

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS A FICTION Part II

According to left-wing activists who are scared to death about religious liberty, the twin devils of our day are White nationalism and Christian nationalism. They say they go hand-in-hand. That is what those who issued the statement “Christians Against Christian Nationalism” contend.

Most of the Christians who are featured as the leading critics of Christian Nationalism are Protestants: of the nineteen, there are only two Catholics among them. Baptists from various denominations are the most overrepresented (none of whom belong to the Southern Baptist Convention—those conservatives would be among the bad guys).

One of the two Catholics is Sister Simone Campbell of “Nuns on the Bus” fame. She is the head of a Catholic dissident group, NETWORK. She is known for working against the religious rights of the Little Sisters of the Poor—hoping to make them pay for abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plan—and for endorsing the Equality Act, which would decimate religious liberty, especially for Catholics.

The other Catholic is Patrick Carolan, who runs the Franciscan Action Network. He is opposed to Catholic schools that insist that their teachers abide by Catholic tenets on marriage and family. He argues that a Catholic teacher who is “married” to someone of the same sex should be permitted to teach at a Catholic school, even if it means violating a contract that he voluntarily signed upholding Catholic teachings. He also thinks Catholic lay groups should support gay marriage.

If there is one religious entity that is in full support of Christians Against Christian Nationalism, it is the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC). It came down

squarely in favor of two gay men who sought to deny a Christian baker his right not to endorse their “wedding.” On August 10, BJC leaders attended the Progressive National Baptist Convention in Atlanta, a conference that addressed the horrors of Christian nationalism. For the record, BJC hates to see “In God We Trust” banners in public spaces.

Andrew Whitehead is generally regarded as the intellectual force behind Christians Against Christian Nationalism. Bill Donohue shares one thing in common with him: they are both sociologists. The Clemson University professor was recently asked if Christian nationalists “think you have to be Christian to be truly American?” He said yes, that’s what they believe. He did not name anyone who supposedly entertains this view.

Whitehead says that his research convinces him that “the more strongly you embrace Christian nationalism, the more likely you are to hold negative attitudes toward racial and religious minorities.” He did not say why Christians are far more generous in their charitable giving than secularists are (much of that charity goes to racial and religious minorities). Nor did he say why Catholics, who are a religious minority, are subjected to “negative attitudes” by the secularists who comprise the cultural elites: from Hollywood to Harvard, Catholic bashing is sport.

In his interview with *Deseret News*, Whitehead wondered about the religious affiliation of the El Paso and Dayton mass shooters. We don’t know much about the former mass murderer, but we do know that the latter was a hard-core Satanist.

In a 2018 paper he co-authored, Whitehead made the claim that there was a connection between Christian nationalists and gun ownership. He fingered Wayne LaPierre, the head of the National Rifle Association, as Exhibit A. Whitehead cited a portion of a speech that LaPierre made in 2018, after the shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida.

“The genius of those documents [the Founding documents], the brilliance of America, of our country itself,” LaPierre said, “is that all of our freedoms in this country are for every single citizen.” Whitehead’s argument imploded right before his eyes, but he didn’t get it. LaPierre did not say that the United States was founded exclusively for Christians—he said our freedoms apply to “every single citizen.” What is it about that sentence that Whitehead doesn’t get?

Whitehead also quoted LaPierre saying our freedoms, such as the right to bear arms, were “granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright.” This is not the voice of a Christian nationalist—it is the voice of Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence. Our unalienable rights, Jefferson said, come not from government but from our “Creator.” Whitehead needs to take a remedial course in American history.

In 1892, the U.S. Supreme Court said, “This is a Christian nation.” It was simply acknowledging that our nation’s heritage is rooted in Christianity. Not to recognize this historical fact is plain stupidity. What is worse is the attempt to silence those who proudly proclaim this verity.

