

Holy Tuesday



Woe to You Scribes and Pharisees, James Tissot

Setting the Stage for Holy Tuesday

In the previous two Holy Week essays we have observed Jesus' confrontation with the religious authorities of Jerusalem. This confrontation will escalate on Holy Tuesday as Jesus excoriates the Scribes and the Pharisees exposing them as false shepherds while holding them responsible for the judgment that will soon befall the Temple, Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel. In this essay we will continue to make a connection between Jesus' words and actions and the prophecies of Ezekiel which were relevant not only to the First and Second Temples, but are also relevant to the Third Temple, that is, the Church.

The Scriptures of Holy Week convey a very different Jesus than that which is often portrayed in modern Christianity, whether it be the "Nice Jesus," the "I'm okay, you're okay Jesus," the "all dogs go to heaven Jesus," or whatever false images Modernist shepherds and churches may be offering their flocks these days. We have seen Jesus cleanse the Temple with a whip of cords, He humiliated the religious authorities in debates, and through parables He has called them unfaithful sons, wicked tenants, unworthy wedding guests whose kingdom will be taken from them and given to another while they are thrown into the outer darkness. Not a very nice Jesus; and He's about to get even tougher. Why is Jesus being so mean?

There is a misunderstanding in our culture about the nature of love— that it is "unconditional." This misunderstanding carries over to how we think about God's love for us, so that we've come to believe that God's love is unconditional. Sorry, its not. The Bible does indeed tell me that "Jesus loves me," as the old hymn tells us so, but scripture also tells me that I'd better bear fruit or I will be held accountable (remember the fig tree from Holy Monday?). And one more thing, if you're a shepherd you are going to held to an even greater accounting because "He who has been given much, much is required," and as a shepherd if you cause "one of these little ones to stumble it would be better if a millstone was tied around your neck and you were thrown into the sea." (Luke 17:2) So much for "all dogs go to heaven Jesus."

We should not think when reading the scripture for Holy Tuesday that Jesus was only talking to the religious authorities of His day. His words, like Himself, are eternal and are therefore applicable at all times, and in all places. Thus, when Jesus says, "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" remember He is speaking to all of us, but particularly to shepherds, not just the Scribes and Pharisees, but to every pastor, youth minister, deacon, elder, priest, bishop, cardinal,

patriarch, and pope. We who are sheep must remember to pray for our shepherds lest we, by our murmuring, complaining, and willfulness, cause our shepherds to become weary in their well-doing, and in a moment of weakness strike the rock as Moses did at Meribah (Num 20). We need to remember that Moses did not enter the Promised Land because of his disobedience, and neither did those who had murmured against God and Moses. As we will see in the scripture the sheep and shepherds often share the same destiny.

When I taught science it made a huge difference in my ability to teach when I had a class of curious and eager students, who applied what I taught in class in their homework, asked questions in class, and even challenged me to challenge them. It is easy to get sloppy as a teacher when you face students everyday that have low expectations of themselves. As sheep we need to ask ourselves what kind of students are we of our faith. Do we have low expectations for ourselves? God said through the Prophet Hosea, "My people perish for lack of knowledge." We can blame our shepherds or we can recognize that ultimately we must be the "first responders" of our own spiritual and intellectual development and be like so many of my student in public school who challenged me to be a good teacher we too must challenge our shepherds to prepare us for the kingdom of God.

Now that I've tried to put both the sheep and the shepherds in the spotlight, let's read the scriptures of Holy Tuesday. I've made some comments after each section of scriptures. To differentiate the scripture from my comments you will find that I have the scripture in italics while my comments are in a normal font and are indented underneath the quoted scriptures. When scriptures are quoted in my comments they are also indented.

Jesus Denounces the False Shepherds

Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples,² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;³ so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.⁴ They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.

Shepherds have authority to teach, but their authority is called into question along with the authenticity of what they teach when they do not practice what they teach. This is a scandal to the Church and to Christ and may lead the sheep to go astray or not be open to the call of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues,⁷ and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men.

