

Two articles on the forgetting of God in the church, in the nation, in our personal lives

1. Imagine No Religion, Too

DEACON JAMES H. TONER

2. As a Nation, We Have Forgotten God



[Jerry Newcombe](#)

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Posted: Aug 09, 2018 12:01 AM

Fr. Perozich — Could it be also that as a church we have forgotten God? Is the liturgy used to promote the political agenda of the local bishop/priest? Is Holy Mass the Paschal Mystery, the sacred celebration of the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus? Is current moral theology about repentance, conversion, and the new life in Christ or a call to worldly social action only? Is the teaching that “not one iota of the law will pass away until all these things are accomplished” still guide our moral lives? Are hierarchs rewriting worship, morality, ecclesiology, salvation? Is it OK to condemn archbishop McCarrick for sexual abuse and at the same

time promote homosexuality among consenting adults, new sexual living arrangements defined by the individual, and communion for all in diocesan synods, synods on the family, parishes, all on a new ENTHUSIASM of the moment and a “new evangelization” of Christians wherein false mercy, accompaniment, inclusiveness, equality, fairness replace Jesus’ teaching in the Bible and in the Tradition of the Church? Is it no longer necessary to evangelize non believers, non Christians? The one true God seems to be disappearing from society, it’s true. Is He disappearing also in the church and being replaced by the feelings of those who have taken over as its leaders?

*Do not forget almighty God and His only Son Jesus Christ who sacrificed His life to make you sons and daughters, to free you from sin, to give you a new life in him here on earth, and to clothe you with the immortal body and life on the last day. Tell everyone you know what Jesus did in salvation history and in your own life. Keep God in your life.
Keep God in the church.
Keep God in our nation.*

As a Nation, We Have Forgotten God



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When I was a kid, there was an expression: “Stop the world. I want to get off.” Glancing at the headlines sometimes makes me feel that way.

For example, here are some stories highlighted on Drudge on Monday (8/6/18):

- A crackdown on free speech by Apple. They decide what is and what is not “hate.” Consequently, conspiracy theorist Alex Jones is now denied his platform.
- The #MeToo movement continues to speak out against alleged sexual predators, and CBS is working to weather a storm of allegations swirling around their CEO.
- Canada is calling for a boycott of the US.
- Sex with robots is a growing fad.

- The president is beleaguered by allegations of collusion with the Russians.
- Calls are going out for social media censorship of climate change “deniers.”
- In Chicago, 63 were shot over the weekend in a city with some of the strictest gun control laws. 44 of them were killed within 14 hours. As a colleague noted, “It’s like Fallujah, only worse.”
- Parkland victims protest the NRA...but the former have armed guards.
- Older Americans have money woes. The New York Times (8/5/18) reports: “The rate of people 65 and older filing for bankruptcy is three times what it was in 1991.”

Why is America seemingly sinking into the abyss? We have forgotten God. As a nation, just like as individuals, we reap what we sow.

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian writer and critic of the atheist USSR (who spent years imprisoned in one of Stalin’s gulags), once said: “[W]hile I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.”

The Nobel-prize winning writer went on to say that he had read hundreds of books on the godless Soviet state and talked with many people about the murderous disaster it was, and he said no one provided a better explanation than those simple peasants: We have forgotten God.

Not to the same degree, but something similar could be said about America. We have forgotten God, and are reaping the consequences.

About 200 years ago, Yale University president Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) warned us against forgetting God: "Without religion we may possibly retain the freedom of savages, bears, and wolves, but not the freedom of New England. If our religion were gone, our state of society would perish with it and nothing would be left which would be worth defending."

Dwight also added: "Where there is no religion, there is no morality...With the loss of religion...the ultimate foundation of confidence is blown up; and the security of life, liberty and property are buried in ruins."

Why? If there is no God, there is no one to hold us accountable. That is why so many deny God, when they know deep down, "Of course, there is a God."

About 50 years after America's independence, Alexis de Tocqueville, a notable Frenchman, came to these shores to assess the new nation. He wrote his famous observations in 1835 in *Democracy in America*, a book that is still in print, in which he noted: "It must never be forgotten that religion gave birth to Anglo-American society."

One of the greatest American speakers in the 19th century was Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster. He's depicted in statues in DC and is the center character in a large painting in Boston's Faneuil Hall.

Webster once declared, "Finally, let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought

hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.”

The famous orator also opined, “We live under the only government that ever existed which was framed by...deliberate consultations of the people. Miracles do not cluster. That which has happened but once in 6,000 years cannot be expected to happen often. **Such a government, once gone, might leave a void, to be filled, for ages, with revolution and tumult, riot and despotism.**”

Revolution, tumult, and riot are becoming almost [commonplace](#) in America. We have a U.S. Congresswoman, Maxine Waters, declaring people should publicly hound out and shame members of the Trump team. The minority leader in the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, is wondering why there are not more “riots in the streets” against this administration.

