

Veterans Day: War and Remembrance for Freedom Was Not Free

[Fr. Gordon J. MacRae](#)

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These Stone Walls, on November 6.*

Veterans Day and Remembrance Sunday first honored the great sacrifices of the First and Second World Wars, and freedom from a global tyranny too easily forgotten.

"What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly."

– Thomas Paine, 1776

What we today honor as Veterans Day (November 11) in the United States, and Remembrance Sunday (the Sunday nearest November 11) in the United Kingdom, began in Europe as Armistice Day. This history is worthy of a reminder, for we forget the fine points of history to our own peril. The armistice that ended hostilities in World War I, culminating in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, was signed on November 11, 1918. In 1954, Armistice Day was expanded to become Veterans Day in the United States and Remembrance Sunday in England to honor all who served in the two World Wars. Today this memorial is expanded to honor the veterans of all wars.

The quote from Thomas Paine above was a criticism of American colonists who became comfortable in their isolation and failed to heed the growing oppressions that would eventually end up at their doors in the War for Independence. At a time when the American footprint is fading from the paths to tyranny throughout the world, it's perilous to forget the high price

that was paid to win and preserve our freedoms. The freedom from tyranny that we sometimes take for granted in America was won at the price of our brothers' blood which today cries out to us from the Earth. We are free thanks to them. War is futile without remembrance.

World War I engulfed all of Western Europe, pitting the Central Powers of Germany and the Austria-Hungarian Empire against the Allies: Great Britain and its Dominions, France, Russia, and then later Italy and the United States. All was not quiet on the Western Front of that war which extended all the way from the Vosges Mountains in Eastern France to Ostend, Belgium.

America entered World War I in 1917 in response to Germany's use of submarines to destroy commercial vessels crossing the Atlantic. This tipped the balance of the war which ended a year later. The First World War cost the lives of ten million people by the time an armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. World War II, which began with Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 and ended with the surrender of Germany and Japan in 1945, took the lives of fifty-five million people. Freedom was never free.

Dates with Destiny

We citizens of a civilized society remember significant dates for a reason. But the Internet generation is causing us to lose some of our collective cultural memory. Today, we rely too much on a Google search to provide meaning to our existence. There's something to be said for having at least a basic framework of meaning for dates we observe and why they are of some cultural importance to us. Anniversaries that lend themselves to our social or cultural identity are in danger of being lost for subsequent generations.

Perhaps the most modern example of a date with cultural meaning in Western Civilization is September 11, 2001 a date that today lives in infamy on a global scale. At *Beyond These Stone Walls*, I marked its twentieth anniversary with "[The Despair of Towers Falling, the Courage of Men Rising](#)." That post was a vivid description of how that day unfolded from a very unusual perspective, that of a prison cell, and of its far reaching impact even here.

But most people in the Western world are not conscious of the whole story behind the significance of that date. Knowing why America became a target of al Qaeda on that date gives the event a whole new meaning, and human beings engage in an innate search for meaning in the events of our lives. That is the very purpose of religion. It seeks and finds meaning in our individual and collective existence. In human history, no culture has survived for long without religion, or a substitute for religion.

And it's the substitute for religion – for real religious meaning – that we should most fear. Those who set the infamous day of September 11 in motion were themselves marking the anniversary of events they retained in collective consciousness for over 300 years, events that much of the rest of the world had forgotten. What happened in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 began in Europe more than three centuries earlier during the Siege of Vienna on the night of September 11, 1683.

