

Fr. Perozich comments —

Larry Chapp's article below was not an easy read for me. Permit me a distillation of the essence of the article for Christians and a borrowing of a point from a sports article to underscore the essence.

Essence — The modern saint is called upon to bring heaven into that hell so many are experiencing today, in order to conquer it from within and to thereby transform it through its power of Christ. — Larry Chapp

When you misidentify your real opponent and latch on to the wrong motivation, it's not surprising when you come out of character, abandon your identity, and perform poorly. — Jason Whitlock

Heaven is unity with God. Hell is separation from God

Man was created for heaven. Through the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are allied with him experience it. Wis 2.

Mary was told that her son by the Holy Spirit would be named Jesus because He would save us from sin: his character, identity, motivation.

At His ascension to heaven he told his disciples then and us now to baptize and teach all He taught, with clarity and without ambiguity.

The devil is at work in the world to separate souls from God. Many are in hell while still in the flesh because they have chosen separation from God's truth in order to seek power, possessions, and prestige right now, a gift of the kingdom of Satan to those who bow down and worship him.

They serve the gospels of climate, sexual license, diversity, equity, inclusion, globalism, racism, environment, perverted versions of justice, fairness, equality, and rights.

These "many" are not concerned with salvation, and are also in the church preaching their new gospel from their father of lies.

Rather than save souls for heaven as Jesus taught, they have misidentified the Catholic Church and her proclamation of Jesus' teaching as rigid, backward, abusive authoritarianism, and now themselves offer moral laxity yet nothing about Jesus and salvation.

This has crept into the liturgy, prayer, sacraments, muting of the bible, and guidance in Christian life.

The devil is the **opponent**. Comfort and security are the **motivations**. **Identity** is what one feels. **Poor performance** in forgetting salvation is the result, thus leading souls to hell rather than rescuing them.

The nones have left the church because she offers worldliness which they can find anywhere, so why remain here?

I cannot leave the Church. The common priesthood by baptism offers me and all salvation and mission to conquer evils in the church, the world, and in individual souls with Jesus and nothing else. My ministerial priesthood elevates my obligation.

We Christians are "in between" but must hold tightly to Jesus with one hand, all the while reaching out with the other hand in truth to those who live in hell here on earth.

Holiness and the desperate need for saints “in between”

The modern saint is called upon to bring heaven into that hell so many are experiencing today, in order to conquer it from within and to thereby transform it through its power of Christ.

January 28, 2024 Larry Chapp



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A new **study** released by the Pew Research Center indicates that 29% of Americans now self-identify as having no religious affiliation of any kind. And only 63% of Americans identify as Christians, which is 12% lower than just a decade ago. This is just the latest indication of a trend in America toward greater secularity that has been fermenting in the wort of “The American Way of Life” for about a century or so. The situation in Europe is even worse as a broad and deep secularism has supplanted Christianity among the historic populations of old Europe even as Islam rises exponentially due to immigration.

Decline and boredom

What are we to make of this? We can start by acknowledging that this is nothing new. **The recognition of ecclesial decline in the West is now as old as Cardinal Newman’s sermons on the dangers posed to the faith by modern liberalism.** Along these lines, I have always been partial to the literary diagnosis of this same disease in the novels of George Bernanos. The reality of what we face was powerfully encapsulated in the opening page of his masterful 1936 novel *The Diary of a Country Priest*, where the young curé of Ambricourt, the saintly hero of the story, says, :

Mine is a parish like all the rest. They are all alike. ... My parish is bored stiff; no other word for it. Like so many others! We can see them being eaten up by **boredom**, and we can’t do anything about it. Someday perhaps we shall catch it ourselves—**become aware of the cancerous growth within us.** You can keep going a long time with that in you.

“Boredom” is a slippery term that can mean anything from the normal emotional fatigue that sets in when one is engaged in the drab duties of daily life up to

the deep existential acedia of one who has simply grown world weary and has become jaded to life itself. But I would submit that it is one of the two main reasons why millions have abandoned the faith. The other reason is the cultural memory of ecclesial evils. More on that in a bit.