During the days of the Civil War, our nation faced worse challenges. But Abraham Lincoln called for a national day of repentance and prayer in 1863, in which he warned us to stop forgetting God as a nation and to remember this truth: “those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.”

Imagine No Religion, Too

DEACON JAMES H. TONER



“We simply cannot,” said Pope Francis. His interlocutor was puzzled, wondering what it is that we cannot do. The answer came swiftly and inexorably.

“Fight another war. The error came in the early Church when its fathers made a false peace with Rome and allowed Christians to serve in its legions. The only way to have peace is not have armed forces. The Quakers have been right all along on this. The Church must make pacifism an integral part of its moral teaching.”

The Holy Father’s interlocutor was stunned, perhaps understanding the ramifications of this declaration by Pope Francis, who continued: “How can it be moral for mass armies to kill each other as well as innocent civilians? Or for Christians to join those armies? Christ was a pacifist. He preached pacifism, and he practiced it in the Garden of

Gethsemane and on Calvary. There is simply no way you can love your neighbor and then go about preparing to murder him.”

The interlocutor had to object. “Holiness,” he began, “what about our ancient Catholic moral and philosophical tradition of ‘just war’?”

Pope Francis responded: “How can there be ‘just murder’?” After a moment, the Pope continued: “We must not only condemn war but categorically forbid all Catholics—yes, all humans—to participate.”

But what would happen when the forces of evil saw all Catholics, and others, refuse military service? Would they then not conquer the world?

Pope Francis responded: “This is not the important thing. The inner life of faith and morality can remain, while the outer political order changes. What matters is that we love one another and practice that love.” Such noble practice might well change the world, said Pope Francis.

The conversation above, which is, of course, fiction, is taken from chapter 33 of Walter F. Murphy’s novel, *The Vicar of Christ*.

If, in time, we can abolish the death penalty, or at least forbid Catholics from approving it, the current pope, taking a cue from the fictional Francis, might well reason that, in time, we can also abolish war, or at least forbid Catholics from approving it or participating in it.

Is it not now time to abolish capital punishment, life imprisonment—and war? One is reminded, after all, of the saying so often and fondly quoted by Senator Robert F. Kennedy: “Some men see things as they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not.”

But in George Bernard Shaw's play *Back to Methuselah*, the speaker of that line was the devil. The call to a man-made utopia is the ancient and perennial heresy (Gen. 3:5).

The abolition of the death penalty and the exaltation of pacifism are signs of a quixotic mentality which Monsignor Ronald Knox knew as "Enthusiasm."

Saint Thomas More called it "Utopianism." Joachim of Flora preached it as the "Third Age." A host of modern philosophers are associated with various strains of secular chiliasm. If we can dream a sufficiently revolutionary dream and thus change the political or economic structure in a way that it is sufficiently modernized—so goes the Panglossian pipe dream—there will be peace. And progress. And prosperity. And paradise.

What is always missing from the progressive agenda is the failure to recognize evil. "Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure" (CCC #387). As the French writer Charles Peguy put it: "It will never be known what acts of cowardice have been motivated by the fear of not looking progressive enough." Moreover, the New American Bible offers this translation of 2 John 9: "Anyone who is so 'progressive' that he does not remain rooted in the teaching of Christ does not possess God." Or perhaps such people possess a false god.

Can it be that the death penalty deters murder and that its abolition will result in more violence? Edward Feser and Joseph Bessette, in [*By Man Shall His Blood be Shed*](#), think so.

Can it be that the U.S. armed forces help to deter terrorism and that pacifism may lead to more violence? The

late Jean Bethke Elshtain argued this affirmatively in [*Just War Against Terror*](#).

Can it be that the root of the problem is failure to perceive evil? In his novel *The Apostle*, Brad Thor quotes George Orwell: “People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.”

That the decision to “work with determination” to abolish the death penalty is a Micawberish foray into secular politics; that it is *ultra vires*, i.e., beyond papal authority as the custodian of doctrine and not its progenitor; that it ignores the traditional properties of punishment (the medicinal and the vindictive [see CCC #2266]); that it ignores and traduces settled Church and biblical teaching; and that it creates a precedent with conspicuously dangerous probabilities—all these matters, and others, again suggest that the Church is altogether too eager to please the liberal, progressive, and secular society to which it is supposed to be witnessing and preaching (John 12:43; Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4).

As Feser and Bessette prophesy: The abolition of the death penalty “will tend to reflect, and to reinforce, a trajectory away from theological orthodoxy and traditional morality. Abolitionism thus inadvertently provides powerful ‘aid and comfort’ to ideas and movements that any Catholic must regard as morally and socially destructive” (207).

