-area issues. But Costi, without getting into the issue and litigating it here in my intro comments, what prompted you to take the gracious but convictional stand that you took on this subject of music?

CH | We made it theological, and that would be the key line that I would draw right off the bat. We made it theological and a gospel issue, not any other type of issue. I know that there are people who have problems and have had problems with the repetitiveness of the music. You know the old Baptist joke about "7/11" worship: The same seven words sung eleven times over and over. I wouldn't even go there. I'm a millennial. I don't mind my music being a little repetitive or being a little loud. But I do mind my music being a doctrinally deficient or in error or propagating false teaching. I wouldn't even make again methodological: about lights, or production, or fog machines. I know that there are some great guys out there who can preach sermons against the methods that are being used, but that's not even our lane. We're not really worried about the methods, because whether you've got a fog machine or not, if you're singing about the real Jesus in a passionate, authentic way, I don't think the Lord is really worried about whether or not you're using special lights or 4K cameras or what. I think the heart, the theology of worship, is more important than methodology, in the sense of what is or isn't prescribed in Scripture.

Ours theologically speaking was this: Number one, I came out of that movement, so I know it very well. So initially, I know that there's some problems. For example, they preach and live the prosperity gospel. Now, a lot of these teachers are starting to say things like, "Man, I don't preach prosperity" and "God blesses who he blesses" and "We just want to preach Jesus." They're really good at mitigating—spinning the P.R.—talking out of the sides of their mouths. What's important to know is if you don't believe in the prosperity gospel, why do you teach people then that if they have enough faith or if they give

to God, then he is going to bless them, that his will is never sickness, his will is never poverty? They teach these things. These are the things that Bethel, Bill Johnson, would teach. And so there's a problem there.

The other thing would be the Christological issue. That I would even put front and center. Let's say you've got the prosperity gospel as an issue, being taught, being propagated, and then, the Christology issue. Now, there are many people around these movements now that are starting to make it clear they do not teach or believe this. I greatly respect that. I've spoken with some of them. I think there's some teachers in process. I think there's some guys really assessing what they've taught and why. They've just repeated a lot of what they've heard.

And let me be real honest with you, and candid, I've spoken with my own father before about these issues. He doesn't have a theological degree or any type of formal training. I said, "Why did you teach this particular thing, or teach that?" And he's told me before, "Costi, I would watch an Oral Roberts teaching, or read a book, or I would listen to Kenneth Hagin and his tapes, or Kenneth Copeland" (who's about thirty years older than my dad) "and it sounded awesome, so I would use that on Sundays, and it worked." My dad wasn't familiar with the term at the time, but I said, "Well, it's a form of pragmatism." Like, "This works, this gets people pumped, it gets them to give, therefore, it must be good, it must be right." But what Bethel teaches, like I said, a lot of people have repeated this, and walked it back; some have abandoned it altogether. In his book *When Heaven Invades Earth*—on both page 29 and 79—Bill Johnson says this: "Jesus did his miracles as a man in right relationship to God…" and then there's an ellipsis that says "(not as God; if he did them as God, they would be unattainable for us)." And so this is their ministry M.O.: "Jesus did his miracles as just a man. He came to earth to show us that we can do it all, too. And so, we'll show you how."

And they charge tuition. They have the Bethel Supernatural School of Ministry. They charge young people tuition to come and learn how to be prophets, apostles, healers, miracle workers, discerners. They've got into other avenues that have been controversial, like the "grave-sucking" or "grave-soaking" where you go and lay on a grave and you get the mantle of William Branham or Smith Wigglesworth or some of these historical heroes that they have. So that's been controversial. They'll walk that back. It's like every time there's something that hits the news, they have really good P. R. people who come in a say, "Hey, we can't control what all of our followers do and believe, but we do want to encourage them to live on the edge and live by faith, and if that gets them in trouble, so be it. It got Jesus in trouble, too." And they'll say stuff like that.