The boredom that Bernanos is referencing is of a unique kind that is peculiar to **Catholic communities that have incrementally and silently abandoned faith in the sacraments as encounters with Christ. That faith has been replaced with a secular *simulacrum* [unsatisfactory substitute] wherein the outward form of the sacraments remains, while the inner life has been hollowed out and replaced with the banal ideology of a deeply channelized, and profoundly intolerant, cult of self-fulfillment and material well-being.** We see this everywhere in today's anodyne, suburbanized Catholicism now made safe for the culture of the cul-de-sac. Even **most of our churches built since 1958 look like those cul-de-sacs: round, self-referential, and aesthetically drab in their cookie-cutter, concrete brutalist minimalism, they inspire nothing and spiritually provoke even less.** Designed for liturgies which **seem designed to induce an anesthetized somnambulance** [sleepwalking], their wide doors of modern aluminum and tempered glass have **become the exit turnstiles of no return.**

Bernanos saw this malaise of boredom long ago. What he was pointing to is a moribund Catholicism that has gone to seed, like a dandelion long past its fruitful floriation [flowering] and which has dispersed its seeds into the buffeting winds. What remains may still be outwardly green but **it now has no discernible purpose.** And soon its greenery will be dead even if the roots remain. Thus, there is also an air of putrescence about this modern and bored Catholicism, with a lingering stench that is the telltale signature of dead things decomposing, in spite of **the**

deodorizing bureaucratic apparatus chanceries try to blanket-over the rotting corpse. As Nicholas Berdyaev noted, the spirit of **bureaucracy is the deepest inner voice of the modern soul and bespeaks a fundamental orientation to “control through management techniques” that is the Mark of the Beast.**

This boredom in the Church is the result of a Church which, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben points out, **has abandoned its eschatological “messianic time” of expectation of a supernatural inbreaking, with the purely immanent and horizontalist “time” of a de facto atheism in practice. It is a Church which bores because it is a Church that no longer communicates it actually really believes in anything. It is a Church that has embraced modernity’s worldview of pure immanence with a globalist ethic.**

Ecclesial sins, compromised witness

And then there is the reality of ecclesial sins which, despite numerous “apology tours” by various popes and prelates, remain deeply entrenched in the popular consciousness since none of the prevailing vices that caused these sins in the first place have been exorcised from the Church and now seem more regnant than ever but in a different guise. Certain images from the Church’s past have a staying power in modern consciousness that we simply cannot casually dismiss through a cheap apologetics that is itself a sanitized, tendentious, caricature of the Church. **Those sins and failures remain stubbornly embedded in the modern mind, rightly or wrongly, owing to the deep incongruity these images create between who the Church says she is and how she actually behaves.**

Nobody is shocked, for example, when it turns out that there are sexual abuses happening in a brothel. However, it is shocking

when those same abuses, among others, happen within a Church that makes the kind of claims for herself that the Catholic Church does. The Church, therefore, cannot easily shed the searing cultural memories of Inquisitions, burned heretics and witches, forbidden books, concordats with brutal dictatorships for the sake of ecclesial social privilege, clerical sexual abuse and financial corruption, Vatican resistance to modern democracy and the freedom of religion, and a myriad of lesser sins rooted in concupiscence which, though venal, only add to the **public perception of a Church whose claims for herself cannot be taken seriously.**

Furthermore, the Church can invoke “ex opere operato” [*sacraments, signifies that they derive their efficacy not from the minister or from the recipient, but from the sacrament considered independently of the merits of the minister or the recipient*] all she wants and can appeal to her Divine origin, which guarantees that in some real and mysterious way she will always be the Body and the Bride of Christ, but **it will all mean nothing to the denizens of our time and space since it will come across as a hollow posturing at best,** and at worst will appear as the wild gesticulations of an attention-starved, aging movie star whose former glory has faded into a pathetic nostalgia. If holiness in the Church is always a palimpsest hidden under an overlay of a pornocratic corruption [*sex, power, self interest*], it is hard to see how an average person can be expected to do the work required to restore the original image hidden under centuries of varnished overlays of mendacity and debauchery.

Caught between the boredom induced by a “Church on the move!” and the perceived preposterousness of the Church’s claims for herself, our culture and **our Church opts for the construction of superficial compromises.**

Saints living in the threshold

The way out of this mess is difficult to see and I have no insights to offer that are different or superior to those offered by many others. I therefore double-down on my repeated theme of sanctity in a deep cruciform, Christological form as the most profound answer that can be given. Therefore, **what we need are modern saints—but saints who can live within what Romano Guardini called the “threshold” between heaven and earth. It is that realm of the “in between” (*metaxis*)** spoken of by various modern thinkers, from Eric Voegelin to William Desmond. But, in this case, it includes as well the ability from within an eschatological prolepsis of heaven to also empathetically “participate” in the antechamber of hell that so many today are experiencing. **The modern saint is thus called upon to bring heaven into that hell in order to conquer it from within and to thereby transform it. The saint therefore cannot live “above” or “beside” or “underneath” this desolation, but must live through it to get beyond it and into the resurrection out of death that only Christ can bring.**

This kind of sanctity is no different than all others, in the sense that it is more art than science. Here we need to help of the poets and of literary giants like Bernanos. Because the Church’s decline is in large measure related to the decimation of a deeply spiritual form of imagination. We have failed to imagine that the truest source of our dismal cultural situation is a specific refusal of the theodramatics that undergirds our existence and defines the meaning of our existence and the meaning of history.

