



## A NEW THEOCRACY

### *Politics and Law as Irrepressible Religiosity*

BY THADDEUS WILLIAMS

In 1981, Francis Schaeffer released *A Christian Manifesto*, a believer's riposte to *The Communist Manifesto* and *Humanist Manifesto*. Schaeffer opens his manifesto, "The basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so, in regard to society and in regard to government, is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals."<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer cites the American church's hand wringing over sexual perversion, secular indoctrination in public education, the assault on family life, and the trampled rights of the unborn. "But," Schaeffer laments, "they have not seen this as a totality—each thing being a part, a symptom, of a much larger problem."

Three years prior, Alexander Solzhenitsyn delivered his seminal (and for many, feather-ruffling) commencement speech at Harvard. Like Schaeffer, Solzhenitsyn argued that addressing society's problems at the surface of legal and political categories, rather than root moral and spiritual categories, "prevents one from seeing the size and meaning of events" and "makes space for the absolute triumph of absolute Evil in the world."<sup>2</sup> Eighty years before that, at Princeton University, Abraham Kuyper began his now famous Stone Lectures with the observation that there are "two life systems wrestling with one another, in mortal combat." The combatants, according to Kuyper, were modernists seeking to "build a world of [their] own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself," striving to vanquish "with violent intensity" those "who reverently bow the knee to Christ." This Kuyper saw as "the struggle in Europe" and "the struggle in America."<sup>3</sup>

The "bits and pieces" approach that Schaeffer criticized, the myopic "legalism" that Solzhenitsyn rejected, and the failure to reckon with the epic worldview

showdown that Kuyper saw raging behind the headlines remain just as relevant in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century as they were in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They beckon us to behold a bigger picture, to see through to the issues behind the issues of our day. For Schaeffer, Solzhenitsyn, and Kuyper that fundamental issue is, in a word, *worldview*, the behavior-shaping belief systems surrounding the perennial questions of metaphysics (what is real?), epistemology (how do we know what is real?), and ethics (how should we live in light of what we know about what is real?).

### IRREPRESSIBLE RELIGIOSITY

Let us bring the Apostle Paul into the conversation. For Paul, worldview is foundational, yes, but there is a still deeper issue. That is the worship issue, the question of ultimate commitments, who or what we elevate as the *summum bonum* not merely in theory, but in real life. At this bedrock spiritual level, according to Paul's argument in Romans 1, there are two, and only two, options—Creator-worship or creation-worship.<sup>4</sup> The question is not *whether* we are worshipping. Worship is an inevitable fact of human existence. "Man," according to Dostoyevsky, "has no more constant and agonizing anxiety than find as quickly as possible someone to worship."<sup>5</sup> The real question is, 'Who or what do our thoughts, emotions, and actions say is the most important thing in existence?'

A growing congregation of scholars is catching up with Paul's ancient insight. Serious students of western civilization from a vast range of disciplines are increasingly seeing worship (often beyond the pale of traditional "religion") as a dominant motive force in

<sup>1</sup> FRANCIS SCHAEFFER, *A CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO* 1 (1981).

<sup>2</sup> ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN, *A WORLD SPLIT APART, COMMENCEMENT SPEECH AT HARVARD* (1978)..

<sup>3</sup> ABRAHAM KUYPER, *LECTURES ON CALVINISM* 11 (1999). Emphasis in original.

<sup>4</sup> For a superb theological and cultural analysis of this point see PETER JONES, *ONE OR TWO? (2010) AND THE OTHER WORLDVIEW* (2015).

<sup>5</sup> FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY, *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*, 297-298 (1978). DAVID FOSTER WALLACE ECHOES, "IN THE DAY-TO-DAY TRENCHES OF ADULT LIFE, THERE IS ACTUALLY NO SUCH THING AS ATHEISM... EVERYBODY WORSHIPS. THE ONLY CHOICE WE GET IS WHAT TO WORSHIP" (*THIS IS WATER, COMMENCEMENT SPEECH AT KENYON COLLEGE [2005]*).

our culture. Economist Bob Goudzwaard argues that everyone “absolutizes” something. We all serve god(s), take on the image of our god(s), then build society in our (that is, in our gods’) image.<sup>6</sup> Feminist author, social critic, and atheist professor Camille Paglia concurs, “Human beings need religion, they need a religious perspective, a cosmic perspective. And getting rid of the orthodox religions because they were too conservative has simply led to [a] new religion.”<sup>7</sup> Paglia identifies this new religion as “political correctness.” She labels it a form of “fanaticism,” citing her experience with second-wave feminists, whom she likens to “the Spanish Inquisition” seeking to “destroy” her for committing “heresy.” Culture commentator Andrew Sullivan also recognizes the religious undertones behind what are typically considered secular spaces in our society. Sullivan notes that “once-esoteric neo-Marxist ideologies—such as critical race and gender theory and postmodernism, the bastard children of Herbert Marcuse and Michel Foucault—have become the premises of higher education, the orthodoxy of a new and mandatory religion.”<sup>8</sup> Anthropologist Paul Hiebert sees a new “dominant religion in the West.” Says Hiebert, “A new Western religion emerged to offer us meaning based on self-realization, not forgiveness of personal sins and reconciliation with God and others. Self had become god and self-fulfillment our salvation.”<sup>9</sup>