And then there's other major concerns that I would have, even personally. I get emails every month from parents and families who have lost their young people to the movement through the music. And Bill Johnson has made it clear that the music is the gateway to their theology and their ministry. They use the music to draw young people in. And he's made that clear. And so the concern that I have is when a parent calls me, and I have to go meet with them or talk with them over Zoom or Skype because they live in another state, and their daughter or son is hearing voices, seeing demons, wrestling with crazy things that you would never even imagine and just think, "What?" And now they're back home, and they don't know what to do. They went to Bethel normal, and they came back and their eyes are rolling in the back of their head and they're foaming at the mouth in the living room all the time chanting weird things. There's a problem there.

I know, in conservative circles, we don't really go there a lot with spiritual warfare. Some people, whether they're cessationists or they say, "Hey I believe that some of these miraculous gifts are more non-normative, we're not going to see this all the time today." And all that's well and good. Thomas Schreiner has written an amazing book called *Spiritual Gifts*; I think we've all read it. He's very charitable and has an irenic spirit. It's just an amazing approach to tongues and the gifts. And even if you would disagree, you'd say, "Hey, if it's going to be the real gifts, this is what the Bible says they are." So let's just say that that topic sometimes overshadows the supernatural in the sense of spiritual warfare. And sometimes, as conservatives, we lump in with maybe a cessationist position, also the demonic activity that is happening in our world. So we tend to overlook this or dismiss it with rationalism.

And I'm telling you, brother, as a conservative, as a guy that does not believe that there are apostles still and guys that are running around healing people at will and a guy who's fairly conservative in my approach to the gifts, I am with guys like Grudem, who in his systematic theology give us a good picture of demonization and of challenges with the demonic that are happening that are real, and of spiritual warfare. And I'm seeing this, literally, in families and young people who are coming out of Bethel. They're leaving or being pulled out by family. I've got a sister who graduated from there in their prophetess program. I've got family caught up in this, so I'm not sitting in an ivory tower mad about "7/11 music" or mad about fog machines. It's theological and Christology is at the center.

Lastly, page 79 of Bill Johnson's book says that, "Jesus laid aside his divinity." Now, we're not talking about what Stephen J. Wellum calls *functional kenotic Christology,* where there seems to be some nuance where Jesus is self-limiting in his omniscience. Remember he says, "It's only for the Father to know certain things." We're not talking about veiling his glory. Johnson takes the *ontological kenotic* Christological position, which is to say that Jesus laid his divinity aside. He ceased to be God in that sense. He'll say things like, "Well, he was eternally God still, and he's going to go back to heaven and be God again, but in his humanity here, he did all that, and he's the model for us." And that's where we get into trouble. Because if he was just a man doing all that, and I can do it too, well, "Owen, what's wrong with you? Why aren't you raising the dead right now? Owen, what's wrong with you? Why aren't you able to see in the Spirit words of knowledge immediately? Oh, you must not be an apostle. Well, don't worry, because I am, and you're just a pastor."

And I've been told that before in conversations. One family member, who believes that he's an apostle, said, "Look, I agree with your concerns, Costi"—we were actually talking about what the Bible says about 'touch not the Lord's anointed' and calling certain things out. And he agreed with what I was saying. He said, "The problem is this: It's out of your jurisdiction as a pastor. You don't understand the deeper things of this realm." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "This is apostolic; I'm an apostle. I deal with this. You're just a pastor. And the reason you can't do these things is that you're pastoral. I can do these things; I'm apostolic." Now we're into a class system, created by this theology, based on this Christology. Rather than seeing that there is no grounds from Philippians two in the humbling of Christ, coming and taking on flesh, there's no grounds there to say that he suddenly just became man and stopped being God altogether.

OS | That's a tremendously significant formulation, theologically, as you're bringing out. And that leaves you with a less-than-biblical Jesus, a Jesus who *was* divine, eternal Son of God, but then who is effectively not divine for his human existence. That is surely heterodox, and very likely heretical. In other words, gospel-cancelling, as a formulation. We are not dealing with niceties here theologically. We are dealing with centrality, and I love that you're bringing that out. There are many different places we can go, and that you've already touched on, and I'm thankful you have.