It is a refusal of the very category of spiritual “decision” as something critically determinative to any concept of a meaningful life and as something deeply consequential for purposeful happiness. The question of existential spiritual decision as the defining moment of any life in a constitutive way is dismissed as meaningless and even dangerous, and the God who proposes it to

us as a provocation is nullified by explaining it away as nothing more than a dyspeptic epiphenomenal fantasy generated in the heat of repressed anxiety and sexual desire. This is what we have failed to imagine and thus failed to see.

For example, **we are told incessantly by the modern ecclesial lords of accompaniment that we must speak in a language that people can understand.** But how cliché that sounds; how anodyne and boilerplate. **We are told that we must “meet people where they are today”. But “where” is *that* exactly? What does that even mean?** What if the person of today, existentially speaking, is nowhere? The pastoral problem we face in modern culture, after all, is that aggressive secularity, at its core, removes all binding addresses. We can knock on the doors but nobody is ever “home”. Nobody actually “lives” there anymore. We live not so much in a culture as in an anti-culture, which dissolves the ties that bind. Hans Urs von Balthasar noted the ambiguity we face in this regard with deep spiritual precision:

The slogan is much bruted about these days that we should try to meet modern man “where he is”. ... So severe is this situation that most teachers of religion ask, with equal justice, just who these ruins are whom we should try to “meet” (against their will!) “where they are”. A missionary ... has it relatively easy: he encounters a perhaps primitive *anima naturaliter christiana*. ... But where is the famous “point of contact” with the *anima technica vacua [empty technological soul]*? I for one certainly do not know. Some table-rapping, a séance or two, some dabbling in Zen meditation, a smattering of liberation theology: enough. (*Epilogue*, 10-11)

What Balthasar is affirming here is that **there is very little in the way of a “point of contact” between the Gospel and a vision of life grounded in a vacuous technocratic and**

soulless paradigm. We must choose and the refusal to choose is a choice—a choice for the non-meaning of the very proposition and a choice for the nullification of the God who proposes it. **It is a choice to drift with the culture of the *anima technica vacua* or the culture of Christ’s Kingdom.**

Christ or nothing

Put into eschatological categories, **what we are confronting in the world today is a theodramatic confrontation wherein there is an increasingly visible prolepsis of heaven and hell playing out in a conflict in the souls of every one of us. And its resolution can only come about Christologically, since only Christ can be that “point of contact”.** This much modernity has laid bare and made increasingly clear.

It is Christ or it is nothing. And it is in the threshold between Christ and nothing that the saint must live since Christ is the bridge that alone can cross that threshold.

This then is the true “accompaniment” that we need today to combat the decline all around us. The accompaniment of one who, in Christ, can bring a foretaste of heaven into the domain of those in the grips of Hell’s shadow. We can lament the decline we see, or we can chase after those who are fleeing, like the shepherd in search of lost sheep. And by “chase” I mean the pursuit of friendship in a high spiritual tonality. **We must be able to live in the “in between” and to bridge it in Christ.** This is the time of the poets who speak the language of paradox but in the concrete singularity of real things. Long gone are the Baroque Romantics. What a pity. But perhaps our own era may yet generate a new

form of the sanctified romantic. For only such saints can make Christianity weird again.

Here is where I find Pope Francis to be both unbelievably attuned to the need for the Church to move out of itself and into the ***metaxu* of engagement with our world (the Church as field hospital)**, but also unbelievably obtuse as to what this means or how it is to proceed. **His response seems to hinge on emphasizing the path of empathy with those, because of sin, who are in the prolepsis of hell, but without bringing along heaven as a restorative remedy. He has lost the Christological point of contact and has opted instead for the mythology of modern globalism and moral latitudinarianism as the “true empathy”.**

As such, this papacy represents to me one of the greatest missed opportunities in the modern Church. What could have been a papacy of energized lay sanctity for the sake of the world out of the heart of the Church became instead a papacy fixated on a quasi-Marcionite theology that pits the angry God of doctrines and commandments against the “kind” God of antinomian love.

And that is a shame. It is a shame because **it gets the diagnosis correct, but not the prescription.**

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