There are no Christians organized to take over the nation, making non-Christians second-class citizens. This is pure propaganda, a vicious lie told by those who believe that Christian conservatives are somehow un-American and a threat to liberty. The threat is not coming from them, but from those who are making this charge.

Conservative Christians are a net asset to America, and should be defensive about nothing.

SLOGANEERING HELPS NO ONE

Helping the vulnerable is a noble goal, but when those who champion its cause resort to sloganeering, it discredits their efforts. Here are two recent examples.

On August 19, Religion News Service published a glowing interview with the 89-year old founder of Bread for the World, Art Simon. A former Lutheran pastor, there is no reason to doubt his sincerity in combating poverty. The problem is that the organization that he founded has never given a dime to the poor, or provided services for them.

Bread for the World is a lobbying organization that pressures the Congress to provide more welfare programs for the poor. Its goal is to educate the public, especially lawmakers, about hunger in the United States and abroad. It also analyzes public policies designed to end poverty. What it does not do is to touch the lives of the poor.

There is a better way to tackle poverty than to help more middle-class bureaucrats police the poor in Washington. That is the Mother Teresa way. She was not opposed to government programs instituted to help the poor, but she saw their role as secondary. She knew that the poor needed food, clothing and shelter, as well as medicinal care. But that was not enough: They needed love.

When Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher boasted to Mother Teresa that Britain had a fine welfare system, the saintly nun replied, "But do you have love?" For Mother Teresa, helping the poor is ideally a personal exchange, an ongoing relationship between two parties; it is not a "program."

Vijay Prashad was born and raised in Calcutta. He became a Communist and an ardent defender of government programs. But he praised Mother Teresa for her work with lepers and children. She and her fellow nuns "certainly brought relief

for many people, not in medical terms,” he said, “but with love and affection.” This is particularly important when dealing with the sick and dying.

On August 19, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill that committed the state to respect “the human rights and dignity” of every person, including respect for “the sanctity of every human life.”

This is pure nonsense. The bill has nothing to do with respecting “the sanctity of every human life.” Just ask those who throw out the trash in abortion clinics. The wording of the bill deals exclusively with putting more restrictions on the police when dealing with life and death situations. The “sanctity” of life that Newsom wants to protect refers to thugs out to kill the cops.

Newsom likes abortion so much that on May 31 he invited women from across the country—make that the world since he doesn’t believe in borders—to come to California to get their abortions.

Sloganeering about the poor is a cheap way to combat poverty. Sloganeering about the sanctity of human life, while actively working against it, is more than hypocritical—it is despicable.

BORN ALIVE BILL GETS A HEARING

On September 10, there was a congressional hearing on the Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. The bill has continuously been blocked by Democrats in the House from

consideration.

According to Rep. Chris Smith, the bill “seeks to end or at least mitigate this egregious child abuse [allowing a baby born alive as a result of a botched abortion to die] by requiring that a health care provider must ‘exercise the same degree of professional skill, care and diligence to preserve the life and health of the child as a reasonably diligent and conscientious health care practitioner would render to any other child born alive at the same gestational age or be fined and/or face up to five years in prison.’”

The bill does not seek to penalize the mother. Indeed, it explicitly says that no mother will ever be prosecuted. That is why Smith calls the bill “humane, pro-child human rights legislation” that “empowers the woman upon whom the abortion is performed to obtain appropriate relief in a civil action.” Regarding this last point, Smith cited the case of a woman who sought an abortion, but the baby was born alive. Her baby girl was born “gasping for air,” yet the abortion clinic owner decided to cut the umbilical cord. The baby was then thrown in the trash.

Most Americans would be appalled by such barbarism. But the media will never inform them of what is happening. It is a sure bet that there will be no “60 Minutes” segment depicting what happens following a botched abortion.

EXORCISMS SURGE

There have been many news reports over the past few years of Americans who are seriously troubled, in need of spiritual peace. Saddled with personal problems, some were so desperate as to seek ways to purge themselves of demons.