We would do well to wake up to this reality. The most pressing cultural, political, and legal issues of our day are, fundamentally, worship issues. They are contemporary expressions of humanity’s irrepressible religiosity. To ignore this Pauline insight is to limit ourselves to “bits and pieces,” miss “the size and meaning of events,” and render ourselves oblivious to “the struggle” in the West.

Creation-worship is nothing new. This is one reason for the frequent New Testament warnings against false gospels.<sup>10</sup> These warnings came not from the cool abstraction of ivory towers, but from the context of real

first-century communities confronted with real first-century heresies. The Philippians and Galatians reckoned with the Judaizers’ synergistic gospel of salvation by circumcision. The Colossians grappled with proto-Gnostic asceticism, and the recipients of John’s epistles faced an incipient Docetism. As time rolled on, the church encountered new pseudo-gospels to subvert—the Montanist’s gospel of salvation by ecstatic experience, the Pelagian’s gospel of salvation by the moral competence of creaturely freedom, and more. Interpreting today’s rising movements through the Pauline lens of worship opens our eyes to see competing political ideologies for what they are—false gospels. They promise salvation, but can never deliver. They leave millions

missing out on the only One who can bring actual redemption to broken systems and the broken people who make them. Taking humanity’s irrepressible religiosity seriously helps us not only engage legal issues, but, like Paul and the historic church at its best, expose the idols of our age and their powerlessness to save.

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### “NOT A GAME”

Before clarifying the doctrines of the new religion, we need Schaeffer’s reminder:

I need to remind myself constantly that this is *not a game* I am playing. If I begin to enjoy it as a kind of intellectual exercise, then I am cruel and can expect no real spiritual results. As I push the man off his false balance, he must be able to feel that I care for him. Otherwise I will end up only destroying him and the cruelty and ugliness of it all will destroy me as well.<sup>11</sup>

Schaeffer spent his career analyzing and engaging culture. He was known to weep often for a generation that had been held captive by destructive philosophies and heretical theologies. In doing so, Schaeffer followed in Paul’s footsteps, the Apostle who said “with tears

<sup>6</sup> BOB GOUDZWAARD, AID FOR THE OVER-DEVELOPED WEST, 114-115 (1975).

<sup>7</sup> CAMILLE PAGLIA, FEMINISM: IN CONVERSATION WITH CAMILLE PAGLIA, interview with Claire Fox, Institute for Ideas, 47:50-48:30 (November 4, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4y3-KLesYRE>, retrieved September 26, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> ANDREW SULLIVAN, *America Wasn’t Built for Humans*, NEW YORK MAGAZINE (September 18, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> PAUL HIEBERT, TRANSFORMING WORLDVIEWS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HOW PEOPLE CHANGE 170 (2008).

<sup>10</sup> See Matt. 24:15; Acts 20:29-31; Rom. 17:17-18; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 11:4; 2 Tim. 4:24; 2 Pet. 3:16-18.

<sup>11</sup> FRANCIS SCHAEFFER, THE GOD WHO IS THERE 127 (1968). Emphasis added.

that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18, emphasis added). Paul was imitating Jesus, who entered Jerusalem, saw people “harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd,” and lamented (Matt. 9:36).

To lament for those who have succumbed to the trending religions of our day requires us to see them as image-bearers of God with irreducible value. If God is our object of worship in reality and not merely in creed, then we will see and engage his image-bearers as *image-bearers*.<sup>12</sup> Our methods and motives will expose our innermost allegiances. If we play by the rules of the *zeitgeist*, then our analysis will be little more than a self-righteous exercise in dehumanizing those we disagree with, expanding the chasm between a tribalized “us” and a demonized “them.” This ‘new normal’ is not only incompatible with the gospel (in which our righteous standing is based solely on our position in Christ, not our political position), but also with Jesus’s anti-tribal Commission (not suggestion) to *go* into the world with that good news (Matt. 28:19).

We are talking about ideas that have real consequences for real people. It is easy to be self-righteously tickled by problems in the ideology of others. It is much more difficult (and requires supernatural help) to be genuinely and even tearfully concerned that someone created to know and enjoy God in Christ has been taken in by a false gospel. Spirit-generated love becomes the driving motivator for the cultural analysis and engagement of the Creator-worshipper.