Jesus likely encountered these same Scribes and Pharisees three years earlier in a Jerusalem when He asked them, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44) How does anyone, shepherd or sheep, come to seek the glory of men over God? Ultimately I believe it is a sign of a loss of supernatural faith that comes when we no longer believe that God will reward us in the life to come, so we seek that reward that comes from the acknowledgment of one another. Pray for our shepherds and ourselves lest any of us should hear from the Bridegroom, "I do not know you."

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren.⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.¹⁰ Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ.

Sometimes this verse is taken too literally. Is Jesus telling us not to call our natural fathers, "Father," or are teachers, "Teacher?" That would be ridiculous. He is telling us not to exalt them into a position that is only to be held by God. A good father or good teacher seeks that his child or student exceeds them in knowledge, and in virtue. In order for this to occur the good father or teacher recognizes his own limitation and therefore introduces them to the source of all knowledge, Christ, as we know Him in the Holy Scripture, Tradition, and the Church. Shepherds, parents, and teachers are God's gifts to the Church so that we all might grow into the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

¹¹He who is greatest among you shall be your servant;¹² whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

A Good Shepherd understands his role in the Church. He is like Christ who

loved the church and gave himself up for her,²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:25-27).

Shepherds, parents, and teachers are the friends of the Bridegroom; they must decrease so that the Bride might be holy and without blemish. (John 3: 25-30)

The Seven Woes

¹³ ***“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.***

Did they not want to enter the kingdom of heaven? I would think that they did and that they were confident that they would. Why didn't they? Perhaps they assumed that the way into the kingdom was broad and so they taught their disciples this also. Jesus taught His disciples a much harder truth:

¹³ *“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt 7:13-14)*

Shepherds must be careful not to fall into the modernist heresy of religious relativism, that is, that all roads lead to heaven. Jesus is the narrow gate and the way that is hard because it means picking up our cross daily. Sheep who hear their Master's voice must avoid shepherds who teach and preach that the gate is wide:

³ *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. (2Tim 4:3-4)*

Let us all work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

¹⁵ ***Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.***

What could be wrong with a shepherd going out of his way to make a convert? Is it because he traversed sea and land? May be it's because he just made a single proselyte? As far as the shepherd traveling to make a proselyte that would hardly seem to be a problem since Jesus commissioned all of us to make disciples of all nations and sometimes this requires traversing sea and land. And I don't think that the number of converts is the issue since Jesus had earlier given the example of the Good Shepherd leaving the ninety and nine to find and restore the one that was lost. I think the question that must be asked is, "Into who's image was the proselyte baptized?"

Let's face it, there are shepherds who seek and enjoy celebrity status. They like to tout how many souls they have won for Jesus, or that their books are best sellers, or may be that they are even popular with the "movers and shakers" of society. One has to wonder if the souls have been won for Jesus or if they are trophies that sit on the bookcases of these celebrity shepherds. And the sheep they have supposedly won for Christ are they still standing at the altar where they accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Have they been shepherded to become a mature men and women in Christ or are they imitating you, having been transformed into your image? Can they bear the cross God has ordained from them when they have not seen you carry yours? Will these sheep be able to withstand the fiery darts of the enemy when their shepherd has succumbed to them?

¹⁶ **“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If any one swears by the temple, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’** ¹⁷ **You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?** ¹⁸ **And you say, ‘If any one swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’** ¹⁹ **You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?** ²⁰ **So he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it;** ²¹ **and he who swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who dwells in it;** ²² **and he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.**

Shepherds who have lost their supernatural faith are like salt that has lost its savor (Matt 5:13). They value the human contribution to the natural, celebrate humanity and its societal progress, and no longer recognize that it is Christ Who incarnates Himself in us and His Church thus filling this natural realm with His Holiness and making it and us holy as He is holy.

²³ **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.** ²⁴ **You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!**

Often Christians are accused of being intolerant by the secular culture, and that we follow the “letter of the law,” but not the spirit of the law. Sometimes even shepherds join in this chorus of accusation! Enough already! Jesus has called us to walk and chew gum at the same time, that is, to follow both the letter and the spirit of the law. What is the “letter of the law” if not the words spoken by the Son of God Himself and He said that His words will never pass away. Let our shepherds invoke the Law of Christ’s and exhort us to carry out both its letter and its spirit.