In our brief time together, I do want to back to what you were talking about earlier. You said that young evangelical men and women are getting drawn off and it's in part because of this music—it's actually because of this music. I would like to talk with you in our few minutes remaining about that. Because here's one line that both you and I hear when we articulate this stance: "Well we want to sing a wide range of voices in our church." I even hear good, Reformed guys, for example, saying, "We don't want to be isolated in our little corner of the evangelical world. We want to sing a range of music from a range of voices. We don't want to isolate ourselves." So I think there can be a good motive here. I actually do want worship leaders, so-called, and pastors who lead worship, to have a diverse array of the church featured in their leading of congregational worship.

But here's the thing: What we are hearing is that when groups like Hillsong, Bethel are sung, or when young people get a hold of this music through Spotify or YouTube or whatever it is, they don't often, at least in a good number of cases, stop with the music. They go on, and they start checking out the movement. And they research the key figures involved and they

look up the Bethel School that you mentioned. Or they check out the latest Hillsong congregation. They maybe visit it when they go to that city. A good number of evangelical youth—young men and women—are getting pulled into this unsound movement, this unsound teaching. Do you think that's accurate?

CH | Absolutely. Let me give you four bullet points, and these will stand on their own. Four bullet point reasons why, besides what we've just talked about theologically, why what you're saying is absolutely true. We don't need to say, "We need to sing a wide array of music and mitigate." These people don't need to be mitigated in their error; they need to be rescued from it, rescued from it with the truth. And so we need to stop looking at them as diversity and start looking at them as deceptive, and say, "We need to reach these people, not join them. Not sing what they're putting out.

Another thing, we need to make sure that church money isn't paying them royalties to fund their heterodox teaching and to fund what they're doing to our young people. And that's another issues. A lot of churches will say, "I'm going to pick the songs that aren't heretical or aren't dangerous, and you think that there's verses or lines from the Book of Mormon that would be in line with what the Bible teaches. But we don't accept those from the Book of Mormon. You would be wise to think that even a broken clock is right twice a day. So we don't want to still fund them and send them directly their money. A lot of people will harp on Furtick and Elevation, and they'll hammer them theologically but they sing Elevation Worship so they're sending Furtick money and their movement money, but they're getting their hits and likes on Twitter by attacking him. I don't understand that.

Another one, here, Owen, with young people. You're limiting the creativity of your own church. I don't need to lean on Bethel. I want to raise up the next generation of passionate worshipers in my church. I want to speak to the potential of the songwriters in my congregation. I don't need to look outside; I want to look inside and disciple the next generation. And that's a huge thing is that we're outsourcing so much, that we're sitting on a gold-mine of gifts and talents that God has given local congregations. Raise them up. Focus on developing leaders. Do that in your own congregation.

And then I think people need clarity on this issue more than ever before: We are in a time of compromise. We are in a time where the lines are being very blurry. And more and more—in a spirit of charity—we need leaders with conviction who do not want to be a stumbling block, who want to avoid that appearance of evil, who will call out what is false and point to what is true and be responsible in the way they lead the church. I'm not saying churches are false or heretical if they sing the music. I'm saying that we're now getting to a day and age in this generation where this is a huge wisdom issue. And people are leaving churches over it. We have people come in droves to our church all the time. They love their church where they were at, but they say, "I'm sick of singing Bethel; my kids have it on their podcasts now, on their iPods. It's too dangerous, and now they're sympathetic to "Wake Up Olive" and trying to raise the dead and it's too much. It's too confusing and we just want clarity. That's all we want. Even if we don't agree with everything theologically. We just want clarity." And I think we need that for this generation.

OS | I think this is a prophetic word. I think this is a really needed word. Neither you nor I—and I know you spoke this conviction with your fellow pastors at Redeemer Bible Church—is saying if there's a sound church out there that ever has sung Hillsong, we are effectively pulling their gospel faithfulness card once and for all time. That's not the case you or I are making, and that's not what you have said. And that's not what either of us would say. Sometimes people will take us the worst way, as if we're saying that. However, having noted that, we are definitely issuing a word of caution here, afresh. One that has gone out before through you and a few others, and one that I pray now goes out afresh.

