

# Conservatives Clinging to Christ

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*The Catholics I know cling not to the past but to Christ, the truth of whose life and message may most reliably be found in those very “dogmatic boxes” we’re now expected to climb out of.*



[Regis Martin](#)

Why does the pope think so poorly of us? Conservative Catholics, that is, whom he maligns on a regular basis, accusing us, as he did most recently in an interview on 60 Minutes, of being “closed up inside a dogmatic box.” We’ve got this “suicidal attitude,” he tells us, the result of forever clinging to a dead past; and so we’ll never be able to move forward with the Spirit, leaving us with a future not of faith but of ideology.

Airing on the evening of Pentecost, the Church’s Feast of Fire, it may not exactly be the fire of divine love that some viewers were hoping to feel. And why that should be seems deeply puzzling since the pope’s approval rating in this country remains astonishingly high. Most Catholics, it would appear, genuinely love the pope, notwithstanding the fact that he doesn’t seem to like us very much; indeed, sees us more or less as reactionary boobs, so fixated upon a dead past that we’ve created this “climate of closure” in which being backward is all that matters.

Where did this caricature come from? Because it certainly doesn’t apply to the Catholics I know, most of whom cling not to

the past but to Christ, the truth of whose life and message may most reliably be found in those very “dogmatic boxes” we’re now expected to climb out of. It gets a bit confusing, doesn’t it?

And while we’re at it, where did this habit of drawing up indictments of whole groups of people come from? Whatever happened to the language of “Who am I to judge?” Does that only apply to some but not to others? Like the latest editorial in America magazine, flagship of Jesuit progressivism, pouncing on poor placekicker Harrison Butker’s speech extolling motherhood, calling it an example of “dead traditionalism.” Such an odd epithet, by the way, to apply to a vocation without which none of us would even have been born.

“We must love one another or die,” to recall one of many exhortations rattling around that dogmatic box we share. Are we now to be castigated as especially hidebound in drawing it out, clinging to its message? If so then we might as well jettison most of the New Testament, certainly the whole Pauline tradition, to use a word now seen as suspect.

So, by all means, let’s take an ax to the writings of St. Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles. Beginning perhaps with this passage, written from the inside of a Roman prison, to the Church at Ephesus, which he and Barnabas had pretty much evangelized into existence back in the middle of the first century:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4:1-3)

Where is the “forbearing in love” when it comes to people like us? Or am I missing something here? Maybe such exhortations no longer apply. Or that the list having been drawn up of approved recipients who already qualify, the rest of us are simply not on it.

Who, I wonder, decides these things? By what criteria are we to understand which categories are now beyond the pale? Because, as I see it, that would include a great number of perfectly ordinary church-going Roman Catholics, the ones who pray, pay, and obey.

In a moving and timely meditation I came across the other day in *Magnificat*, a prayer companion indispensable to those of us happily ensconced in Mother Church's great dogmatic box, Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., who once mentored a young student by the name of Karol Wojtyła, reminds us that it is nothing less than God's will that we bear with one another.

He does not want us to be scandalized or irritated with evil he permits. He does not want our zeal to be transformed into impatience or bitterness. And he does not want us to complain about others, coming to the point of being persuaded that the ideal is in us or at least that we love it while others do not. In short he does not want us to pray the prayer of the Pharisee.

How very strange that these days it is not only the enemy outside the Church we must suffer to love, despite his best efforts to destroy us, but fellow Christians on the inside, who seem no less determined to revile and reject us. And these are not just the ones railing against us on social media, for the most part desperate and inflamed laity laying claim to an ideal from which we've been excluded. But now they apparently have got the Holy Father himself in their corner, excoriating us for all sorts of antediluvian habits.

It hardly seems fair, does it? And the charge? It is good to remind ourselves of what it is we represent which has suddenly become so threatening to Pope Francis. It's called the Deposit of Faith, the defense of which is why we elect popes in the first place, counting on their leadership and support. But maybe that doesn't matter so much anymore.

What does matter, of course, and will continue to matter so long as we are joined to Christ Jesus and the Church He founded,

is the spiritual importance of bearing with one another, including even those bent on persecuting us. How else are we to comply with the Lord's command that we actually try and love our neighbor? "I do not pray for these only," Jesus says in John's Gospel,

*but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (17:20-21)*

This is why we suffer the insults along the way; why it is our task to bear the cross of incomprehension, offering it all as a sacrifice of praise. Because this is how Christ loves us. It is never easy turning the other cheek so that your enemy may slap you twice. But Christ asks it of us. And when it's the pope who's doing it? Show him with a smile that other cheek; and if he asks, tell him yours is not the cheek he should be slapping.

### Author



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