

Fr. Perozich comments —

I once saw a poster that said, “It’s my opinion, and it’s very true.”

This might apply to the thinking of many in church, politics, education, “science”, medicine, social engineering, and other structures that form our outlook.

James Kalb addresses this. Here are some quotes from the article:

- ***The resulting emphasis on man’s power over things has led people to view the social order as something they can change as they wish.***
- ***So the project in its usual form calls for a small independent group to mold the larger society in accordance with its own wishes, disregarding what people in general want.***
- ***The effort seems especially likely to fail if it is based on misconceptions and involves force and fraud, as is very often the case.***
- ***Viewing the social order as an intentional construction has consequences. One is the idea of society as an actor that defines arbitrarily who people are. Whatever someone’s situation, it’s something we did to him.***
- ***Another effect of the belief that people have an open-ended ability to remake society to serve their purposes is that the satisfaction of individual preferences becomes the highest good.***
- ***Things and their value become what people decide they are, and each of us acquires, as the Supreme Court says, “the right to define [his] own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”***
- ***individual morality disappears in favor of “social justice” as now understood—the aspiration for a social order that delivers equal satisfaction to everyone regardless of his situation and scheme of values.***

- ***The consequences are all around us. Social justice warriors grow increasingly extreme.***
- ***it leads them into a new sort of religion, one in which subjectivism becomes the new absolute.***
- ***Under such circumstances, people don't talk about dogma. Instead, they talk about Catholic traditions and practices and what they mean for them and how they can be tailored to individual and social needs. And the sacraments are reduced to personal spiritual practices, like yoga classes at the local health club.***
- ***Making a fuss about confession and last rites for the dying in the midst of an epidemic would violate the conventions of secularism, and that would make Catholic leaders look bad in the eyes of people they want to impress.***
- ***social justice. So leading churchmen insist strenuously on causes that governing elites care about, like global governance, social management, and the free movement of labor. If the world those causes point to would be hard to distinguish from control of all social life by those same elites, so much the better.***
- ***The alternative to such a regime, we are told, is exclusion, injustice, poverty, and violence. That is the institutional consensus, so respectable people—almost by definition—agree it must be right.***
- ***The result for many Catholics is an inability to distinguish the Kingdom of God from global technocracy.***
- ***Politics and reform may be important, but they cannot transform our basic situation. For that something much greater is needed. And that is the point of the Catholic faith.***

Social justice as a religion

Too many Catholics are unable to distinguish the Kingdom of God from global technocracy.

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Print



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Last month **I noted** that modern people are impressed by the power of technology, industrial organization, and the managerial state. **The resulting emphasis on man's power over things has led people to view the social order as something they can change as they wish.** If we can put a man on the moon, people ask, why can't we abolish war, poverty, and inequality?

The line of thought raises difficult questions. If we reconstruct society, who is the "we"? "Society" means all of us,

who are mostly doing what we think good already. **So the project in its usual form calls for a small independent group to mold the larger society in accordance with its own wishes, disregarding what people in general want.**

That sounds like dictatorship by a revolutionary vanguard. Wouldn't it be better to persuade people to change their habits and goals—if that seems beneficial to them—so that changes come more organically? Also, does experience really bear out the idea that something as complex as the network of human social relations can be remade any way someone wants? **The effort seems especially likely to fail if it is based on misconceptions and involves force and fraud, as is very often the case.**

Viewing the social order as an intentional construction has consequences. One is the idea of society as an actor that defines arbitrarily who people are. Whatever someone's situation, it's something we did to him. So people who own sleazy nightclubs aren't marginal characters any more, they are "marginalized." Women aren't physically attractive to men, they are "sexualized." And juvenile delinquents aren't delinquent, they are "at risk," "justice-involved," or even "criminalized"—that is, defined arbitrarily as criminals.

That way of speaking sometimes raises issues worth considering. If a great many people are breaking the law, we should ask how that comes about, and whether something can be done about it. And constantly emphasizing sex in entertainment and advertising distorts a side of life that requires restraint and tact, so why not try to find a response?

The sensible response to such situations, though, is not to claim that crime and sex are arbitrary social constructions. It does no good to say, for example, that sexual desire is something you can browbeat out of young men, or that concern about provocative dress is an example of the sexualization of women's

bodies that leads to rape culture. Such claims deny human life as it is, and make it impossible to deal with sensibly.