There are many different issues we could break down. We've already touched on several of them. But we are simply trying to note this real problem of, in particular, younger evangelicals being drawn away by unsound groups who have great music, at least when it hits your headphones it sounds great, and that music

acts as a gateway drug into a whole broader theological orientation. And that orientation is unsound. And so if we're working from a 2 Peter 2 framework, from the book of 2 Timothy framework, we have to recognize that false teachers don't usually show up at our doors and announce themselves and say that they are teaching false doctrine. They are deceptive. You said this earlier. They are very, very clever. They scheme, according to Peter, ways that they can trick the sheep.

We can't always identify the false teacher who is masterminding this, let that be said. And yet, we have responsibility to warn the rising generation about these kinds of movements. And I believe fathers and mothers, pastors and worship pastors, elders have a responsibility to hear the warning that you're issuing, and others have said as well. And then strive to structure with great worship with great care of the sheep in mind. Do you think that's accurate, as we wrap up.

CH | Amen. That is spot on, Owen. The last thing I'll just say and recommend is: If you're looking to dig deep on the issues, two things. One, a pastor friend and I wrote a book called *Defining Deception* on this issue. We're actually releasing a revised and expanded edition in the new year, in February. It will have a study guide and more to it. Two, if you want to dig deep, and I'm talking about into a seminarian's mind, I would pick up *God the Son Incarnate* by Stephen J. Wellum. It's a book that a lot of us get in seminary anyway; it's required reading in systematic theology classes. Third, if you're at MBTS and you're not taking Owen Strachan for systematic theology, you're crazy! Dig deeper into your Christology. Dialogue with your professors. Understand where the lines are and where there could be some nuance and some difference theologically, and then understand where the Bible's clear and your professors are clear and there's just no getting around it. And the put a stake in the ground and shepherd the flock and lead the next generation.

OS | Amen. Great word. Pastors, elders—rising generation, seminarians—think very hard about these things. We do not all have the same exact worship service out there in the Baptist world, the Reformed world, the Evangelical world. Let that be said. There is room for singing music—solid music—from an array of voices. But we also have this responsibility to recognize that we are shepherding the sheep, not just when we preach an expository sermon, as we commonly think. But we are shepherding the sheep in every dimension of the worship service. Teaching them how to pray, leading them in song, driving them to worship the living Christ. And so, just as sound faithful pastors out there would not cite a Bill Johnson or related voices in their sermon notes and quote him from the pulpit—at least, I sure hope you wouldn't—recognize that your music ministry needs to not cite Bill Johnson or Bethel or Hillsong or Elevation or Jesus Culture. It has the same effect.

In fact, in conclusion, I think it could even have a stronger effect because of the whole-person experience of singing, where you are lifted up such that you'll come away singing different songs with this kind of surging passion. And then you'll search out that group that penned that song, that played that music. And as we have said, that can easily be a gateway into unsoundness, and even grave spiritual jeopardy. •

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Keep Your Eyes on the Trees: An Essay on the Film *1917*

By Owen Strachan

EDITOR'S NOTE

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The movie *1917* has been a success by any measure. On a budget of about $100 million, it has grossed well over $375 million worldwide, and was nominated for 11 Academy Awards (winning one for cinematography). Director Sam Mendes set out to tell a story heard from his grandfather of a daring suicide mission in World War I, and that story in its cinematic form clearly resonated with viewers (some spoilers to come).

Not so much with critics, at least a good number of the highbrow kind. A few characteristic examples to follow. The Verge called *1917* a "brag trick," summarizing the views of many reviewers who focused almost exclusively on its "one-shot" cinematography. The New Yorker characterized the film as one of "patriotic bombast." The Atlantic spoke more plainly still: *1917* is "a bad movie" and a "soulless film." No mincing of words, these (numerous other reviews argue much the same).

But is it a trick, bombast, bad, and soulless? Alfred Hitchcock once said that his films were like "a slice of cake," a delicious treat without any real nutrients in them. Is *1917* mere frosting and butter as many critics have it? Mendes has certainly made his mark as a big-budget director. He is an accomplished craftsman of the Hitchcockian kind, adept at entertainment. But again, is that all *1917* is—a cute ode to now-outmoded hero quests?