²⁵ **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity.** ²⁶ **You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.**

²⁷ **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.** ²⁸ **So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.**

I can’t imagine that any young Jew considering a life dedicated to the study of Torah, Tanakh, and Talmud would ever think, “When I grow up I want to be a whitewashed tomb filled with dead men’s bones,” and yet, to those Scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus had just issued these “woes” somehow this is what they had become; they were incapable of recognizing this truth about themselves, and therefore, unable to repent and change. Scary isn’t it? I mean couldn’t that happen to any of us? We can know the right things and even do the right things, but still we miss it. It reminds me of an earlier encounter with the Scribes and Pharisees when Jesus quoted to them from the book of Isaiah,

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me....” (Matt 15:8)

The problem sometimes is not so much in the mind, but in the heart.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?
(Jer 17:9)

The heart can be a trickster; it often confirms what we want to believe about ourselves, and justifies our actions when we act upon the inclinations of the heart. The mind may be disciplined to reason, but often we allow our hearts free reign over ourselves. And to make matters worse we will tend to trust our hearts, even when our minds object. It is difficult to get a true image of ourselves. At best, we see ourselves (minds and hearts) in a mirror dimly.

¹² *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall*

understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. (1Cor 13:12)

What we need is intervention—divine intervention, in the form of Holy Scripture.

¹¹ *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

¹² *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* ¹³ *And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of **him** with whom we have to do.* (Heb 4:12-13, emphasis added)

The Scribes and the Pharisees were open and laid bare to the eyes of **Him**, our Lord Jesus. We too are open and laid bare to the eyes of the Trinity, but unless we have some direct visitation from God that encounter will not be face to face so then how will we understand ourselves as we have been fully understood by Him? I believe there are many ways that we can have these experiences with God, some of which I have been blessed to experience myself, but in this reflection on verses 25 through 28 of Matthew 23, I'd like to focus on just one, that face to face encounter with that special someone(s) who is qualified to "speak the truth in love" to us.

I'd like to take minute to give an example. God called King David, "a man after my own heart." (Acts 13:22) The scripture goes on to say of David, "he will do everything I want him to do." Well, that last part didn't work out so well, but when David made a mistake, and he made some whoppers, he was open and humble enough to hear the hard truth about himself which led to *metanoia*, a change of mind and heart.

I'm sure we all remember of the story of David and Bathsheba, and how one evening while on the roof of his palace he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing on the roof of her nearby home. He lusted after her, had her called to the palace where he slept with her and got her pregnant. Uriah, her husband, was one of the king's "mighty men" and ultimately David had him killed in battle to prevent the discovery that he had made Bathsheba pregnant. Then, after the death of Uriah, David took Bathsheba for his wife. Everything had worked out for David, that is, until Nathan the Prophet showed up. The encounter between the two is just too good for me to summarize so here it is below.

And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor."² The rich man had very many flocks and herds;³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared it for the man who had come to him."⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die;⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷ *Nathan said to David, "You are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul;⁸ and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.'⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uri'ah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites.¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uri'ah the Hittite to be your wife.'* (2Sam 12:1-10)

The decisive moment came after Nathan delivered the blistering word God had given him to deliver to David. What would David do? Would he reject it as the Scribes and

Pharisees would do a thousand years later with Jesus?

¹³ *David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." (2Sam 12:13)*

David was a "man after God's own heart" not because he did everything God told him to do, but because he was malleable to the word of God spoken to him. David had the heart to receive the "truth spoken in love," the Scribes and the Pharisees did not. Psalm 51 is David's prayer written after his encounter with Nathan; an excerpt is given below:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love;
according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*

² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!*

³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

⁴ *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done that which is evil in thy sight,
so that thou art justified in thy sentence
and blameless in thy judgment.*

⁵ *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

⁶ ***Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.***

⁷ *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

⁸ *Fill me with joy and gladness;
let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.*

⁹ *Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

¹⁰ ***Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.***

¹¹ *Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of thy salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psa 51:1-12)*

Beautiful, isn't it? I pray that I will have a heart like David that can receive the "truth in love" when it is spoken to me. But before this can even occur, there has to be that qualified someone to speak the truth, someone who knows me, who loves me, and has the courage to speak the truth to me. This qualified someone should be a parent, a spouse, or other family member; could be a friend, and I hope my shepherd.

