

Fr. Perozich comments —

I'm lazy to read a six page article, yet this one held my attention. The crises in society and the church began to make sense to me. Just because someone has an advanced degree or a position of authority or power does not make his power just or his authority valid to express the truth of God.

I would not have bothered to review, synthesize, and send this if it were not happening in the Catholic Church in the 20th and 21st centuries. Rather than transform the world, the reverse is happening: the church is succumbing to worldly values and thinking. Staples explains why.

Each human being is affected by his or her upbringing and various forces of life. Many youth try to slough off the authority of their parents and of God. As teens, their peers' approval is important. Later a loyalty to college professors replaces that. In the society and the church, the approval of the authority who grants advancement in power, possessions, and prestige replaces the former shift for many.

While God is with each person, especially the baptized, corruption of thought is still possible. It leads to corruption of action and of the soul. This may be why we have so many in the church claiming their own "changes" as authentic and lambasting us who will not follow them as rigid when in fact the change makers are the most rigid of all in their rupture and novelty.

I'll hold fast to Jesus.

To understand an argument (not a fight between two people, rather a presentation of an idea), it is important to define terms.

- *Philosophical Materialism — "man is nothing but matter, and that once you understand how his body works, there is nothing more to know about him."*
- *the ideology of philosophical materialism that currently inspires many researchers in neuroscience, neuropsychology, and related fields*

^a *the widespread acceptance of materialism. would mean the end of our belief in free will and everything that depends on free will, including law and the moral order of society.*

- *when a philosophy is meant to apply to everyone but the philosopher himself. It's a sure sign that we are not dealing with a philosopher at all but a tyrant pretending to be a philosopher.*
- *Many students, therefore, find sociology liberating, a way to justify abandoning God, family, conventional morality, and any authority but their own. Thus, sociology, animated almost entirely by atheist humanism, has been the tip of the spear in the debunking of religion and religious faith.*
- *to challenge and replace the Judeo-Christian understanding of man. This traditional understanding is seen by materialists as an obstacle to progress, to man's goal of becoming autonomous - i.e., free from all constraints other than those he chooses.*
- *To Catholics, atheist humanists are enemies. And though we should love them, our loving them does not make them our friends, or any less dangerous.*
- *Luther freed man from the authority of the Church so each man could find his own truth*
- *The Enlightenment freed man from the authority of the Bible so he can submit- in theory anyway - to the authority of reason alone. Today, in our post-Enlightenment phase, man claims the right to the authority of reason alone.*
- *Today, in our post-Enlightenment phase, man claims the right to be free even from reason. He is free to want what he wants, and if he is prevented from getting it, he then wants power so he can go back to getting what he wants.*
- *College students who enroll in a typical sociology class today will meet the man Comte discovered. Sociological Man, they will learn, is a creature not of God but of society. They will also learn that society, in turn, is created by man through social interaction.*
- *Atheist humanism involves a failure to think as we should, as we were made to think. This failure is not a psychological failure, though psychology is involved; nor is it a failure of creativity or intelligence. I've*

known many atheist humanists who are original or brilliant or both. Instead, atheist humanism arises from a spiritual disorder, the willful turning away from God that we otherwise call sin.

- *The contemporary incubator of atheist ideologies is the university ... it offers such fictions as "social justice," "diversity," "intersectionality," "white privilege," and "gender fluidity." These and other ingenious half-truths and lies are cooked up in graduate seminars in the humanities and social sciences,*
- *Sociological Man, having rejected his transcendent origin, understands himself to be a purely historical or sociological being. As such, he can only know himself as society knows him, and he can only value himself as society values him. **Alienated from his Creator, condemned to thinking of his life as bound entirely by history and society, Sociological Man has no idea who he truly is**, where he came from, or where he is headed. He is at the mercy of society, be it the society of the sandbox, the junior high school, the college campus, the corporate boardroom, the fashion industry, or social media. What is sold as freedom turns out to be enslavement to society and the elites who control it. Atheist-humanist sociology is just another one of modernity's false promises.*
- *atheist humanism and left -wing utopianism. It "has realized the dream of its founders to rid sociological thought of all traces of traditional Judeo- Christian ideas about man and society.*
- *what matters is that your sociological knowledge contributes to "social justice," principally by eliminating all social and economic inequalities, which are always and everywhere evil*
- *major companies use their considerable economic power to propagandize and, when necessary, bully employees, customers and state legislatures into complying with what ever "progressive" cause is currently fashionable.*
- *sociological knowledge is evaluated based not on its truth Value but on its utility*

- *We are naturally open to the reality outside of ourselves that we did not make, that is given to us. But, of course, this natural inclination to be open to all that is can be perverted.*

Ideological thinking, in contrast, involves denying the reality that is given to us and substituting an alternative reality of our own imagining.