Here is my own view: *1917* is the most profound major-market film to release in a very long time. The movie is at base a stirring philosophical meditation on the meaning of life; it is an aesthetic inquiry into the good, beautiful, and true. Yes, that sounds like the cake has been baked at a high temperature, I admit. In what follows, I (who earn no money doing film criticism, and justly so) will lay out my case for this view of Mendes' film (featuring a screenplay of compressed eloquence by Krysty Wilson-Cairns). My thesis can be boiled down to three simple words:

Trees. Family. Renewal.

The Importance of Trees

1917 is a film about trees. It begins with Schofield resting against a tree, and it ends with him resting against a tree. As quoted above, Mendes gives us the clue to his film over 30 minutes in, embedding it in dialogue that we might well miss after the shattering bunker scene. "Keep your eyes on the trees" is not a throwaway line, however (as Schofield says it, a lone tree stands tall in the background). We're not learning through this eminently missable clue—I read many reviews of *1917* and found none that cited this dialogue—that trees are abstractly interesting. No, there is a much deeper philosophical point at work in *1917*.

This quick sentence is in fact the very message of the film. Throughout the movie, where trees flourish, there is rest; conversely, where trees have been hacked and hewn to evil ends, there is ruin and pain. In a manner consistent with the lush arboreality represented by Frederick Law Olmsted in design, J.R.R. Tolkien in literature, and Terrence Malick in auteur cinema, Mendes (and Wilson-Cairns) are telling us something vital. I mean "vital" in the deep sense, not the cursory. Bearing fruit, trees "manifest life" (from the Latin vitalis,

fourteenth-century origin). Trees show us something of the created order as designed by God: it was not fashioned for death, but for life.

To celebrate and enjoy trees is thus to partake deeply of what we Christians call common grace in this world, even a fallen world like ours. But using trees as implements of war (as the Germans do in *1917* in numerous places) speaks to a worldview that desacralizes the created order and the goodness it bears (Genesis 1:31). Nature stewarded in celebration of life yields still more goodness, while nature sublimated to purposes of needless destruction makes creation nothing less than a witness to hell.

Nowhere is this tension brought out in greater nuance than in the cherry tree scene. About 38 minutes in, Schofield happens upon a grove of them and says, "They've chopped them all down." In the midst of a ferocious war, he stops cold to observe this act of savagery (the Germans have also shot cows and a dog, innocent creatures unjustly handled). Blake then notes what kind of trees they are: "Cherries. Lamberts."

This next bit of dialogue is necessary to understanding the thesis of the film. Schofield doesn't know anything about trees; like we all do, he beholds spectacular and intricately detailed beauty on a regular basis but takes no notice of it. Blake, a sensitive soul, notes that people think "there's only one type" of cherry tree, "but there's lots of them," listing "Cuthberts, Queen Annes, Montmorencys, sweet ones, sour ones." Blake is a witness here to the aforementioned limitless variety of creation. (As a quick aside that deserves more substantiation, I think that Blake may represent the Romantic poet William Blake, a figure who had a strange interaction with a soldier named Schofield in 1803. Blake the character is certainly Romantic in nature—he has a full-orbed emotional life and is aesthetically inclined.)

Blake is the character who opens not only Schofield's eyes, but ours. Where we like Schofield see a tree, Blake sees a cherry tree; but more than this, he knows that there are many kinds of cherry trees, and that their variations yield myriad colors and textures and tastes. It is at this point that we arrive at Mendes' major philosophical idea. Enlightened by Blake's knowledge of trees, knowledge gleaned not from textbooks but from the rhythms of a happy family, Schofield expresses sadness about the desecration of this holy grove. In his optimistic way, Blake responds: "They'll grow again when the stones rot. You'll end up with more trees than before."