Another effect of the belief that people have an open-ended ability to remake society to serve their purposes is that the satisfaction of individual preferences becomes the highest good. We are social beings, and our ideas of good and evil are closely tied to our social setting. That's one reason Catholics need to be part of the Church. But if our choices create the social world, why wouldn't they create the standards for judgment within that world?

That line of thought leads to subjectivism and the abolition of personal responsibility. **Things and their value become what people decide they are, and each of us acquires, as the Supreme Court says, “the right to define [his] own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”** Since our choice gives these definitions their value, and each of us equally chooses, each definition has equal standing. Each of us thus defines his own truth and his own right and wrong—which very likely justify everything he does.

Morality thus comes to accept that each of us lives in his own world, with each world having equal status. The one remaining personal sin is failure to support that principle. The result is that **individual morality disappears in favor of “social justice” as now understood—the aspiration for a social order that delivers equal satisfaction to everyone regardless of his situation and scheme of values.**

The consequences are all around us. Social justice warriors grow increasingly extreme. If you say a man who says he's a woman is still a man, people are outraged and try to destroy your life. You want to make someone disappear, they believe, since you deny the reality of what he defines himself to be. So why shouldn't you be made to disappear?

Not surprisingly, that outlook affects religion. It doesn't abolish it, since people always have some understanding of what's real and important that guides them in what they do. Instead, **it leads them into a new sort of religion, one in which subjectivism becomes the new absolute.**

In that updated religion, contemplation of ultimate reality disappears, because each makes up his own. Speaking about truth becomes oppressive, because it's considered a matter of forcing one's ideas on others. So concern for doctrine vanishes. Religion becomes a matter of morality and psychological self-care, with pastoral support from the clergy. The one remaining doctrine is universal acceptance—encounter, accompaniment, inclusion, support, and so on. And proselytism becomes blasphemy, since it's a rejection of what the faith of the other makes sacred.

Under such circumstances, people don't talk about dogma. Instead, they talk about Catholic traditions and practices and what they mean for them and how they can be tailored to individual and social needs. And the sacraments are reduced to personal spiritual practices, like yoga classes at the local health club. Some people are into them, but they don't matter in the serious practical way bicycle shops and liquor stores do—not to mention Tinder, Bumble, and Grindr, which (Dr. Fauci **seems to believe**) have the dignity that comes from their centrality to the fundamental concerns of life.

So why keep the sacraments if they might cause problems? Our higher pastors, who don't like to make problems or annoy people, usually don't want to dispute the point. **Making a fuss about confession and last rites for the dying in the midst of an epidemic would violate the conventions of**

secularism, and that would make Catholic leaders look bad in the eyes of people they want to impress.

Instead, image-conscious higher-ups emphasize the need to build what counts as social justice. So leading churchmen insist strenuously on causes that governing elites care about, like global governance, social management, and the free movement of labor. If the world those causes point to would be hard to distinguish from control of all social life by those same elites, so much the better. Justice, after all, requires guardians, and what better guardians than Bill Gates, the *New York Times*, the Democratic Party, and the UN?

Catholics who reject those positions are considered hypocrites. After all, didn't Jesus say "judge not"? Wasn't he a refugee? Didn't he emphasize concern for the poor, and outreach to prostitutes and crooked businessmen? And today doesn't all that mean getting rid of boundaries and traditional social and moral distinctions, replacing them (since some way of organizing society has to replace them) with a global regime that manages everything and looks after all human concerns?

The alternative to such a regime, we are told, is exclusion, injustice, poverty, and violence. That is the institutional consensus, so respectable people—almost by definition—agree it must be right.

But should Catholics be respectable?

The past sixty years have seen great efforts to present the Faith in ways consistent with present-day thought. But the ways of thinking that are taken seriously today are defective, because they sacrifice adequacy to effectiveness. They identify knowledge with modern natural science, and rationality with technology. That makes it impossible to discuss life as it is. All we can discuss is what people want and how to get it, along with abstract

standards like efficiency and equality. **The result for many Catholics is an inability to distinguish the Kingdom of God from global technocracy.**

But that's no good. The Catholic faith and our own experience tells us that the world is more complex—at once grander and more miserable—than such conceptions allow. We don't make ourselves, and can't redesign ourselves, because we are neither gods nor industrial products. **Politics and reform may be important, but they cannot transform our basic situation. For that something much greater is needed. And that is the point of the Catholic faith.**