## THE POSTMODERN PRIMER

Before getting into the specific doctrines of the new religion, there is one more question to ask. Why now? Why do our religious appetites seem to be expressed with such escalating political zeal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? I have developed these themes elsewhere, but briefly, Western

culture has been living under postmodernism for half a century, give or take, and postmodernism is dull.<sup>13</sup> As Solzhenitsyn saw, “the human soul longs for things higher, warmer, and purer than those offered by today’s mass living habits.”<sup>14</sup>

In other words, postmodernism is deeply out of sync with human nature. It clashes with our deepest drives and most pressing existential needs. When God constructed the human *telos* He designed us to run and thrive on meaning. We are wired for objective, not subjective, Creator-formed, not creature-fabricated, transcendent and God-centered, not transient and self-oriented meaning. Christian theism offers something worth living and dying for. It is centered on Someone infinitely bigger and more interesting than ourselves. The postmodern fixation on the Self offers us, in the final analysis, nothing worth living or dying for. I do not mean in the final *abstract* analysis, as in, if we were to build logical syllogisms from the core premises of postmodernism, they would all eventually converge on the conclusion that life is meaningless. I believe that to be the case. However, I am arguing that the postmodern project is not merely a philosophical failure. It has also proven void of meaning in the real lives of real people.<sup>15</sup> This is essential to understanding our current religious crisis. We crave a meaning that is bigger than ourselves and the postmodern *ethos* can never provide such meaning. Thus, postmodernism has a shelf life.<sup>16</sup> Deprive a culture of transcendent meaning long enough and that culture will take to politics with the ferocity of an absolutist religious fanatic. *Akrasia* begets activism. Relativism begets radicalism. In Dostoyevsky’s words, “Unlimited freedom begets unlimited despotism.”<sup>17</sup>

History demands that we do not take this phenomenon lightly. Historian Richard Evans has argued that the young men of 1920s Germany who were drawn to violent

<sup>12</sup> In other words we must consciously reverse the trend observed by Andrew Sullivan when he says, “Liberals should be able to understand this by reading any conservative online journalism and encountering the term ‘the left.’ It represents a large, amorphous blob of malevolent human beings, with no variation among them, no reasonable ideas, nothing identifiably human at all” (supra note 8).

<sup>13</sup> See *Beyond Capes and Cowbells* (Fall 2014) and *Post-Postmodernism* (Fall 2016) in JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN LEGAL THOUGHT, and Chapter 2 of REFLECT: BECOMING YOURSELF BY MIRRORING THE GREATEST PERSON IN HISTORY (2017).

<sup>14</sup> Solzhenitsyn, supra note 2.

<sup>15</sup> Solzhenitsyn adds, “If humanism were right in declaring that man is born only to be happy, he would not be born to die. Since his body is doomed to die, his task on earth evidently must be of a more spiritual nature. It cannot be unrestrained enjoyment of everyday life. It cannot be the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then cheerfully get the most of them. It has to be the fulfillment of a permanent, earnest duty so that one’s life journey may become an experience of moral growth, so that one may leave life a better human being than one started it. It is imperative to review the table of widespread human values. Its present incorrectness is astounding” (*Id.*).

<sup>16</sup> See WILLIAMS, *Beyond Capes and Cowbells* 8.

<sup>17</sup> FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, *THE POSSESSED* 365-366 (2009).

extremism “weren’t looking for ideas, but meaning... a pick-me-up to restore a sense of personal significance.”<sup>18</sup> “Violence” Evans argues, “was like a drug for such men.”<sup>19</sup> “Hostility to the enemy *de jour* —Communists, Jews, whomever—was the core of their commitment.”<sup>20</sup> As Christian Piccolini, ex-White Nationalist and founder of Life After Hate, commented after the recent racist demonstrations in Charlottesville, “I believe that people become radicalized, or extremist, because they’re searching for three very fundamental human needs: identity, community and a sense of purpose.”<sup>21</sup>

Elizabeth Corey recognizes similar undercurrents in the rise of the intersectionality movement, which she identifies as...

...a quasi-religious gnostic movement, which appeals to people for precisely the reasons that all religions do: It gives an account of our brokenness, an explanation of the reasons for pain, a saving story accompanied by strong ethical imperatives, and hope for the future. In short, it gives life meaning.<sup>22</sup>

This bestowal of meaning is precisely what religion offers that postmodernity cannot. Subject our meaning-craving human nature to a few decades of intense meaning deprivation and you have a compelling answer to the question, ‘why now?’

## A CREATION WORSHIPER’S SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

We can now better appreciate the doctrinal convictions sweeping through culture. Borrowing from the taxonomy of systematic theology, in particular, Theology Proper, Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, and Eschatology, I sketch the shape of today’s secular faith. (It is only a sketch, as a full doctrinal exposition would require a multi-volume Secular Systematic Theology text as long as Aquinas’s *Summa* or Barth’s *Dogmatics*.)

