COMPASS

What Should Christians Do? Road Trip

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https://youtu.be/ndFYFQ63LQc?list=TLGGdeGf7gfdoj4yMjAzMjAyMg

In 1492, Christopher Columbus tried to sail off the edge of a flat world. As we all know, he did this for a whole host of silly reasons, with his first name offering a clue to at least one.

Similarly, my wife and I like to visit college campuses, so in May 2019, on our way to a wedding in Chicago (and to interview PC Expert Contributor Deirdre McCloskey), we decided to spend two nights of our road trip on Notre Dame University's campus in South Bend, Indiana.

ND's buildings & grounds are uncommonly beautiful, but particularly its Gold Dome (Main Building), Basilica of the Sacred Heart, and football stadium (not to miss Touchdown Jesus). At the top of the Gold Dome sits an 18-foot statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus and the Lady of Faith. ND's founders believed education without religious and moral training could be dangerous, and, obviously, they did not have any problem following, even worshiping a women.

No doubt, Catholics everywhere and ND faculty, alumni, and friends since the school's founding in 1842 have poured their hearts, souls, and pocketbooks into this magnificent place. Such love and care shows itself everywhere. And yet, for reasons I believe sincere for some but still categorize as misguided subjectivity for many good reasons, certain Notre Dame students, faculty, and others have problems with Christopher Columbus being prominently displayed in the Gold Dome's hallways. The President and much of the administration resides there. Here are some of the pictures I took of the Columbus murals.

Columbus was a symbol of American cultural pride in 1776, when the murals were painted in the 1880's, and through my childhood and early adulthood in the 1950's through the 1980's. When Father Sorin founded Notre Dame in 1842, South Bend was imagined to be in the center of America's wilderness. No, by any standard, it was in the center of an actual and vast wilderness now called the Midwest. It was Father Sorin's dogged leadership and uncompromising faith and vision that led to ND's and the Gold Dome's creation and development.The world benefits from Columbus' and Father Sorin's bravery everyday.

However, as evident from the many attacks on statues, paintings, and traditional American names of buildings, streets, places, and even towns nationwide, Columbus now represents to

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many Americans racism, white supremacy, the patriarchy, sexism, slavery, murder, colonialism, imperialism, inequality, and even the early stages of class-based exploitative capitalism. Of course, there is the elite's "Critical Race Theory" articulating perpetual victimhood, systemic racism, and compensatory justice or reparations. These are phantom notions to many regular people today, who remember real racism when it was plain as daylight, up close and personal, and actually experienced regularly in a severe manner.

In other words, some today see Columbus as a good person and are grateful for his bravery and leadership, though we wish the world then was more like today, and others seem him as the leading progenitor of all the many "isms" we apparently suffer from now. Columbus can't win, and neither can America. Such an uncompromisingly negative view never seeks to understand the times. Though I believe human beings are deeply flawed, they have pursued the good in every known human society.

Clearly, we human beings choose our heroes and stories for our own purposes to suit our own time and place. In addition, we know that nations do not stand for long when they are severely divided or engage in self-loathing to an extreme degree. No one should delegate the right to judge to anyone else in such matters. It is just too important. You must investigate and imagine the truth for yourself. It is not much of an exaggeration to say America in 1492 and 1842 was almost nothing like today.

With this in mind, I'd like to serve up the question posed in the video above produced by the 360 Institute, *What Good is Christianity?* It offers a terrific introduction to much of Praxis Circle's focus over the next year.

It's definitely worth 7:34, especially if you've never thought much about the question – one surprisingly far from the historical narratives of today's public schools and universities. Where you end up on this question will tell you a lot about your worldview.

How others answer it is also an immediate worldview indicator.

An obvious related question: Is America a good country? Does it have a good history? Again, our growing impression is a positive view of America and the West is not what's being taught today in our schools nationwide at almost every educational level, whether public or private. Our educational system is highly diseased.

Alumni and friends of high schools and universities across the country have been no less than shocked about what has moved brazenly out in to the open nearly everywhere in just the last year, mostly the result of the BLM controversy. While historians can chop away around the edges of the 360 Institute video's themes, scholarship clearly supports them. Of course, such scholarship would include the writing and life's work of many Praxis Circles Contributors.

We believe that America remains a great country due to its still predominant CJC (Classical Judeo-Christian) culture supported by its Christian-based majority, whether believing, cultural, or libertarian. I would argue CJC values undergird all good Western values and even the good values of the radical elements who oppose it. To use a postmodernist term, any "genealogy" of these movements show this without any doubt whatsoever.