The abolition of the death penalty is based upon a metaphysically *mistaken* notion of human dignity (CCC #1881), which places man at the center of all human institutions. “Dignity” provided by human customs can be repealed by human institutions. The Church has always insisted, despite the trendy liberalism of the past half-century, that human dignity is grounded in our ensoulment and in our

reflection of God's image. When that truth is twisted to mean human exaltation, liberty becomes license; moral freedom (which means sinlessness [cf. John 8:34]) becomes moral autonomy; and moral agency can be socially detached from objective and universal norms. We begin, in short, to worship the creature and to forget the Creator (*aversio a Deo, conversio ad creaturam*).

It is, in short, not only heterodox theology—but it is also deranged politics—to mistake respect for the dignity of every human and the nature of our relationships with others as our highest duty and chief virtue as somehow more important than the duties and virtues which lead us and bind us to God. There is a reason, in short, that the First Commandment is first (Dt. 6:5).

In pridefully exalting human dignity (cf. Jer. 17:5), we fallaciously conclude that there can be no such thing as just war; that the moral law against sodomy is somehow an assault upon our prized human dignity; that civil laws forbidding same-sex “marriage” are demeaning; and that the time and circumstances of our deaths are to be matters of personal choice and of private convenience.

Considerations of space preclude lengthy rehearsal here of the many reasons which tell us clearly and cogently that pacifism and the abolition of the death penalty are more than merely Pollyannaish. We can, though, point out here that they are perilous, and that they will result in moral and political catastrophe because they misjudge human nature. They are saccharine and sentimental, for they are, at heart, Pelagian, and they look forward to a time and place where no grace is necessary. They hope for peace and healing, but “terror came instead” (Jer. 8:15, 14:19). And when murderers and

aggressors do come, the Pelagian progressives can't beat them; so, too often, they join them. It's all right, they think, for the prevailing ideology determines the boundaries of right and wrong, and dignity comes from allegiance to the morals of the day. Taste matters, it seems; truth doesn't.

The romance of the political left is always grounded in the belief that we can be as gods. If we have within us the seeds of our own magical flowering, surely we can dispense with reminders that we are inclined to evil thoughts and deeds. The days of the death penalty—for *any* offense—and the days of military service—and just war against aggressors—will finally be ended. We will have achieved harmony, and we will have done so ourselves. The Tower of Babel will finally be built, and there won't be any need for police, soldiers, or weapons inside it for defense.

Criminals of every sort and stripe will listen to sweet reason; international aggressors will be deterred by the reinstatement of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which nations pledged not to use force to resolve disputes; and the lion will lie down with the lamb—if only we imagine it, as John Lennon taught us so memorably:

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today.
Imagine there's no countries [or borders]
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace.

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

John Lennon was murdered on December 8, 1980. On that tragic night, when Lennon was shot in the back multiple times, there was present no rough man in a blue suit ready to do “violence,” if need be, to save the life of the singer/song writer. John Lennon would be 77 today if vigilant, and armed, police had been able to deter his murderer.

Lennon's woolly-headed imaginings clash, and not only with historical knowledge and political experience; they deny —“and no religion too”—the biblical teaching which is at the heart of the ancient and ever-new faith, expressed most succinctly in Job: “I know that my Redeemer liveth” (19:25). I know I need a Redeemer, for I cannot save myself. As Jeremiah put it: “Who can understand the human heart? There is nothing else so deceitful; it is too sick to be healed” (17:9). The *Catechism* teaches that “Sin is present in human history; any attempt to ignore it or to give this dark reality other names would be futile” (#386).

However, the belief that we alone can conquer sin is more than “futile”; it is blasphemous and debauched. When we lose sight of the need for defense against criminals and aggressors or terrorists, abandoning the idea of protecting the innocent and of punishing the guilty, “the very idea of justice will go with it,” say Feser and Bessette, “[and it will be] replaced by a therapeutic or technocratic model that treats human beings as cases to be managed and socially engineered [rather] than as morally responsible persons.”

Progressives—utopians—think that we stand at the threshold of a brave new world. We are dreaming dreams and asking why not. We are soaring! “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High” (Is. 14:14). Like Icarus, however, we crash and burn when we seek self-exaltation, denying the objective truth of sin and our personal and institutional need to always guard against it.

The Church has always faithfully taught the need for repentance, for accountability, for daily conversion to Christ, and for working out our salvation in “fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). This is the call to redemption, not to social engineering. By the grace of God, it is not yet too late to restore our understanding of the divine mission of Holy Mother Church.

Editor’s note: Pictured above is a detail from [“The Sun or the Fall of Icarus”](#) painted by Merry-Joseph Blondel in 1819.