Take the case of Gary Dale Mort. About six weeks before Christmas last year, this Muncie, Indiana man kicked his wife out of their house and set it on fire. He was shot by police after he flashed what turned out to be a pellet gun; he was not seriously injured. In 2017, he slammed his car into a store. When questioned, he said the crash was intentional, an act he attributed to his being possessed by a demon. He had sought, unsuccessfully, to get a priest to perform an exorcism.

Is he possessed? Would an exorcism work? No one knows. Most of those who believe they are possessed are not; they suffer from a host of clinically diagnosed maladies. But not everyone can be helped by conventional psychiatric treatments. Some are indeed possessed and clearly benefit from an exorcism.

Mike Mariani wrote a splendid article on exorcisms last year in *The Atlantic*. He pointed to survey data that indicate that roughly half of Americans believe in demonic possession, and an even higher number believe in the devil.

In fact, Gallup polls show that in 1990, 55 percent said they believed in the devil; the figure jumped to 70 percent in 2007. More recently, an article in England's *Catholic Herald* noted that belief in God was declining in the West but belief in the devil remained strong.

While religions other than Catholicism offer exorcisms, no institution has a richer tradition in dealing with them than the Catholic Church. Requests for exorcisms are spiking, leading to an increase in trained exorcists.

The devil works by pressuring a person to accept evil (demonic oppression), or by seizing control of a person's body, speaking through him (demonic possession). Either way, the priest who confronts those who claim to be in the snares of the devil is trained to proceed with caution.

The priest begins by sending the person making the request to

a psychiatrist for evaluation. That's the end of the line for most: they receive the mental health care they need, but are no longer considered a candidate for an exorcism. Still, there are some who defy the standard explanation for a person's serious mental condition; they may be a candidate for an exorcism.

It is not just priests, or Catholics, who believe that there are persons seeking help who are beyond the scope of experts. Jeffrey Lieberman, chairman of Columbia University's psychiatric department, says he knows of some cases where it "could not be explained in terms of normal human physiology or natural laws."

Who are the most likely candidates for an exorcism? Approximately 8 in 10 are survivors of sexual abuse. Mariani explains why. "The exorcists—to be clear—aren't saying sexual abuse torments people to such an extent that they come to believe they're possessed; the exorcists contend that abuse fosters the conditions for actual demonic possession to take hold."

From a Catholic perspective, this is daunting. It suggests that those who do such evil acts as sexual abuse create the fodder that attracts the devil to victimize the victim again. If this is true, the offenders are responsible for much more than molestation, and will have to answer for it.

What is driving our current state of affairs? Mariani speculates that two concurrent phenomena—the increasing belief in the occult and the rise in demands for exorcisms—are a reflection of what ails us.

Surely the social decomposition that has occurred in Western civilization over the past half century must be seen as playing a lead role in contributing to our social ills. Historically, such times are marked by a fascination with the occult: magic, witchcraft, astrology, and the like are

deceptive substitutes for God. It should be stressed that the devil thrives in such an environment.

Millennials are especially attracted to the paranormal. Turned off by organized religion, they are more likely to be drawn to the occult than to atheism. However, that doesn't resolve anything: what they typically experience is spiritual hollowness, a void that cries out for fulfillment. It is not easy to satisfy that appetite without God, but some still try.

William Friedkin, the director of the classic movie, "The Exorcist," once said, "I've known quite a few atheists who, while unmoved by the idea of God, seem to be afraid of the Devil and conscientiously avoid horror films." But such persons misunderstand the point of the novel upon which the film was made.

The author of *The Exorcist*, William Blatty, said his book was not meant as a horror story, but as "an argument for God." In fact, he meant it to be "an apostolic work, to help people in their faith. Because I thoroughly believed in the authenticity and validity of that particular event."

There is some good news here. It is hard to believe in the devil without believing in God, so perhaps the uptick in Americans believing in the devil will draw them closer to God.