One challenge of clarifying the theology of today’s emerging religion is that it is hardly a monolith. In his article “Millennials are in Election Hell Because Politics Has Become Their Religion,” Peter Burfeind identifies this rising religion as a rebooted Gnosticism.<sup>23</sup> (On Gnosticism, see P. Andrew Sandlin’s helpful piece in the current issue.) Paglia identifies it as “political correctness.” Elizabeth Corey dubs it “the church of intersectionality.” New York University social psychologist Jonathan Haidt labels it an “extremely intense, fundamental social justice religion.” Other monikers like “cultural Marxism” and “neo-paganism” occur with frequency in the literature.

Indeed, there are multiple “denominations” with a wide range of dogmatic emphases. Nevertheless, there are strong theological threads that tie these denominations together, a discernable mere orthodoxy. In describing this shared theological core, I opt for the term

<sup>18</sup> JIM FRIEDRICH, *AMERICAN DEMONS: THE HORROR OF CHARLOTTESVILLE*, (August 13, 2017), <https://jimfriedrich.com/category/protest/> retrieved September 26, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> RICHARD J. EVANS, *THE COMING OF THE THIRD REICH* 220-221 (2004).

<sup>20</sup> *Supra* note 18.

<sup>21</sup> MAQUITA PETERS, *A Reformed White Nationalist Speaks Out On Charlottesville*, NPR (August 13, 2017), interview available at <http://www.npr.org/2017/08/13/543259499/a-reformed-white-nationalist-speaks-out-on-charlottesville>, retrieved September 22, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> ELIZABETH COREY, *First Church of Intersectionality*, FIRST THINGS (August 2017), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/08/first-church-of-intersectionality>, retrieved September 21, 2017. Corey adds, “It posits a classic orthodoxy through which all of human experience—and through which all speech must be filtered. Its version of original sin is the power of some identity groups over others. To overcome this sin, you first need to confess, i.e., “check your privilege.” And subsequently live your life and order your thoughts in a way that keeps this sin at bay. The sin goes deep into your psyche, especially if you are white or male or straight, that a profound conversion is required.”

<sup>23</sup> Burfeind is following renowned political philosopher Erik Voegelin. See Voegelin’s *THE NEW SCIENCE OF POLITICS, ORDER AND HISTORY, AND SCIENCE, POLITICS AND Gnosticism* (1968). According to Burfeind, “Voegelin identifies six characteristics of the gnostic psychic mechanism. (1) It begins with a dissatisfaction with one’s situation. (2) Lacking a doctrine of original sin, the drawbacks of one’s situation are attributed not to anything in him, but rather to the constitution of the world, or even nature itself, at a minimum to the intrinsic corruption of the world’s systems and institutions. (3) Contrary to all evolutionary evidence, but faintly recalling the paradisaical Eden of traditional religion, the gnostic “just knows” salvation is possible, that the world can be changed into something special. (4) For this salvation to occur, the order of being itself must be changed in a historic process. As Voegelin writes, “From a wretched world a good one must evolve historically.” (5) This historical change in the order of being lies within the capacity of human action. (6) Knowledge, or gnosis, here becomes the central concern, for only one enlightened about history’s proper course can help spearhead the world-historical change” (*Millennials Are In Election Hell Because Politics Has Become Their God*, THE FEDERALIST [November 17, 2016])

Contemporary Western Creation-Worship, a Romans 1:25 inspired designator that captures what I take to be the root doctrine from which the diverse denominations sprout.

*Theology Proper and Anthropology.* Historic Christianity has always affirmed the Creator-creature distinction. One of the many distinctions between God and us is his unique, authoritative role in determining *that* humans would exist (we are contingent; he is not), and also *why* we exist. The built-in meaning of human nature, what we exist *for*, our *telos*, traces its origin to our transcendent Creator. Human nature is not like a bowl of alphabet soup—a senseless jumble of floating letters that can be arranged at our leisure. Human nature is more like a book—we are *authored* beings with meaning and purpose. Authoring the meaning of human nature is a God-sized task.

In Contemporary Western Creation Worship, by contrast, the author of our *telos* is, unsurprisingly, the creature. As Ru Paul put it in a recent interview with *Time*, “Drag has always served a purpose. We mock identity. We’re shape-shifters. We are God in drag. And that’s our role to remind people of that.”<sup>24</sup> Under this doctrinal tenet, the autonomous “I,” the self-creating self, takes the sovereign mantle of man-making that God held in traditional theology. Solzhenitsyn describes it as “the proclaimed and enforced autonomy of man from any higher force above him.” (In this sense, the new secular religion is as old as Adam.)