- *descent into atheist humanism... its aim is: to destroy the order of being, which is experienced as defective and unjust, and through man's creative power to replace it with a perfect and just order. Now, however the order of being may be understood*
- *it remains something that is given, that isn't under man's control. In order, therefore, that the attempt to create a new world might seem to make sense, the givenness of the order of being must be obliterated; the order of being must be interpreted, rather, as essentially under man's control. And taking control of being further requires that the transcendent origin of being be obliterated: it requires the decapitation of being - the murder of God.*
- *The greatest among philosophers are those who do not flinch in the presence of truth, but welcome it with the simple words: yes, Amen.*

MEET SOCIOLOGICAL MAN

CLIFFORD STAPLES

THE IDEOLOGY AT THE ROOT OF OUR MORAL DISORDER

A few years ago, I wrote an article titled "Abolishing the Moral Order," in which I argued against the ideology of

philosophical materialism that currently inspires many researchers in neuroscience, neuropsychology, and related fields (Crisisblagazine.com, Dec. 15, 2016). These people would have us believe that man is nothing but matter, and that once you understand how his body works, there is nothing more to know about him. I tried to explain in my article why such a philosophy can't be true. I made the unoriginal point that just because a philosophy is untrue doesn't mean it's necessarily unpopular or unimportant. I argued that the widespread acceptance of materialism would mean the end of our belief in free will and everything that depends on free will, including law and the moral order of society. I wrote that without free will, we are no longer dealing with human beings in a human society but with ants in an ant colony - a colony ruled by materialist philosophers. To me, it's a deal-breaker when a philosophy is meant to apply to everyone but the philosopher himself. It's a sure sign that we are not dealing with a philosopher at all but a tyrant pretending to be a philosopher.

Nothing I've seen or read since I wrote that article has changed my opinion of philosophical materialism. It remains popular, powerful, and untrue. It is one among many false philosophies, or ideologies, that have emerged, or perhaps re-emerged, in the modern world to challenge and replace the Judeo-Christian understanding of man. This traditional understanding is seen by materialists as an obstacle to progress, to man's goal of becoming autonomous - i.e., free from all constraints other than those he chooses.

Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac, SJ., referred to these ideologies collectively as "atheist humanism," and he identified Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Friedrich Nietzsche as its leading thinkers. Needless to say, atheist humanists are not our friends. They want God out of the public square - and out of the private sphere as well. They believe we would all be better off without God, so they want to create a

society with no trace of God. And they seem to have a particular dislike for Christianity, and that dislike turns into hatred and bigotry the closer you get to Catholicism.

I know this because I lived among this tribe for many years, studied them carefully, and even went native for a time. But, through the grace of God, I never felt at home among them, even though 20 years ago I won an award for writing a book on Marxist sociology, To Catholics, atheist humanists are enemies. And though we should love them, our loving them does not make them our friends, or any less dangerous. So, let's spend some time with our enemies.

The focus of philosophy, at least in the Western tradition up through the medieval period, is the attempt to know a truth that *man did not make*, including the truth about himself. Atheist humanism assumes there is no truth that man does not make. Brad Gregory, in his marvelous book *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (2012), provides the historical context in which atheist humanism emerged in the 19th century. The modern world, Gregory says, is best thought of as the result of an ongoing rebellion against the authority of the Catholic Church and all she stands for. There are stages to this rebellion. Luther freed man from the authority of the Church so each man could find his own truth, but Luther still understood that this truth was to be found in the Bible. The Enlightenment freed man from the authority of the Bible so he can submit- in theory anyway - to the authority of reason alone. Today, in our post-Enlightenment phase, man claims the right to be free even from reason. He is free to want what he wants, and if he is prevented from getting it, he then wants power so he can go back to getting what he wants. Atheist humanism emerges in the second period, with Comte's science of society and Feuerbach's inversion of the story of creation, wherein it's man who creates God, not God who creates man. Marx and Nietzsche assume what Comte and Feuerbach accomplished.

