

A SIGNAL TO THE SEEKER: A FRIEND TO THE FAITHFUL

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Prodigal Europe

It is fairly commonplace to now refer to Europe as a “post-Christianity” culture. Is it? Based on our recent experiences, it is.

There are several reasons this development seems so ironic, but none more so than the fact that no other area of the world has as much physical evidence testifying to the faith of those from centuries past. Magnificent cathedrals, churches and monuments are everywhere. The rise of public education can be traced directly to the church. Governments are based on morals and beliefs established by Christendom — not the Roman Empire or the Germanic tribes or invading Norsemen — the Christian church. History’s greatest cultural and artistic achievements came from the church and cover the continent — they are interwoven into all that Europe is.

And yet, the faith is dying. Cathedrals and churches are largely empty on Sunday. Monasteries and convents can be found abandoned. A shrinking number of residents even bother to go to church for appearances.

Why is this?

We believe there are several possible answers.

First, of course, is the Enlightenment and the rise of skepticism about church teachings. Reason has, throughout the centuries, become a religion unto itself and offers a seemingly logical reason for everything.

We believe the faith of Europeans may be dying because of the continent’s very long history with the sciences. In reality, most of the world’s great scientific discoveries came out of Europe until recent decades when America took over that role. In other words, skepticism has been growing in Europe for centuries and skepticism is winning the race.

Reason partners quite well with science, and because virtually every scrap of science is now presented as “settled science,” it is an easy stance to take: The first time a peer-reviewed study is published, it is accepted by most as set-in-concrete fact. As a general rule, Christians rarely mock non-believers, but the opposite is not true. It’s far more appealing to may people to be on the side of the bully than on the side of the kid trying to be kind. Since the science and faith have been “fighting” on European soil for hundreds of years, it’s easy to see why the bully has gained so much ground.

One must also consider the loss of the church’s role in everyday life. Until a century ago, the church was the source of almost all altruistic work: Education, health care and welfare for the poor, the institution of marriage and, as mentioned earlier, the moral foundation on which Europe was built.

In case it is not obvious, the church is no longer needed for these things. The state has usurped these duties with a vengeance, dispensing them in the name of votes and power. Certainly one could claim the church used them for the same reason, but the argument must be viewed at the micro-not-macro level. i.e. Who would you rather provide you care in your times of greatest need — a nun sworn to a life of poverty and benevolence? Or a bureaucrat eyeing a government pension?

Interestingly, the most invoked phrase we heard while in Europe was, “The church has a lot to answer for.”

We’ve heard this before and if questioned about the statement the answer is usually vague and self-righteous.

Think of all the wars waged in the name

of Jesus! What wars? The Crusades for one. Good one. But that was a thousand years ago and was a response to Muslim invasions. Others? The invasions and genocide of the indigenous people of South America. That was about land and gold, not God. Wars about Christianity were fought for hundreds of years in Europe. Those were power struggles between rulers. The words Catholic and Protestant were used as the excuse, not the reason. Oh, yeah? Well, the church has a lot to answer for.

Anti-Christianity individuals seem to have absorbed an odd and uneducated view that, since its inception, our religion has been on some sort of violent crusade throughout the world, butchering and stealing from the innocent and unarmed. They turn a blind eye to the reality that billions of lives over thousands of years have been transformed.

Let’s be clear — many atrocities may have been committed by nations using the church to cloak the real motive and atrocities occurred between Catholics and Protestants in Europe, but such actions are defacto non-Christian. Using an American example, it is like a person pointing at the KKK and claiming they acted in the name of Christianity. A man can no more lynch an innocent person and be an actual Christian than a man can falsify research data and be considered an actual scientist.

The use of Christianity throughout the centuries as a strawman by royalty and madmen should be obvious to anyone with the ability to reason. We believe “The church has a lot to answer for” is simply a lazy excuse for a lack of education on the topic — especially when one looks at the tremendous good provided by the church since the Middle Ages.

Finally, one must ask the question, “Is this Europe’s fault? Have they been properly evangelized?”

According to Dr. Evert Van De Poll, the answer to that question is an absolute “Yes.”

In missiological terms, an “evangelized region” is where over 50 percent of the population has unrestricted access to an understandable version of the Gospel. Dr. Van De Poll rightly states that Europe has been evangelized many times over and it’s been going on for centuries.