The doctrine of self-creation was once the domain of professional philosophers. Nietzsche had his *ubermensch*, Sartre his dogma that “existence precedes essence,” and Foucault his “technologies of the self.” Then come movements in Critical Theory, particularly Critical Race Theory, Queer Critical Theory, and the recent upsurge of so-called “Dignity Jurisprudence” (See Roberta Ahmanson’s helpful piece in the current issue). This erasing of the Creator-creature distinction, the fundamental redefinition of our species from the made to

the makers, has since spilled from the ivory towers and flooded virtually every square inch of Western culture.<sup>25</sup> And the indoctrination begins early.<sup>26</sup>

There is a problem with this doctrine that, despite constant propaganda to the contrary, is becoming increasingly apparent in the West. The omnipotence-demanding task of constructing an entire person’s nature is forced onto our all-too-shaky and finite shoulders. Tragically, we buckle under the impossible weight. (And churches are called to serve as trauma recovery centers for those crushed by the mainstream credo of self-construction.) As I argue elsewhere, it is not a coincidence that the meteoric rise of the gospel of autonomous self-making since the 1960s corresponds with a crescendo of brokenness. “From 1960 to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, America doubled its divorce rate, tripled its teen suicide rate, quadrupled its violent crime rate, quintupled its prison population, sextupled out-of-wedlock births, and septupled the rate of cohabitation without marriage (which has been established as a significant predictor of divorce).”<sup>27</sup> I am not arguing that shifting the weight of self-making from the Creator to the creature’s shoulders is the exclusive factor in these unnerving statistics. But, if we take seriously Paul’s Romans 1 argument about the disarray that ensues from creation-worship, then we would be missing something profound if we limit ourselves to a sociological (at the exclusion of a spiritual) account of our present brokenness.

To offset the weight of this autonomy, many turn to other finite creatures to validate their self-made selves. The collective “We” is invoked to do some of the existential heavy-lifting that the autonomous “Me” can not muster. For deeply spiritual and not mere social reasons, people seek universal celebration of their constructed identities. This takes us to the soteriological doctrines of Contemporary Western Creation-Worship.

*Hamartiology and Soteriology.* In Christian soteriology (doctrine of salvation) we find the doctrine of justification. Justification refers to, among other things, the

<sup>24</sup> RU PAUL. *Time* 100 (April 19, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Sociologist Thomas Luckmann, noticed this rising trend back in the 1960s. “The individual,” says Luckmann, “is left to his own devices in choosing goods and services, friends, marriage partners, neighbors, hobbies and ... even ‘ultimate’ meanings in a relatively autonomous fashion. The consumer orientation, in short, is not limited to economic products but characterizes the relation of the individual to the entire culture” (THE INVISIBLE RELIGION 98 [1967]).

<sup>26</sup> For example, an episode entitled *We’re All Potatoes at Heart* from the animated Disney Jr. show “Small Potatoes” concludes with a talking potato telling a vast audience of impressionable minds, “I think it’s great to be different and unique because then everyone has their own different way of doing things and there’s no wrong or right answer for doing something.” As Augustine quotes Horace in THE CITY OF GOD (1.3), “new vessels will for long retain the taste of what is first poured into them.”

<sup>27</sup> WILLIAMS, REFLECT 73 (2017). For careful documentation of these unnerving facts see DAVID MEYERS, THE AMERICAN PARADOX (2000). There is also the 400% rise in antidepressant use from 1988 to 2011 documented by the U.S. Center for Disease Control (“NCHS Data Brief, No. 76 [October 2011]).

divine act whereby God declares a sinner “not guilty!” on the basis of Christ’s redemptive death and resurrection. God is the Judge, Satan is “the accuser,” and Jesus is our Defense Attorney who appeals to his own completed death sentence so we can be declared not guilty. If we leave God out of the process of living free from guilt, then where must we turn for that authoritative declaration? We turn to the next biggest entity we can imagine. We turn to Society. Media, the law, education, entertainment, the local business owner—we must get *everyone* to declare us, in unison, “not guilty!” We must demonize and silence anyone who fails to acknowledge and celebrate our guiltlessness. The Little Sisters of the Poor, the baker, the photographer, and the Christian University become the collective functional equivalent to Satan and his minions in an historic Christian demonology.

Psychologists, according to Elizabeth Nolan Brown, have found that the kind of moral outrage we typically classify as altruistic “is often a function of self interest, wielded to assuage feelings of personal culpability for societal harms or reinforce (to the self and others) one’s own status as a Very Good Person.”<sup>28</sup> This constant imputation of guilt to others—*they* are the bigots, *they* are the phobics, *they* are the fascists—offers a subjective sense of something very close to (and yet infinitely far from) what Christ offers in the Gospel. It offers those in a perpetual state of outrage “status as a Very Good Person” in Brown’s terms, a forensic declaration of imputed righteousness in the language of the Reformers. Note well, this false means of declaring ourselves “not guilty” often occurs among Christians on the Right. Rather than our justification coming from Christ, and Christ alone, we seek our own “not guilty” verdict by transferring all guilt onto the Left. (With the alt-right, which is anti-Gospel to its rotten core, justification takes on nationalistic and racist overtones, in which all evil can be imputed to those with more melanin in their skin cells.)