As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, when the Creator is gone, the creature vanishes as well. And so, for example, if God's existence is denied, it is impossible to say in any convincing way that man is sacred. No atheist can declare that man is sacred without sounding foolish. All he can do is write laws declaring that man has "rights," but these rights, as the products of history and circumstance, are worth no more than the paper on which they are written. They were created by men and can be abolished by men. Without God, man has no inherent dignity or worth, only as much as he wishes to grant himself, where and when he chooses.

Pope St. John Paul II observed that all modern atheist ideologies reduce man to something smaller and narrower than he is understood to be in the Bible. Behind this reductionism, whether it be biological or sociological, is the will to power, the desire of some men to control others. According to John Paul, the tragedy of modernity is that it fails to tell "the whole truth about man."

Atheist humanism involves a failure to think as we should, as we were made to think. This failure is not a psychological failure, though psychology is involved; nor is it a failure of creativity or intelligence. I've known many atheist humanists who are original or brilliant or both. Instead, atheist humanism arises from a spiritual disorder, the willful turning away from God that we otherwise call sin.

The contemporary incubator of atheist ideologies is the university. The institution founded by the Church in the Middle Ages and devoted to seeking and passing on truth now assumes there is no truth to pass on. Instead, it offers such fictions as "social justice," "diversity," "intersectionality," "white privilege," and "gender fluidity." These and other ingenious half-truths and lies are cooked up in graduate seminars in the humanities and social sciences, some of which I attended, some of which I taught.

Over the past 40 years, sociology, my home base, has become little more than propaganda on behalf of atheist humanism and left-wing utopianism. It "has realized the dream of its founders to rid sociological thought of all traces of traditional Judeo-Christian ideas about man and society. De Lubac pointed out that, despite superficial differences, there is a common core to the positivism of Comte, the founder of sociology, and the historical materialism of Marx, the communist revolutionary. He wrote: .

To anyone observing the great spiritual currents of our age from a certain altitude, positivism will seem less the antagonist than the ally of the Marxist and Nietzschean currents. By other methods, in another spirit, and in competition with them, it strives for the same essential object. Like them, it is one of the ways in which modern man seeks to escape from any kind of transcendence and to shave off . the thing it regards as an unbearable yoke - namely, faith in God. "To discover a man with no trace of God in him ... " defines Comte's self-appointed task.

College students who enroll in a typical sociology class today will meet the man Comte discovered. Sociological Man, they will learn, is a creature not of God but of society. They will also learn that society, in turn, is created by man through social interaction. If the students can put two and two together - admittedly always a 50/50 proposition - they will realize they are being taught that man is self-creating and autonomous, free, in principle, to remake himself by remaking society. Many students, therefore, find sociology liberating, a way to justify abandoning God, family, conventional morality, and any authority but their own. Thus, sociology, animated almost entirely by atheist humanism, has been the tip of the spear in the debunking of religion and religious faith. In the sociological imagination, it is man who creates God,

not the reverse, just as Feuerbach taught. Once you free yourself from God and all human institutions that honor God, anything is possible, or at least appears to be.

Sociological Man, having rejected his transcendent origin, understands himself to be a purely historical or sociological being. As such, he can only know himself as society knows him, and he can only value himself as society values him. Alienated from his Creator, condemned to thinking of his life as bound entirely by history and society, Sociological Man has no idea who he truly is, where he came from, or where he is headed. He is at the mercy of society, be it the society of the sandbox, the junior high school, the college campus, the corporate boardroom, the fashion industry, or social media. What is sold as freedom turns out to be enslavement to society and the elites who control it. Atheist-humanist sociology is just another one of modernity's false promises.

With atheism entrenched in the discipline, Comte and Feuerbach are no longer needed and today are not much read. Marx, however, continues to inspire. Sometime in the 1990s almost everyone had come around to accepting that the purpose of sociology is not merely to understand society but to *change* it, as Marx had declared in his earliest philosophical writings. Once you abandon the pursuit of truth, the pursuit of power is all you have left.

Inspired by this Marxist philosophy, sociological knowledge is evaluated based not on its truth Value but on its utility. It no longer matters, if it ever did, ~ your claims are true against any ahistorical objective standard, the impossibility of which is now assumed: what matters is that your sociological knowledge contributes to "social justice," principally by eliminating all social and economic inequalities, which are always and everywhere evil—except, of course when it comes to dividing up faculty salaries, at which point, a merciless meritocracy is established.