He writes, “It is as if they are saying, ‘I know all about Christianity; in Europe we have seen a lot of it, but I prefer leaving it in the past. I appreciate the heritage of Christian art, I appreciate what Christians are doing for the poor and so on, but as for me, I’m not interested in joining a church.’”

All is not lost, of course. We do see God working in Europe. The team at Holy Trinity, Brompton, in London, creators of the Alpha Course, have reached and led to Christ tens of thousands of Brits and perhaps millions more in the industrialized world. And there are millions of believers still active in Europe, no doubt working tirelessly to win people for the Kingdom.

But the trends in Europe are currently in a nosedive towards the secularization of the Continent. Europe is indeed now a post-Christianity culture and the painful question is, “Does it matter?”

It should to us, because the American people have a great deal more culturally in common with Europeans than the people of the Southern Hemisphere, where the Good News of Christ is exploding with growth. Only by studying the failings of the Christian institutions in Europe can we learn from their mistakes and redouble our efforts to avoid the same fate.

Impulsive thinking and another path

We have all been a witness to a national discussion about temperament, anger-fueled commentary and how such writings and quips from talking heads have provided fodder for thought. Have such charged comments influenced harmful acts such as the shooting in Alexandria, Virginia? Can we draw such conclusions about why the Illinois gunman acted? Perhaps this situation has more fingerprints pointing at motive than most, as we learned about the shooter’s hatred of Republicans. This is an extreme situation — but we see various degrees of rage and riots and nasty behavior all over the country.

We step back and think about what truly influences us from various media sources — and that is a long list for many of us. We think about the bubbles surrounding our social media inputs, i.e. places like Facebook that are programed to give us more of what we like, often sealing out other

perspectives. When we do take measures to respond, we do so after what process? One deep breath? A walk around the block? When the stakes are especially high and the

Holy Spirit.

This world is full of strong-willed sorts, ready to pounce and fueled by egos gone wild. Our culture reminds us to think we have the power

When the stakes are especially high and the feelings are raw, do we step aside for true discernment?

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Scripture tells us again and again of those who have acted without praying and how disaster often results from going full steam without the Lord’s input. It is not always easy to discern a path but we never know unless we allow our hearts to be open to the guidance of His

to control our destiny, and our celebrities, in the vein of Oprah, reinforce this me-me-me driven approach. Christians are called to be different; our Bible guides us to think, pray and consult our church elders before heading out on course setting from which there may be no return.

Until a century ago, the church was the source of almost all altruistic work: Education, health care and welfare for the poor, the institution of marriage and, as mentioned earlier, the moral foundation on which Europe was built.

A new take on the 23rd Psalm

By Debbie Martinez

When I was a little girl, I remember vividly reciting the 23rd Psalm in Sunday School and then as I grew up I would read it from time to time but it wasn’t until my divorce that I read it with new meaning.

There were times during my divorce I wanted to act or say things that I knew God would not be pleased with but I wanted to do what I wanted to do for instant gratification. However, I knew that my way needed to be His way because He promised me he would have my back, restore me and deal with my enemies. I’m sharing my divorce interpretation with you in the hope that it will help you as much as it helped me.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (He will take care of everything in this divorce).

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures (He allows me to rest in Him); he leadeth me beside the still waters (He calms me).

He restoreth my soul (the hurt, the heart-break, mistrust will be healed): he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake (He helps me to do the right thing even when bitterness takes over).

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (death of my dreams and marriage, shadow of divorce), I will fear no evil (whatever my ex could throw my way): for thou art with me (He is beside me every step of the way); thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (they not only comfort but protect me).

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies (going thru a divorce you live your life in a fishbowl with gossips, those who are jealous and friends who turn their backs on you, so in reading this I took great solace knowing that He would turn this for my good): Thou anointest my head with oil (He loves me); my cup runneth over (He will restore me and give me

more than what I lost in all areas of my life).

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life (His promise to me): and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (going through the divorce strengthened my faith more than I thought possible).

Don’t let divorce shrink you; let it stretch you in your faith, your way of thinking, your strength and your actions and your ability to forgive.

Debbie Martinez is a certified Mindful Life Coach specializing in divorce, a Florida Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator, Florida Supreme Court Qualified Arbitrator, Parent Coordinator and trained in Collaborative Divorce both in Florida and South Carolina; she also writes for The Florida Villager and is a contributor to The Huffington Post. She may be reached via Debbie@transformationthrudivorce.com and her website is www.transformationthrudivorce.com.