Embedded in this secularized view of justification, we find a doctrine championed by the French Revolutionaries that remains an essential dogma of Contemporary Western Creation Worship. In Jean

Jacques Rousseau’s words, “Man is naturally good ... It is by our institutions alone that men become wicked.”<sup>29</sup> Abraham Kuyper clarifies the main point of departure between this secular faith and historic Christianity, “two absolutely differing starting points.” That point of departure is whether we view man “in his present condition as normal, or as having fallen into sin, and having therefore become abnormal.”<sup>30</sup> For abnormalists, like Jeremiah, Solomon, and Paul, the human heart is desperately sick (Jer. 17:9), full of moral insanity, (Eccl. 9:3), and dead in transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1). Those who recognize such abnormality...

... maintain the miraculous as the only means to restore the abnormal; the miracle of regeneration; the miracle of the Scriptures; the miracle in the Christ, descending as God with His own life into ours ; and thus, owing to this regeneration of the abnormal, they continue to find the ideal norm not in the natural but in the Triune God.<sup>31</sup>

If, however, we are unfallen, then humanity “moves by means of an eternal evolution from its potencies to its ideal.”<sup>32</sup> This clarifies ways in which #loveislove and #lovewins have become defining slogans of the new religion. What is presupposed and then *imposed* is a normalist account of human nature. You must corroborate and celebrate my happiness *as I currently conceive of happiness in all of my unfallen perfection*. Anything less is bigotry. From an abnormalist perspective, by contrast, love is not constricted to always say ‘be who you are.’ It can also say ‘*become* who you are’ when that needs to be said. It is a love, like God’s, that can passionately and zealously pursue the beloved’s redemption and flourishing. Love can only be redemptive if we are in need of redemption (i.e., abnormal/fallen).

Kuyper’s normalist/abnormalist distinction captures one of the deepest rifts in contemporary faith, why we often talk past one another. Recall the driving thesis of evolutionary zoologist Alfred Kinsey in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Every sexual drive and behavior becomes justified as “normal mammalian behavior.” The scientific

<sup>28</sup> ELIZABETH NOLAN BROWN, *Moral Outrage is Self-Serving, Say Psychologists*, REASON.COM (March 1, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> See LETTERS TO MALESHERBES IN THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF ROUSSEAU, vol. 5, Ed. Christopher Kelly, 575 (1995); OEUVRES COMPLÈTES, vol. I, Eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 1136 (1995). As Solzhenitsyn noted in his 1978 Harvard speech, “Such a tilt of freedom in the direction of evil has come about gradually, but it was evidently born primarily out of a humanistic and benevolent concept according to which there is no evil inherent to human nature. The world belongs to mankind and all the defects of life are caused by wrong social systems, which must be corrected” (supra note 2).

<sup>30</sup> Kuyper, supra note at 132, 54.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 132.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

community eventually rejected Kinsey's spurious research. His normalist worldview assumptions about human sexuality, however, have risen over the last fifty years to become cardinal dogmas of the Western mainstream. This occurred largely through the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers like Herbert Marcuse with his *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Paul Goodman with *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), and Norman O. Brown with *Love's Body* (1966). "We knew that at bottom their gospel, was a sexual one," says one scholar of Marcuse, Goodman, and Brown, "that sex was their wedge for reorienting all human relations."<sup>33</sup>

When Paul describes the move from Creator to creation-worship, one of the first places that this self-destructive exchange expresses itself is in the realm of human sexuality. How does the new sexual orthodoxy, the legacy of Marcuse, Goodman, and Brown, relate to Paul's insight? One helpful way to answer that question is with the doctrine of divine impassibility. In historic Christian theology, the Creator-creature distinction entails that the Creator is impassible and we the creatures are not. The doctrine of impassibility is not that of an unfeeling, statuesque God, as often caricatured, but a God who feels perfectly. The Creator lacks the emotional volatility we find in creatures.<sup>34</sup> God's feelings are just, unerring, and authoritative.