The story was described by the late Christopher Hitchens in "[Why the suicide killers chose September 11](#)" (*The Guardian*, October 3, 2001). Then it was expanded upon by Father Michael Gaitley in a great book entitled, [The Second Greatest Story Ever Told](#)." In the book, Father Gaitley wrote of the historic significance of September 11:

"For some 300 years, an epic struggle raged between the Ottoman (Muslim) Empire and the Holy Roman (Catholic)

Empire. The Battle of Vienna marked the turning point in this struggle as it stopped the Muslim advance into Europe... On the night of September 11, [1683], the Muslims launched a preemptive attack on Austrian forces..."– The Second Greatest Story Ever Told, p.45

By the next night, September 12, 1683, after a night of fierce battle, the Islamic forces were repelled and routed by the Polish cavalry led into battle by King Jan Sobieski himself. But victory also brought the knowledge that 30,000 hostages, mostly women and children, were executed before the Islamic retreat on orders from the Moslem commander. The Polish king wrote in a letter of his horror at the savagery of the fleeing invaders. Then, writing his post-victory letter to his nation, King Sobieski paraphrased in Latin Caesar's famous words of victory: "Veni, Vidi, Deus Vincit" – "I Came, I Saw, God Conquered."

King Sobieski had entrusted that battle to the intercession of Mary, Mother of God, and it was in honor of this victory that the Pope established the date of September 12 as the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary. What had thus been the date that began an event of glory and great sacrifice for Christendom was a date of infamy for fundamentalist Islam, a date remembered for over 300 years. It was for this reason that September 11 was chosen for an attack on the West by al Qaeda terrorists in 2001.

Swords into Plowshares

Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, described the West's lack of awareness of that significance as being "among the worst failures of political intelligence in modern times." In "[Swords Into Plowshares](#)," an essay in *The Wall Street Journal* (October 3-4, 2015), Lord Sacks wrote that our lack of awareness was not accidental, but "happened because of a blind spot in the secular mind: the inability to see the elemental,

world-shaking power of religion when hijacked by politics.”

That story of the significance of September 11 told above is not war in the name of religion as some would today have you believe. It is what takes the place of religion when it is suppressed in the human heart and soul, and overshadowed in the public square until man’s search for meaning is hijacked by politics.

One of the great victories of the First and Second World Wars – great victories won at great price – was freedom of religion. In our era of forgetfulness, this has been twisted into a guarantee of freedom FROM religion, and the result has been an agenda to park religious voices somewhere outside the American public square. By America, I mean all of the Americas. What happens in the U.S. does not stay in the U.S. Lord Jonathan Sacks has composed a wise and well informed caution for America:

“The liberal democratic state gives us freedom to live as we choose, but refuses, on principle, to guide us as to how we choose... Religion has returned because it is hard to live without meaning in our lives... [but] the religion that has returned is not the gentle, quietist and ecumenical form that we in the West have increasingly come to expect. Instead it is religion at its most adversarial and aggressive. It is the greatest threat to freedom in the post-modern world.”– Jonathan Sacks, “[Swords Into Plowshares](#),” WSJ.com, October 3-4, 2015

It is only when religion is denied a voice in the public square that such a hijacking happens. Humanity will seek meaning then only in what is left. There is a broad assault on religion in Western Culture today with the goal of just that – of removing voices of religion from the public square by the process of selective memory, of blaming war on faith. The reality is very different. An analysis of 1,800 conflicts for the “Encyclopedia of Wars,” by Charles Phillips and Alan

Axelrod determined that fewer than ten percent had any real religious motivations.

It's very interesting that today Lord Jonathan Sacks cites the Western intellectuals' belief that the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the fall of European Communism in 1989 was "the final act of an extended drama in which first religion, then political ideology, died after a prolonged period in intensive care..."

"The age of the true believer, religious or secular, was over. In its place had come the market economy and the liberal democratic state in which individuals, and the right to live as they chose took priority over all creeds and codes."

The fall of the Berlin Wall and European Communism was, therefore, "the last chapter of a story that began in the 17th Century, the last great age of wars of religion." What makes this theory so interesting is that it blatantly overlooks the fact that one of the greatest religious figures of the 20th Century – Saint John Paul II – is also the person most responsible for setting in motion the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. That is what Father Michael Gaitley unveils as an essential element in [*The Second Greatest Story Ever Told*](#), but first it has to look back upon Armistice Day.

