

Fr. Perozich comments —

Recently we priests of the diocese of San Diego received a letter from Cardinal McElroy advising us not to be the conscience for voters in this election, rather to help people to form their consciences.

He suggested the use of the bishops' document "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>.

The wordy document is something few will slog through.

Guidance from pastors is being restricted by church leaders who have their agenda.

Abortion, sexual license and marriage, cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and euthanasia are still not negotiable in my view.

Gun controls, diversity inclusion equity, racism claims, climate, ambiguity regarding immigration and other policies, usually pushed by socialists can be found in the document.

It gives cover for control of citizens by the government and by bishops allied with socialist politicians. In some ways, it does not pass the "bologna detector" for me.

While sounding "intellectual", it is more evocative of feelings.

*Author Erik Reed states **"This intellectual deficiency has left Christians susceptible to superficial interpretations and sensationalist claims, undermining their credibility in society."***

*He continues **"Discipleship has to include knowing how to properly read the Bible, interpret passages, understand theology, and discern how ideas in the world stack up against God's revealed will."***

Many lack a well-honed "bologna detector" that can discern truth from error, fact from conspiracy, and biblical ideas from mere human opinions.

I am weary of being propagandized, to push me in a direction of the person speaking.

For intellectual formation, I begin with the Bible and the Catechism. I bring it to prayer, and then deliver what I discern for me for my conscience to give people listening to my homily what God speaks to me as an example so that they can do the same.

How Christians can fight back against a world awash with deception

ERIK REED

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At a time when American culture is more ungodly and opposed to truth, the church is less equipped to deal with it than ever before.

Christians risk falling for anything when the church fails to cultivate sharp-minded disciples. **Many lack a well-honed "bologna detector" that can discern truth from error, fact from conspiracy, and biblical ideas from mere human opinions.**

This describes a significant portion of American Christianity right now, evident every day on social media as Christians share the latest conspiracies or claim to see biblical prophecies unfolding.

After the recent assassination attempt on Donald Trump, many such claims spread like wildfire online. Some linked Trump's bloody right ear to Leviticus 8:23, which mentions blood on the right lobe of Aaron the priest. Others referred to the time of the shooting — 6:11 pm — to Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

This isn't a new phenomenon.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Christians warned that barcodes used for commerce were the "marks of the beast" as described in Revelation 13:16-18. Many still believe microchips and other technologies are potential "marks." These claims and interpretations are not only incorrect but also make Christians appear unserious.

But why are Christians vulnerable to believing these ideas? How did we get here?

The church's witness and effectiveness hinge on our ability to think deeply, engage rigorously with scripture, and equip believers to stand firm in a world awash with deception.

For the better part of 2,000 years, Christianity grounded its identity on truth claims. Theologians and pastors labored to present the truth of God, as revealed in scripture, in a coherent, rational, and consistent form. Creeds, confessions, and catechisms emerged throughout Christian history as believers passed the principles of the faith to the next generation.

Christianity wasn't based on feelings. It proclaimed truth. It offered a comprehensive worldview on God, creation, humanity, sin, redemption, ethics, vocation, family, marriage, sexuality, and more. This is why Jude 3 says, "Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

There is a faith — with principles, precepts, and claims — that embodies the heart of Christianity. It is a faith delivered as a coherent whole.

Christians well-versed in the truth claims of the faith were marked by wisdom and discernment. Mature believers knew what they believed and could articulate their faith and defend it. They knew how to weigh claims and test them against the scriptures. This is why the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to be transformed by the renewing of their minds so they can discern God's will in various situations (Romans 12:2). He also says, "We destroy

arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Many Christians cannot do this today because Christianity in America shifted from a head religion to a heart religion.

This shift in American Christianity began during the Enlightenment period. As scientific advances occurred and philosophers spoke openly against Christianity, many Christians retreated from the intellectual arena. **Revivalist pastors led movements that stirred emotions but neglected the intellect.** Churches seeking to fulfill the great commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind forgot the last one. Feelings and experiences dominated American Christianity as biblical illiteracy spread.

At a time when American culture is more ungodly and opposed to truth, the church is less equipped to deal with it than ever before.

Many churches teach their people the basic gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection and the forgiveness of sins found in trusting Christ alone. However, they have not equipped them to face the challenges meeting them in the world.

This intellectual deficiency has left Christians susceptible to superficial interpretations and sensationalist claims, undermining their credibility in society.

The loss of intellectual rigor is not isolated to the church alone. The education system in America, particularly in higher education, refuses to make students participate in critical thinking skills. Diversity of thought has disappeared. The cultural shift in America promotes fragility and emotional reasoning over critical thinking.

Discipleship has to include knowing how to properly read the Bible, interpret passages, understand theology, and discern how ideas in the world stack up against God's revealed will.

Most churches are no different. They stir emotional responses to Jesus while neglecting the theological depth that would strengthen the faith and discernment of her members.

An example of this phenomenon is the popularity of Christian music. Many believers today are formed in their faith more by Christian radio than by biblical teaching and theology. Most prefer a music playlist to a book. They listen to feel-good, uplifting Christian songs that have strong melodies and catchy choruses but lack any substantive theology. The result is most Christians tend to have a theology as shallow as the music they listen to.

My worship pastor received an invite to join one of the major Christian labels in Nashville for a writing session. He told me after the session that he got his Bible out to help direct lyrics and ideas. One of the longtime songwriters commented, “Wow. You’re the first person to get your Bible out during a write.” That is the state of American Christianity.

It pains me to say these things. I love the church. Like the famous English pastor Charles Spurgeon, I believe the local church is the hope of the world. But the church will never be that hope until she returns to a robust commitment to loving God with all her mind.

The church must return to the formation of the intellect. Discipleship has to include knowing how to properly read the Bible, interpret passages, understand theology, and discern how ideas in the world stack up against God’s revealed will.

We need a revival of intellectual engagement in the church. Church leaders must advocate for disciplined study, logical reasoning, and deeper understanding of Christian doctrine and philosophy. This can be done by incorporating use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms back into our worship gatherings and discipleship efforts. If we fail to do this, Christians will be seen as emotional conspiracy theorists with empty heads.

The church's witness and effectiveness hinge on our ability to think deeply, engage rigorously with scripture, and equip believers to stand firm in a world awash with deception.

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