With this historic definition of impassibility, we can better clarify the sexual orthodoxy of our age. When the Creator-creature distinction is erased, we ascribe impassibility to ourselves. We elevate our own feelings, including our sexual feelings, to sacred status. Historically, ascribing unquestionable authority to one's own feelings was considered arrogance. It is now

called "authenticity."<sup>35</sup> In Kuyper's categories, it is the "normalist" view writ large. Just as God's feelings in traditional theology are expressions of his very nature, so our feelings come to define our very identities.<sup>36</sup> Colin Campbell clearly captures this dogma:

The 'self' becomes, in effect, a very personal god or spirit to whom one owes obedience. Hence 'experiencing,' with all its connotations of gratificatory and stimulative feelings becomes an ethical activity, an aspect of duty. This is a radically different doctrine of the person, who is no longer conceived of as a 'character' constructed painfully out of the unpromising raw material of original sin, but as a 'self' liberated through experiences and strong feelings from the inhibiting constraints of social convention.<sup>37</sup>

*Eschatology.* This leads us to the eschatological vision of Contemporary Western Creation Worship. Sin is no longer an internal category. (How, after all, could *telos*-defining, impassible deities of like us be in violation of a higher moral law if our desires *are* the highest moral law?) Sin must be found only "the institutions" according to Rousseau and the French Revolutionaries, or "the oppressors" in the categories of neo-Marxism. The great and final triumph over evil, then, becomes a triumph over any institution or oppressor who dares question the self-defined self.

What emerges is a kind of secular postmillennialism in which intersectional alliances of self-defined selves must mobilize for the great eschatological struggle. Cultural, political, and legal efforts become a spiritualized

<sup>33</sup> MORRIS DICKSTEIN, *GATES OF EDEN: AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE SIXTIES* (1977). Philip Yancey counters, "I might feel more attraction towards a reductionistic approach to sex if... I senses that the sexual revolution had increased respect between the genders, created a more loving environment for children, relieved the ache of personal loneliness, and fostered intimacy. I have seen no such evidence."

<sup>34</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer retrieves an old distinction that effectively makes the point. On the one hand you have passions, which are (as the name implies) passive and which often overrule reason and are subject to evil. On the other hand are affections, which are active, good (and which Vanhoozer explains in terms of cognitive concernedness that is theodramatic and covenantal). In short, God has affections but not passions. See Chapters 8-9 in VANHOOZER, *REMYTHOLOGIZING THEOLOGY: DIVINE ACTION, PASSION, AND AUTHORSHIP* (2010).

<sup>35</sup> For deeper analysis of this point see Ch. 2 "Emote," from my book, *REFLECT*.

<sup>36</sup> In the words of one proponent of the new orthodoxy, Alex Garner, "Our sexuality is *at the core* of our humanity" (quoted in JACOB ANDERSON-MINSHALL, *The New Gay Sexual Revolution*, *THE ADVOCATE* (May 15, 2017), <https://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2017/5/15/new-gay-sexual-revolution>, retrieved September 24, 2017). As Philip Yancey notes, "If humanity serves as your religion, then sex becomes an act of worship. On the other hand, if God is the object of your religion, then romantic love becomes an unmistakable pointer, rumor of transcendence as loud as any we hear on earth" (*RUMORS OF ANOTHER WORLD*, 88). In other words, sexuality is an inherently religious matter, the way we think about it and the way we engage in sexual acts will be a fundamental expression, consciously or not, of either Creator or creation worship.

<sup>37</sup> Colin Campbell quoted by Craig M. Gay in *Sensualists Without Heart: Contemporary Consumerism in Light of the Modern Project*, in *THE CONSUMING PASSION*, ed. Rodney Clapp 28 (1988).

quest to usher in the new heavens and a new earth. This quest is every bit as eschatological and utopian as it was for the 18<sup>th</sup> century French Revolutionaries and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxists. But, we must say with tears, this new revolution also renounces the Creator-creature distinction. Drastically overestimating our goodness and underestimating our propensity for evil, it will prove just as dystopian.<sup>38</sup>

### “SAVE THE WORLD FROM SUICIDE”

Above are some of what may be called “the Deep Dogmas” of Contemporary Western Creation Worship. There are also what we might call “Cosmetic Dogmas,” the attractive doctrines on the public face of the religion that draw converts (even many from the church). These Cosmetic dogmas sounds uncannily like the *shalom* the Bible envisions and the kingdom Jesus inaugurated. We want to help the poor and end oppression. We want a world forever purged of racism, where justice prevails and greed and tyranny are permanently replaced with compassion and love.

If we want to winsomely engage contemporary creation-worshippers we must make it abundantly clear that the Bible is anti-oppression to its core. It has inspired the Wilberforces, Bonhoeffers, Martin Luther King Jr., and Lee Jong-Rak’s of history<sup>39</sup> to bring about justice. To mute the Bible’s clarion calls against oppression would be a travesty, particularly in this cultural moment. It would perpetuate a false dichotomy and drive anyone who cares about ending oppression into the arms of Contemporary Western Creation Worship, rather than toward the God of the Bible who commands (not suggests) that we “seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isa. 1:17).