Religious faith was never a cause for war, nor was it ever an excuse. But for those who survived the Great Wars of the Twentieth Century – and for 65 million lives lost in the face of Godless tyranny, faith was all that gave it meaning, and without meaning, what's left?

Don't let your religious freedoms and your voices of faith be so easily parked along the wayside of America and the rest of the free world, for thus it will not remain free for long. People died to give us that voice, and today is a good day to

remember that, and to honor their sacrifice. To distance ourselves from war and remembrance – from the price of freedom – is to give witness to Thomas Paine’s dismal foreboding on the eve of war:

“What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly.”

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Note from Father Gordon MacRae: Thank you for reading and sharing this post. Please join us in prayerful remembrance for those who served and especially those who gave their lives to secure and preserve our freedom. None of those who speak today about political threats to democracy have any real idea of what freedom cost.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ELECTION

Bill Donohue

Not surprisingly, the mainstream media are in disbelief over the results of the presidential election. That’s because they live in an intellectual ghetto. Instead of just talking to each other, it would be so nice if they actually spent time talking to those who work in housekeeping, the cafeteria, maintenance and security.

Will they change now that they have been proven wrong? Not at all. They are hopelessly incapable of changing, though they love to say that the public has a hard time accepting change. Not so. They do.

Does money count in elections? Not as much as many think.

Harris raised over \$1 billion and wound up \$20 million in debt in the final week. Trump spent half as much, over \$400 million. In the few weeks before the election, Bill Gates gave Harris \$50 million, and Michael Bloomberg followed with another \$50 million. George Soros topped them both.

Do celebrities matter? They may if they occasionally show up for a rally or fundraiser. But Harris went overboard, bringing in Oprah, Bruce Springsteen, Beyonce, Taylor Swift, Katy Perry, Jennifer Lopez et al. She also went on Saturday Night Live before the election. This actually hurt her. Why? She was already seen as a lightweight, the word-salad queen, so being surrounded by celebrities only fed the perception that she was not a serious person.

Why were so many of the polls wrong? Because most of them never corrected for the Trump supporters who simply won't speak to them. They don't trust them, and, importantly, they know it is not popular in many circles to admit being for Trump.

The pollster that was the most accurate was J.L. Partners. Based in the U.S., it was founded by pollsters for the British Prime Minister; it published its results with the *Daily Mail*, a conservative U.K. publication. It was one of the few that got it right: it said in the run-up to the election that Trump had a 54 percent chance of winning. McLaughlin & Associates also did a good job.

Pollsters often ask the wrong questions, or they don't dig deep enough. For example, the media kept reporting that Trump's unfavorability rating was significantly higher than Harris'. On election day, Nate Silver, who runs an influential survey site, reported that Trump's unfavorability score was 8.6 points higher than his favorability score. For Harris, her unfavorable rating was 2.0 points higher than her favorable rating.

A more important question is how the public views the candidates on their leadership abilities and their ability to get things done. A month before the election, Gallup found that when it comes to who is a strong and decisive leader, Trump outscored Harris 59 percent to 48 percent. On their ability to get things done, Trump won 61-49. Exit polls on election day found that his numbers increased significantly on related measures.

In other words, an election is not a popularity contest. It is about issues and who is the most likely to govern effectively.

Billy Martin, who coached the New York Yankees, was hard to deal with. Bobby Knight, who coached the University of Indiana basketball team, could be obnoxious. Bill Belichick, who coached the New England Patriots, was surly. Unlikeable though they were, they were also great leaders who knew how to win.

Ergo, while Trump's persona may strike many as offensive, few question his ability to get things done, and that is what counts in the end.

Democratic strategist James Carville warned Democrats in October that Harris was not getting her message out. This misses the point. She had no message. That was her problem. Being against Trump is not a message—it's a feeling: it doesn't tell voters what policies you want to implement.

Admittedly, she was put in a delicate position. Joe Biden dropped out after the debate in June because the media could no longer pretend that he wasn't mentally challenged. They covered up for him for years, but could do so no longer. Harris never faced a challenger—she was anointed—and proved incapable of separating herself from his policies.