Forgive me once more, but I saw nary a critic mention these sentences in numerous snarky "Mendes is a trick-shot director" reviews. I believe this particular comment from Blake spells out the case that *1917* quietly but persuasively makes. Man does terrible things to man, and to creation besides. But even with evil loose in the world, bringing desperate suffering to living things, beauty will win in the end. The glade is a cut-flower civilization in miniature, but the trees have lived and will grow again. This is too weak, actually: the cherry seeds—"stones"—will rot, but will grow back as trees in greater number than before, Blake says. The death of the grove means the flowering of a much greater forest. Transposed in theological terms, evil is not only overcome; evil's purposes are turned on its head, and goodness expands in ironic fashion because of evil's destructive schemes.

We shall return to this soaring (and deeply biblical) theme in due course, just as the film does.

The Rebuilding of the Family

I want to move ahead in the narrative, skipping much I could cover. Mendes returns to the theme of rebuilding in the ruins in the fiery French town occupied by German soldiers. After being shot and narrowly escaping death several times, and after one of the most stunning visual images I've yet seen in a film (a town enwreathed in flame that is both horrifying and transfixing), Schofield crashes into a basement dwelling. There he encounters a young woman who is keeping a baby alive. Schofield initially is barely able to respond to this pair as he is badly hurt. The young woman moves gracefully toward him and treats his head wound with a gentle feminine touch. She cares for him, the warrior come home to a patchwork family.

For his part, Schofield emerges from his shock and sacrificially gives his canteen of milk to the woman, who gives it to the child. He then warms up further

still, engaging the baby and making her laugh. The young woman senses perceptively that he is a father (as indeed he is, we learn later). I wager that Mendes is communicating something meaningful in this scene. In the ruins, in surprising circumstances, the family is rebuilt. Here is the renewal that the world truly needs: not just a planting of trees, but the recovery of marriage, the union of one man and one woman, and the welcoming of children as a gift, not a curse.

It seems that the motif of trees forms the beginning and end motif of *1917*, and this family scene represents the inclusio (the main point bracketed by complementary ideas). The family scene is, in other words, the human expression of the cherry tree scene. Here is the replanting that the world truly needs. It needs men and women, husbands and wives, children loved and cared for, the family restored amidst much attack. Mendes seems to be communicating that this creation order has suffered violence, but that civilization can know healing. It will come through a renewal of the family.

To whatever degree they believe in the natural family (a far better term than our dreaded "nuclear family"), Mendes and Wilson-Cairns have landed on the foundational element of society. We are not born into isolation; we are born into families, at least in God's design. The family is the first institution, grounded in covenantal marriage that is a picture of the Gospel love of Christ for his church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Even in the treacherous conditions of ferocious battle, the family endures. This short scene, generally mentioned as an oddity by many reviewers, speaks to a profound truth: civilization begins with the family.

Here the trees, so to speak, grow once more.

The Value of a Life

1917 brings its celebration of life to a muted peak in its final scene. Schofield, having lost Blake to an unjust death some hours back, meets Blake's brother. Schofield and Lieutenant Blake struggle to speak to one another, but even as he delivers terrible news, Schofield performs a precious service. Schofield hands over some small effects of Blake's. This quick action, easily overlooked, is actually a crucial development of Schofield's character.

Earlier in the movie, Schofield derided a medal he earned in a prior conflict for heroism. Just before the cherry tree scene, he tells Blake that he traded his medal for a bottle of wine. This got Blake's blood up: "You should have taken it home," he protests. "You should have given it to your family. Men have died for that. If I got a medal, I'd take it back home."

Schofield spits back at Blake. "It's just a bit of tin," he says. "It doesn't make any difference to anyone." But Blake (just before his death) rises again to the challenge: "Yet it does. And it's not just a bit of tin. And it's got a ribbon on it." This early scene anticipates the film's last scene. At that point, walking into the cut-flower grove, Schofield is battle-hardened. He has lost touch with the good, true, and beautiful. He is by no means evil as the enemy is, but he is no longer able to be a witness to the deep value of life; he is simply surviving. But Blake is still alive, fully alive. He sees that the medal is not just tin; it speaks to the ideals that drive one to risk everything for the sake of the innocent and the threatened.