The problem, then, is not with the quest for justice and the end of oppression *per se*. Such a quest is deeply biblical. The problem is what happens when the quest for justice is hijacked by the Deep Dogmas of Creation Worship. When we disavow the Creator, we unwittingly

lose all that the Creator means for our humanity—our *telos*, our intrinsic and irreducible worth as image-bearers, a realistic sense of our fallibility, and our universal need for grace. (On the effects of this dehumanization in human rights law and personal data sharing, see Andrew DeLoach and Stephen Kennedy’s articles in the current issue). Without the Creator-creature distinction, we fundamentally misunderstand human nature and end up the unwitting oppressors in our quest for liberation. Just study the effects of Marxism in the modern world.

To see what genuine Creator-worship offers the justice-seeker, consider Martin Luther King Jr. Like all Creator-worshippers, King was an abnormalist. He believed in the reality of human fallenness and, therefore,

our need for supernatural grace as we seek a better world. In King’s words:

By opening our lives to God in Christ, we become new creatures. This experience, which Jesus spoke of as the new birth, is essential if we are to be transformed non-conformists... Only through

an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit.<sup>40</sup>

King’s Creator-worship made him a clear-eyed realist about his own fallenness and perpetual need for grace. It prevented him from elevating himself as the supreme source and standard of righteousness.

With its Deep Dogmas of self-definition, normalism, human impassibility, and self-justification, Contemporary Western Creation Worship produces an altogether different kind of justice-seeker. For him, evil is ever lurking in systems of oppression, and never in his own heart. Paulo Freire’s warning that “the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors”<sup>41</sup> is totally lost on such a justice-seeker. His system of worship leaves no space for authentic introspection, no reason to ask for forgiveness, “no category of corruption within the heart to warrant self-critique.”<sup>42</sup> This is not a recipe “to fight vigorously

*Without the Creator-creature distinction, we fundamentally misunderstand human nature and end up the unwitting oppressors in our quest for liberation.*

<sup>38</sup> I discuss this further in 2.1 of *LOVE, FREEDOM, AND EVIL* (2011).

<sup>39</sup> On Pastor Lee Jong-Rak’s heroic efforts to bring life and justice to the abandoned infants of modern day Seoul, South Korea see WILLIAMS, *REFLECT* 129.

<sup>40</sup> MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., *STRENGTH TO LOVE* 16 (2010).

<sup>41</sup> PAULO FREIRE, *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED* (1993). Marvin Frankel echoes, “The powerless call out for tolerance [which], achieving power, they may soon forget” (*FAITH AND FREEDOM: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA*, 111 (1994)

<sup>42</sup> WILLIAMS, *LOVE, FREEDOM, AND EVIL* 78.



the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit,” as King said. It is an impetus for the hubris and loathing that is presently ravaging the West.

Make no mistake; what is now unfolding in western law and politics is not a face-off between religious theocrats and freedom-loving secularists who seek a religiously neutral state. What we are seeing is nothing less than a new theocracy. It is the dogmatic faith of Contemporary Western Creation Worship working to silence all heretics and enshrine itself as the only legal faith of the land. It is a faith in which the creature, not the Creator, defines the human *telos*. It is a faith with no holy God as a pride-deflating reference point to realistically assess our own fallenness and fallibility. It is a faith that projects all evil from our own hearts onto any institution that refuses to celebrate our autonomous identities. It is a faith striving to usher in a new heavens and a new earth, centered not on Christ but on Self, guided not by Saint Paul or Saint Peter, but by Saint Rousseau, Saint Marx, and Saint Marcuse. Make no mistake; it is a faith.

How do we engage its zealous practitioners? We do so with tears because we love them. And we do so with the same tried-and-tested method the church used with the Judaizers, Gnostics, and Pelagians of old. We preach “the Gospel once for all entrusted to the saints.” We herald the good news that only Jesus can define the human *telos* in the deeply meaningful ways that we cannot. We offer the good news that we no longer have to pretend, and force others to pretend, that we are perfect. Jesus is perfect, and through his substitutionary death for our evil, he offers a new identity as infinitely beloved sons and daughters of God. We preach the good news of his bodily resurrection, by which he inaugurated the age to come, with all of its *shalom* and justice that the West has tried to realize with such antithetical and oppressive

effects. We preach the same Gospel that was able to bring real racial reconciliation to first century Jews and Gentiles, and real liberation to the slaves of American and British history. We preach the only gospel that offers real meaning to our generation of image-bearers created to know and enjoy God. To those gasping for air under the crushing weight of Contemporary Western Creation Worship, we preach the Gospel.

The world is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.

—T.S. Eliot<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> T.S. ELIOT, *Thoughts After Lambeth* in *SELECTED ESSAYS* 342 (1977).