More than anything else, it was the politics of extremism that did her in.

- Flooding the economy with funny money drove prices sky

high

- Allowing millions of migrants to crash our borders and then be rewarded with better services from the government than are afforded homeless veterans angered millions
- Playing catch and release with violent criminals was indefensible
- Forgiving student loans for the middle and upper classes while making the working class pay for them was infuriating
- Promoting policies that allow children to change their sex behind their parents' back was mindboggling
- Allowing boys to compete against girls in sports and shower with them was morally bankrupt
- Allowing the FBI to spy on Catholics was malicious
- Inviting foreign aggression was irresponsible

These policies did Harris in. For the most part, the American people do not want extremists on the right or the left in office. Thank God for that.

NEXT UP—NEW SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Bill Donohue

According to the *Washington Post*, Donald Trump won the Catholic vote 56 percent to 41 percent. That's a great triumph for religious liberty. As we previously [documented](#), there were far more victories for religious liberty under the Trump administration than under Biden-Harris. He is poised to enhance his record. To do that he needs to lock in a religious-friendly Supreme Court for decades to come.

Trump appointed Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett and Neil Gorsuch; the first two are Catholic and Gorsuch, who was raised Catholic, is Protestant. All are good on religious liberty. Chief Justice John Roberts, another Catholic, is mostly reliable on this issue. Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, both staunch Catholics, are rock solid on this First Amendment right.

Thomas is 76. Alito is 74. Both have served with distinction. They are bright and courageous and have been subjected to incredible vitriol. Indeed, they have survived attempts to destroy them by the masters of personal destruction: those who work in the media, left-wing advocacy organizations, the entertainment industry, and education have worked overtime to smear them.

The Left failed to bring them down. Halleluiah. But early next year it will be time for them to step down. If Trump can appoint two more just like them—he can't do any better—he will secure a religious-friendly court for decades. There is nothing the Catholic bashers would like less.

HARRIS HAS A PROBLEM WITH CHRISTIANS

This article appeared in [The American Spectator](#) on Oct. 25

[Bill Donohue](#)

Vice President Kamala Harris occasionally attends a Baptist church, but she still has a problem with Christians. So does her boss. Biden attends Mass regularly, but his rejection of Catholic moral teachings—on abortion, marriage, the family and

sexuality—makes practicing Catholics wonder about his bona fides.

When Harris was California's attorney general, she bludgeoned pro-life activist [David Daleiden](#). He used undercover videos to expose how abortion operatives harvest and sell aborted fetal organs. She authorized her office to raid his home: they seized his camera equipment and copies of revealing videos that implicated many of those who work in the abortion industry.

In her role as California AG she also sought to cripple crisis pregnancy centers with draconian regulations. Specifically, she supported a [bill](#) that would force these centers to inform clients where they could obtain an abortion. She was sued and lost in the Supreme Court three years later.

On February 25, 2020, Sen. Harris voted against the [Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act](#), a bill that would “prohibit a health care practitioner from failing to exercise the proper degree of care in the case of a child who survives an abortion or attempted abortion.” That's called infanticide.

When she was in the senate, Harris [co-sponsored](#) the “Do No Harm Act,” as well as the “Equality Act.” Both bills would weaken, or nullify, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, thus mandating that Catholic doctors and hospitals perform abortions and sex-reassignment surgery.

Harris' passion for abortion rights—she has never found one she couldn't justify—impels her to attack Catholic candidates for the federal bench. She did so most famously in late 2018 when she questioned [Brian C. Buescher](#) about his suitability to be a federal district judge. His membership in the Knights of Columbus raised a red flag for her.

“Were you aware that the Knights of Columbus opposed a woman's right to choose when you joined the organization?” Her real target, of course, was the Catholic Church. Should someone who

accepts the Catholic Church's teaching on abortion—child abuse begins in the womb—be allowed to sit on the federal bench? She knows the Constitution bars a religious test for holding public office, so this was her end-run around it.