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In a sense, therefore, radical views represent CJC values run amuck, though I digress.

What's worse, a growing and powerful minority is attempting to push every last bit of Christian religion and culture and its supporting history out of the public square, consisting of schools, the media, entertainment, business, community involvement, and political activity of every sort. In addition, we see an accelerated tendency to subvert lawful and protected activity that supports liberty and equality with intimidation and violence. So far, America has simply absorbed the blows and waited for them to end. This can only last so long.

More specifically, the loudest, angriest voices are forcing once normal behavior and time-tested mores to the sidelines, often replacing them with corrupt, immoral, and criminal activity. Honesty in reporting and narrative has gone out the window. In other words, much of America has become downright hostile toward Christianity and the values CJC most treasures. These are the West's values, those values that have opened equality and opportunity to every group now claiming victimhood. In other words, the most extreme elements would not be free to subvert our culture without the freedom CJC has provided.

Those of us over 60 have been feeling this coming for decades – at least 30-40 years. Furthermore, we seem to be the only ones who have a frame of reference telling us we can welcome any truth, as we have always sought to do during our lifetimes, while still maintaining a positive view about the United States, its Founding, its history, and our critical place in the world today.

Again, it's gotten so bad in the last year during the COVID-19, China Virus, or CCP Virus Crisis (take your pick) that people are increasingly moving from the city to more rural areas and from unruly, corrupt states to those known for law & order and less government interference. We know that the nation's political differences are not so much state-to-state, as pockets of territory within states. Our largest cities are the problems and mostly basket cases due to corruption. What looked mostly like an economic trend or movement since maybe the 1980's from the colder, Northern Eastern and Midwest American states and then California to warmer Southern states across the nation has become now a full-fledged exodus from blue-to-red states or areas based on ideology.

And what some Red States and parts of Blue State locals are discovering is that this accelerating migration has been good for the economy and and has brought many wonderful people in recent years, but it could also be spreading the bad habits and corruption that should have been left behind. Such behavior involves a higher tolerance for dishonesty and intellectual hypocrisy serving only self-interest.

So, the key question most Christians are asking ourselves nearly everywhere: What should Christians do?

Of course, this is not a new question! It's one Christians have asked since the Resurrection. Christians certainly have no monopoly on moral behavior and are just as flawed by nature as any human beings. We have made centuries of terrible mistakes and continue to do so; maybe we just worry more as a group, but I kind of doubt it.

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In America, however, the big difference today, again, is that the Christian majority is being increasingly forced into a corner by an extremely aggressive-to-violent and largely atheist or strongly leftish Christian minority. I say left only because nobody on the right is asking to defund the police or suggesting laws not be enforced.

In sum, the purpose of this post is to offer a signal, as already mentioned, that this will be one of Praxis Circle's main areas of inquiry in 2021: What should American Christians do? Again, we certainly do not claim to have all the answers, but we have been following the discussion for quite a long time, and we will be offering the thoughts of respected others next year who are interesting and possibly helpful.

Our Praxis Circle Library is filled with books that address this issue, and the picture below offers a small, yet representative sample.

My own characterization of the past twenty years is that, since America was most concerned with terrorism from the Middle East and the Great Recession during the 2000's, it hasn't been until the last ten years that the issue of *Which way Christian behavior?* has regained center stage, last seen most prominently perhaps in the 1980's.

Granted, the authors below occupy a center to center-right position, but if one goes much farther left one moves into a Christian space where liberation theology tends to marry identity politics and blends into hating Columbus, Washington, Adams, Henry, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Monroe, A. Jackson, Lincoln, Lee, Grant, Douglass, B.T. Washington, and even MLK (in his early thirties).

I placed a thought leader Dr. James Davison Hunter of the University of Virginia at the top and to the side of the picture's small pile because he's been plugged in to this issue since inception, decades ago. His 1991 book *Culture Wars* is placed vertically to the right because it focused on our current situation at that early stage.

His most recent co-written book, *Science and the Good* (2018), is placed between *Culture Wars* and the horizontal pile because it sits at the nexus of the dispute between theism and atheism: Does science really have anything to say about morality? – BTW, the book's answer, to oversimplify, is No.

Dr. Hunter's 2013 book, *To Change the World*, is at the top of the stack because he, along with Ross Douthat at the bottom in *Bad Religion* (2012), foresaw the current times early in this last decade and tried to lead a discussion of self-examination and possible solutions.