Notably, in this earlier scene Blake sees the medal as valuable in relation to family. (He adores his family, making it all the more poignant that we meet his brother in closing.) Valor in battle confers meaning on all the sacrifices made by both soldiers and loved ones. War is terrible, but men give everything they have in order to love and protect those who are also sacrificing much at home (who will be justly proud of warrior heroism). The "tin" itself is not worth anything great. But the medal symbolically captures all the hardship, courage, and sacrifice made by soldiers (and civilizations) for a greater good. It simultaneously has no real value and more value than words can convey.

In the end, tin is all that is left in earthly terms. But these effects, though small and insignificant, speak to the value of an entire existence. They tell us who this man was: Blake, a valiant soldier, one so merciful that he died trying to help a foe, a young man whose days on earth mattered. Every life matters. Every person has value, dignity, and worth. Here, I think, we behold a glimpse of the doctrine of the image of God in cinematic expression.

An Odyssey, But a Spiritual Odyssey More Than a Physical One

As mentioned above, the film closes with Schofield resting against a tree. For the first time, he lets himself look at pictures of his beautiful young wife and children. He alluded to his family in the "bit of tin" scene, but got choked up before he could say more. "I hated going home… when I knew I had to leave and they might never see…" At the end of this line, Schofield's voice trails off. The pain is too great for him, so he goes silent. Here is his mentality early in *1917*: better to survive than despair.

In light of this resolution, we discover that *1917* is not only a "quest" in the classic sense, a man going on a grand adventure. It is that, but it is much more. Schofield himself has gone on a personal quest, yes, but has been changed by his personal odyssey. He is not the same man. He understands afresh just how much life matters. He felt this in a terrible way when Blake bled out on the ground; he felt this like an electric current as he ran to stop the doomed assault; he felt it when he handed over all that was left of a noble life; he feels it as he leans against a tree at the film's end, looking over his pictures of his family. He has awakened once more to the goodness of the world. The survivor of almost impossible difficulty, Schofield is effectively brought back to full-fledged humanity by Blake. He is, you could say, reenchanted.

Mendes has signaled such a trajectory already. Recall what happened in the German barracks scene: after a terrific explosion (that nearly knocked me out of my IMAX seat), Schofield would certainly have died had Blake not pulled him out of the rubble. In the end, Blake—with the young woman and baby and the singer in the wooded glade—has pulled Schofield out of spiritual ruin as well. Though dead, Blake's spirited and virtuous example has helped bring Schofield back from a kind of living death. Nearly dehumanized by war, Schofield's epic quest has revealed that the world is not a machine. Existence is not merely a test of survival. The created order is not intended for consumption, least of all for mindless destruction. Evil is everywhere, but the cherry trees—representing civilization—will grow back, and in greater number. Goodness, truth, and beauty are all around us, and will be found in greater measure in the age to come.

Conclusion

It may well be that these commitments reflect for Mendes not a Christian worldview but a Romantic worldview. Yet as I surface this possibility, I cannot help but think of two intertwined concluding events. First, after surviving a terrible assault and a rushing river, Schofield is nearly dead. Cherry blossoms then fall on him and seem to revive him, enabling him to crawl over corpses and survive (a fulfillment of Blake's words on regenerative cherry trees). Second, as Schofield staggers toward the battlefield, we hear these words from the "Wayfaring Stranger" song sung in the forest glade: "But golden fields lie just before me / Where God's redeemed shall ever sleep." Perhaps this is a sign that Mendes' vision is not only Romantic, and that this is not simply a war movie, or a "quest" movie. It certainly is not a "one trick" movie, nor is it "soulless" or "bad" or "bombast" or a mere slice of cake. No, *1917* is a work of art. It is a beautiful film. It is a deceptively deep inquiry into the value of life, the treasured heritage of Western civilization, and the importance of martial courage. *1917* is, after Malick's Tree of Life, the most profound film I have seen in some time.

This is a fitting reference with which to conclude. What did we hear early in *1917*, after all? "Keep your eyes on the trees." How fitting, and how consonant with rich Christian theology. It was a tree misused that damned us. It was a tree fitted for torture that saved us. Like Schofield at the end of his journey, sitting in peace beneath a tree, a living thing that is itself a witness to the goodness of God's creation, so it will be a tree's leaves that heal us weary pilgrims in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2).