After 50 years of propagandizing in the universities, it should not be surprising that the Marxist philosophy animating sociology

and other field: has made its way into the broader society, including mainstream political parties, and even the corporal world. Of late we have seen major companies use their considerable economic power to propagandize and, when necessary, bully employees, customers and state legislatures into complying with what ever "progressive" cause is currently fashionable. Of course, we have reason to suspect that, in at least some cases, the ideological commitment of these companies is not entirely pure. As Clay Routledge, a North Dakota State psychology professor, put it, "We are now living in an age of woke capitalism in which companies pretend to care about social justice to sell products to people who pretend to hate capitalism.

As mentioned above, ideologies such as atheistic humanism are the result of disordered thinking, so let's look a little more closely at the roots of this disorder. We have minds to know what is real, what is true, what is *out there* independent of our minds. We are naturally open to the reality outside of ourselves that we did not make, that is *given* to us. But, of course, this natural inclination to be open to *all that is* can be perverted.

Ideological thinking, in contrast, involves denying the reality that is given to us and substituting an alternative reality of our own imagining. Seen against the purpose for which God gave us minds, ideological thinking is the work of a disordered mind, a mind that has turned away from the end toward which it is ordered by nature and nature's God. Writing in the 1930s, historian Etienne Gilson was alert to the increasing prominence of such disordered thinking among modern philosophers. He wrote:

There is an ethical problem at the root of our philosophical difficulties; for men are most anxious to find truth, but very reluctant to accept it. We do not like to be cornered by rational evidence, and even when truth is there, in its impersonal and commanding objectivity, our greatest difficulty still

remains; it is for me to bow to it in spite of the fact that it is not exclusively mine, for you to accept it though it cannot be exclusively yours. In short, finding out truth is not so hard; what is hard is not to run away from the truth once we have found it The greatest among philosophers are those who do not flinch in the presence of truth, but welcome it with the simple words: yes, Amen.

So, why do we flinch in the presence of truth?

What compels an otherwise healthy mind to refuse what is given to it and seek a substitute? The answer is that we turn away from what is given to us precisely *because* it is given to us, because we are unwilling to accept the gift. Why do we refuse the gift? We refuse it because to receive it means acknowledging that we are beholden to the giver, and therefore obliged to express gratitude, even to honor and praise. To accept the gift is also to admit that there is something we *need* that we cannot give to ourselves. To accept the gift is to acknowledge that we are not autonomous but are dependent on the giver.

Thus, the disordered thinking that leads us to atheist humanism is the result of a *spiritual* disorder, a disorder of the will, the decision to deny who God is, who we are, and what that means. The disordered thinking of atheist humanism is ultimately rooted in the denial of the most fundamental of all realities: *There is a God, and I am not Him*. Ideological thinking is what we do to create an alternative reality in which this truth can be denied, a reality in which there is no god but me. Philosopher Eric Voegelin succinctly captured the descent into atheist humanism. He wrote that its aim is:

to destroy the order of being, which is experienced as defective and unjust, and through man's creative power to replace it with a perfect and just order. Now,

however the order of being may be understood ... it remains something that is given, that isn't under man's control. In order, therefore, that the attempt to create a new world might seem to make sense, the givenness of the order of being must be obliterated; the order of being must be interpreted, rather, as essentially under man's control. And taking control of being further requires that the transcendent origin of being be obliterated: it requires the decapitation of being - the murder of God.

Atheist humanism begins in murder and ends in tyranny. Man denies God only to make himself a god and enslave other men. It cannot be otherwise. The social revolutionary assumes for himself the necessity and the obligation to fix what is broken in man and society; all he needs is the power to do it. As such, he is a tyrant in the making, a danger to himself and others. And to the extent that he fails to get the power he needs, and the world continues to disappoint him, he seethes and rages at the failure of Heaven to arrive on earth on time and under his command. As long as he remains in the grip of this disorder, pray that he never gets any real power beyond the sociology department.

I won't go into great detail about my years as a pseudo-Marxist sociology professor, but thank God I eventually gave it up. My failure, I've since come to understand, was thanks to my Catholicism - a faith I tried to abandon. It turns out that growing up with an Irish Catholic mother and grandmother, the *Baltimore Catechism*, eight years at st. Francis de Sales Catholic School, and half a dozen years as an altar boy are not really things you can easily ignore. In my case, it turned out to be impossible. But for many years, and for no good reason, I tried very hard to be someone other than who I am, and as a result, I was

uncomfortable and spiritually "restless," in the way of St. Augustine.