While I can't speak for any of the authors highlighted above, I think it's fair to say that few thought 10 years ago that America could find itself in such a bad place today, perhaps likely to get worse before it gets better. The recent presidential election will probably just kick the can down the road, when we're running our of time.

All of the books propose solutions to the question, *What should Christians do?* To oversimplify again, those between and including *Bad Religion* and *To Change the World* examine a wide range of solutions from withdrawing from the public square into the private world to being more aggressive and more outward-reaching into culture, public institutions, and the political public

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square. The vast majority of Christians with the best of intentions create families, go to work to support them, live their lives modestly and privately, while hoping the country and the world stay on a good course.

Well, that really hasn't happened. Again, the question is why and what can we do about it.

As you would guess, each of these books approaches *The Question* from a different angle with contrasting assessments and visions of the future. In 2021, Praxis Circle will examine a full range of possibilities. Of course, there are many other books also suggesting solutions for Christians either completed or being written now, and Praxis Circle will consider some of them, as well.

Before moving on we want to mention Mary Eberstadt's book, *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies* (2016) shown above mid-pile. Mary is a Senior Research Fellow at the Catholic Faith and Reason Institute in Washington, DC. Mary is also a Praxis Circle Contributor.

At 128 pages, *It's Dangerous to Believe* is by far the shortest of the bunch, and her final chapter, "What Is to Be Done; or, How to End a Witch Hunt" answers *The Question* at a high level. On page 121 she gives a clue to her own orientation, citing what I will call a serious fact about early Christian history:

> Every age turns out people who follow their God, and who insist on listening to what they call "conscience" – even when acting on their beliefs runs against their self-interest; or what their supposedly "selfish" genes ought to be telling them what to do. Sooner or later the unbelievers among them will simply have to get used to it. It takes violence to separate the faithful from their gods, as the history of communism and Nazism shows. Other entries on the human ledger demonstrate the same . . . running through the twenty centuries of Christianity. Of the first 32 popes beginning with Peter, 32 were martyred – everyone until AD 314. That's another way to measure the persistence of theo-tropism: the fact that in every age, people die for it.

"How many popes were martyred in a row prior to 314 AD?" would make a great "trivia" question! Remember those few warnings in the early 1900's after almost 100 years of Pax Britannia? History is still repeating itself in new, inventive ways.

Mary's suggestion above is that all human beings have their idols – whether in the supernatural, natural, or ideological worlds – and that it's more a matter of where we place them and how we invoke them than anything else.

Who knows? Maybe we aren't far from the days of civil war between Christians again, reminiscent of the early Reformation? It's been said that we're now in a new Civil War, yet still a "Cold War" phase. Let's hope this is wrong, but it sure feels to many in Virginia now like Reconstruction II, but without the slavery, racism, discrimination, and segregation.

Of course, Mary Eberstadt and Praxis Circle certainly aren't recommending any violence, and we would very much hate to see more of it. Nonetheless, America is starting to feel like it's

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reaching it's whit's end, with the Right so far around here anyway having hardly lifted a violent finger in comparison to the Left.

I would like to end here by wishing you a Happy Thanksgiving with a hope you find a way to be with family, friends, and other loved ones. And I look very forward to the Notre Dame – Carolina (UNC) football game on Friday (11-27-20 at 3:30 ET on ACB), and just hope it's competitive.

We will continue during the Thanksgiving Holiday with a serious four-post series on how men remain most of the problem in society today, as well as a key to much of the solution. Your views on these matters will tell you quite a lot about what you think about yourself and human beings, but, particularly, about God.

PS – Please see the picture below of the top of Notre Dame's Gold Dome from the inside. Mother Mary looks down from above surrounded by angels and the Latin words *Naturalis* and *Moralis* (possibly meaning natural morals or law). Signor Gregori painted the inside of the Gold Dome, the Columbus murals, and the inside of the Basilica.

Also included is a picture of my wife, Beth, and me, on that May 2019 road trip from Virginia to the Chicago and Michigan wilderness, where we also visited the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and our friends Roscoe and Margie Brumback. Roscoe and Margie work for different multinational and middle-market manufacturing corporations and live on the farm Margie grew up on. Red areas of the country are filled with sophisticated people today who just happen to disagree with many in our cities on certain fundamental issues. In addition, Roscoe is a beekeeper on the side, and, most important, a daring, early on Praxis Circle Member Contributor.

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