Harris was also upset that the Knights ban women. But several Jewish women's groups (e.g. Hadassah) ban men. So do the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. For that matter, so does the League of Women Voters. But it seems that for Harris, none of those organizations are a problem. Just Catholic fraternal ones.

Harris refused to attend the Al Smith Dinner, letting Catholics know what she thinks about them. But she never misses a Hollywood dinner. Those are her ideological next of kin, not Catholics.

When a couple of Christian young people shouted, "Christ is King" at a recent Wisconsin rally, Harris could have ignored them. After all, when left-wing pro-Hamas protesters shout her down, she simply says that she has the right to speak. But she couldn't help berate the Christians, saying, "[You guys are at the wrong rally.](#)" She was right about that—Christians are not welcome at her events.

Harris is losing to Trump [52-47](#) among Catholics. And this was before she stiffed New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan by blowing off the Al Smith Dinner, and before she mocked Christian students.

No one truly believes that Trump is personally a deeply religious man. He admits as much. But his policies are clearly religion friendly. The same is not true for Harris. She is wedded to the Biden-Harris record, and it pales in significance to what Trump accomplished. [It's not even a close call.](#)

ROGAN'S COMMENTS ON ABORTION DISSECTED

Bill Donohue

When J.D. Vance sat down with Joe Rogan for a three-hour interview, the subject of abortion came up.

Rogan expressed concern about the different state laws on abortion, saying the issue “is essentially based on a religious idea.” He brought up religion again when discussing the Justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Abortion is fundamentally an issue of biology, not religion. To be sure, many religious organizations have teachings on this subject. They also have teachings on what constitutes a proper diet. But that doesn't make dietary issues inherently religious. The heart of the abortion issue is when life begins. That is not a uniquely religious issue. Indeed, it is primarily a scientific one.

Biology 101 teaches that the DNA that makes us unique individuals is present at conception, and not a moment later. That's when life begins. Rogan can disbelieve it, but he cannot disprove the scientific evidence.

Commenting on overturning *Roe v. Wade*, Rogan said, “you have these religious men who are trying to dictate what women can or cannot do with their bodies.” Before commenting on this remark, it is true that of the six Supreme Court Justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*, all are Christian; five are Catholic and one is Protestant (one of the Catholics is a woman, and one of the dissenting Justices is also a Catholic woman).

What Rogan said would be disturbing—indeed it would be bigoted—if it were clear that what he said was his opinion. But the transcript suggests otherwise.

Rogan was discussing the decision to overturn *Roe* when he said, “the zeitgeist is that abortion had always been you know *Roe v. Wade* has always been the law of the land and then all of a sudden that was taken away and you have these religious men who are trying to dictate what women can and can’t do with their bodies.”

It is obvious to any fair-minded person that Rogan was simply noting what was commonly understood at the time—he did not commit himself one way or the other as to whether he shared this view. This is important because left-wing media outlets such as *The New Republic* made it appear that these were his views. In short, they took his comment out of context, thus turning what was a sociological observation into his personal opinion.

Still, it would have been helpful if Rogan challenged the view that “these religious men” were shoving their religion down everyone’s throat.

Not too long ago, Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Elena Kagan served on the Supreme Court. All are Jewish. They often took a secular view on cultural issues. Were they imposing their secular ideological preferences on the rest of us? Or were they simply making decisions based on their interpretation of the law?

Ginsburg, in fact, said *Roe* was wrongly decided. She was personally in favor of legalized abortion, but she said it should never have been decided by the courts—it was an issue for the legislature. *This is exactly what the “religious” Justices decided.*

The Constitution prohibits a religious test for public office. Unfortunately, too many Americans seem to have a problem with

that, especially when Catholics are overrepresented.

It is important to note that the way *The New Republic* framed Rogan's comment is remarkably similar to the way Kamala Harris' website framed it—making it appear that he personally objects to “these religious men” dictating to women.

This is not a gaffe. They know exactly what they are doing.