As a young man, I thought that happiness was to be found in freedom from God and the Church. Only later did I realize that outside the faith there is no inherent meaning to life, let alone true freedom or true happiness. Outside the faith there is only enslavement to sin and the lies we manufacture to justify our sins. As a sociologist, I spent my days "dreaming of a society so perfect no one would have to be good," as T.S. Eliot so perfectly put it. But from the Christian perspective, the condition of society is rather beside the point. A man can gain eternal life in the worst society and lose it in the best. I also spent my days arranging people into social hierarchies, categories, and classes - as if people were reducible to those categories, as if those categories were real. But as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reminded us, the line between good and evil runs not between categories but through each and every human heart.

About the time I gave up pretending not to be a Catholic, I reached out to the late Fr. James V. Schall, *S.l.*, who wrote at length in these pages. After he got to know me a bit, he told me, in essence:

Staples, enough screwing around, get to confession, and then to Mass. That's where you belong. He was right about this, of course, as he was about so many things. He was a dear friend to me, and I ask you to join me in praying for the repose of his soul.

I was a poor Marxist, but I turned out to be a pretty good Catholic. In recent years, I have read everything I should have been reading, and I discovered that I already knew it, not in my mind, but in my bones. The reading only confirmed it. So, it seems, I was never anything but a Catholic. And so, I now teach RCIA classes, help at the local Newman Center, and write for Catholic publications. This work is more satisfying than anything

I ever did in sociology, and I would probably do more of it if the Lord hadn't given us golf, bourbon, and cigars.

I am happy to report that soon after I returned to Mass, my wife - who is half-Jewish and was, at the time, a non-practicing Buddhist - joined me, and soon she started going to Mass without me. Eventually, she was baptized and we were married in the Church. Not long after that, my daughter was also baptized and married in the Church. Now you know why I'm delighted the Marxism thing didn't workout!

So, I am done worrying about society and where it is headed because where it is headed is nowhere, no matter where it ends up. As Msgr. Alfred Newman Gilbey, a onetime chaplain at Cambridge's Fisher House, wrote, "We are not led to undo the work of creation or to rectify the Fall. The duty of the Christian is not to leave the world a better place. His duty is to leave this world a better man."

Toward that end, all I ask of society is to be left in peace to practice my faith and share it with all who have ears to hear. But, as we are learning, this is too much to ask. Today, Christians are being persecuted in our own society simply for being Christians, for refusing to accept as true what is not Atheist humanism is behind this persecution, behind the efforts to destroy anyone who refuses to accept the view that man's law is the only law, and that the laws should reflect what the majority of men want, whatever that might be.

Though I recognize a legitimate right to defend our religious freedom under our Constitution, I do so without illusions, without any expectation of lasting success, because I no longer can put much faith in a democracy such as ours, which is increasingly untethered from any transcendent norms. Moreover, even if we win a battle here and there, we shouldn't convince ourselves that any such victories are more than temporary. As the late Dale Vree, founding editor of the NOR, once wrote, echoing T.S. Eliot, "There

are no lost causes because there are no won causes. We have no right to expect to win anything in this world; all we can do is bear witness."

Yet, as Christians we do not lose hope because society might decay and die, any more than we lose hope because we ourselves will surely decay and die. Our hope is transcendent; our final destiny lies beyond this world. As philosopher Josef Pieper wrote, "Never can the natural man say as triumphantly as the Christian, 'Things will end well for me.' And never can the hope of the natural man hope for such an end as that of the Christian."

This hope of ours is rooted in the belief that there is an all-powerful, all-loving, and eternal God at the center of things, and that He sent His only Son to save us "from our sins and lead us back to Him. This, of course, is astonishingly good news to hear in a fallen world such as ours. Sadly, there are many among us who refuse to listen. Either they don't think they need saving or they believe they can save themselves, perhaps by perfecting society. But as Catholics we are not to be fooled by such dreams and schemes; we know we will only be saved through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the truth to which we must witness against the false promises of atheist humanism and all other ideologies.

Clifford Staples is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of North Dakota and a Faculty Associate with the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life at Franciscan University of Steubenville. His articles have appeared at TheCatholicThing.org, TheChristianReview.com, and CatholicExchange.com. This article was originally delivered as a lecture to the Cleveland chapter of Legatus on March 20.