Keep your eyes on the trees, indeed. •

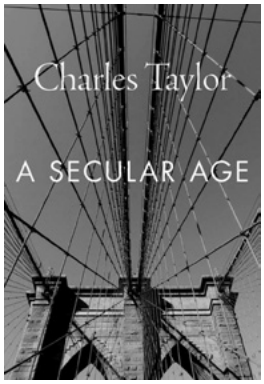
Sailing to Byzantium

By William Butler Yeats

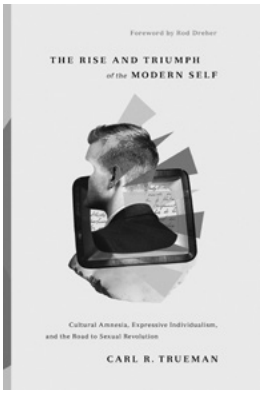
That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" from The Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition, *edited by Richard J. Finneran.*

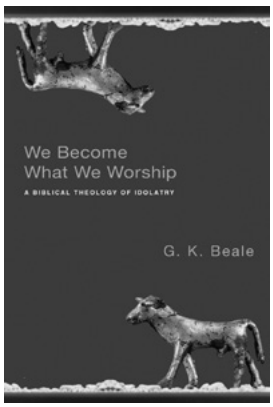
Recommended Reading



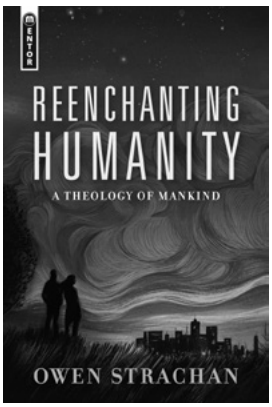
A SECULAR AGE
Charles Taylor
(Harvard University Press)



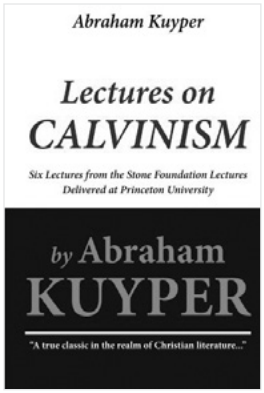
THE RISE AND TRIUMPH OF THE MODERN SELF
Carl Trueman
(Crossway)



WE BECOME WHAT WE WORSHIP
G. K. Beale
(IVP Academic)



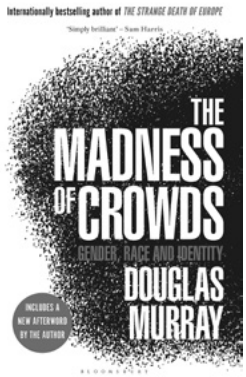
REENCHANTING HUMANITY
Owen Strachan
(Mentor)



LECTURES ON CALVINISM

Abraham Kuyper

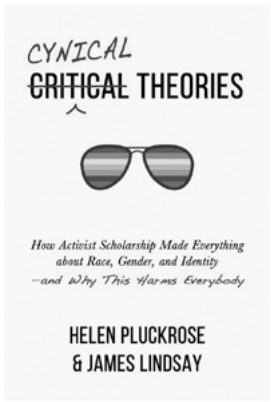
(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform)



THE MADNESS OF THE CROWDS

Douglas Murray

(Bloomsbury Continuum)



CYNICAL THEORIES

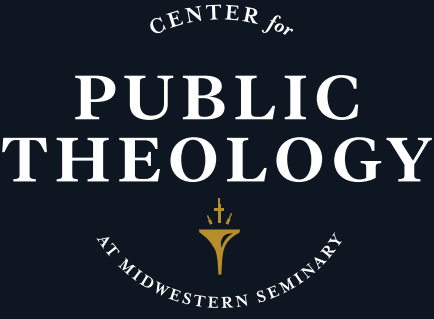
Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay

(Pitchstone Publishing)

FOOLS, FRAUDS, AND FIREBRANDS

Roger Scruton

(Bloomsbury Continuum)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