Do we have shepherds who can still speak the truth in love? Has the "politically correct," hypersensitive, narcissistic culture made it impossible for shepherds to be the shepherds they need to be so that they can fulfill their ministry:

¹¹ *And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and*

upbuilds itself in love. (Eph 4:11-16)

Pray for malleable hearts and the stalwart shepherds who love enough to mold us in truth and love.

But what if a shepherd needs the truth spoken to him in love? The Scribes and the Pharisees are a good example of this not going well because of a proud and unmalleable heart. On the other hand, David, is a good example of a shepherd being confronted and it going well and considering that as the King of Israel he had the authority to throw Nathan into prison and have him executed (as with Herod and John the Baptist). Closer to home though, we are living in a time when Satan is battling the Church unlike any other time in history and the shepherds are on the frontline of this battle and sometimes they succumb to sin and even apostasy. Praying for our shepherds may not be enough and in these cases we must be prepared to speak the truth in love, and if you're a layperson you should probably expect responses like:

- Who do you think you are to talk to me like that?
- But what authority do you say these things? Did you go to seminary? Do you have an advanced degree in Scripture and theology?
- The role of the sheep is not to instruct the shepherd, but to be submissive to the shepherd.

I could go on because I've pretty much have had experience with all of these being said to me, more or less. Perhaps you know what I'm talking about, but I bet you've never been called a Nephilim—don't even ask. All I know is that I hated every time I felt compelled to "speak the truth in love" to a shepherd. I believe I genuinely go to a church with the intention of just grazing on the lush green grass of Word and Sacrament like all of the other good sheep. Why me? I hope I do this because I love the shepherds, the sheep, and the Christ's Bride, however, if it's because I am proud and have an unmalleable heart, then pray for me, please. I don't want to be a "whitewashed tomb filled with dead men's bones."

²⁹ ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,*** ³⁰ *saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’* ³¹ *Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

³² *Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.* ³³ *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell* ³⁴ *Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,* ³⁵ *that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechari'ah the son of Barachi'ah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.* ³⁶ *Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.*

I think we'd all like to believe that if we were living in Jerusalem back when Jesus was there that we would recognize Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. But lets imagine that we could go back in time just as we are now, 21st century Christians, to be with Jesus from Palm Sunday to today, Holy Tuesday. How would we respond? Remember, we are very different people compared to the first century Jews who had a rich cultural and religious tradition, and yet lived under the hegemony of Rome. Their expectations of the Messiah were quite different from ours, they wanted a Messiah who would free them from the oppression of Rome, not die for their sins. We'd also know the full context of the story, how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, that He would be the Passover lamb to deliver us from eternal death and separation from the Father, His establishment of the Church, and we'd also know the end of the story, that He will come back as King of kings and Lord of lords, and as our Bridegroom. We would certainly have the advantage over the Jews and the Jewish religious authorities in recognizing Who Jesus really was. Or would we?

We've accrued a lot of false images of Jesus over the past fifty to sixty years since the Modernism infiltrated the Christian West with an array of relativistic doctrines ranging from religious relativism, moral relativism, and even ontological relativism with its ever

growing number of genders, definitions of marriage, and rejection of personhood of an infant in the womb simply because the mother doesn't want it. How many 21st century Christians would be offended by Jesus' insistence that no man can come to the Father except through Him? What type of moral and theological gymnastics do 67% of American Catholics have to go through in order to imagine that when Jesus discussed marriage with His disciples He was including same-sex marriage? How would mainline American Protestants, about 40% who do not believe in hell, respond to Jesus when He said,

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many."

And going back to my church, over 50% of all White American Catholics support abortion in all or most cases. What! Jesus said He came to fulfill the entirety of the Scripture including that passage from Psalm 139 which says,

"For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb."

"Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees!" Perhaps we should not be so quick to judge those first century Jews for rejecting Jesus when we, the Church, have a log in our own eye. We who has been given much, much is required.

As we have been discussing since Palm Sunday, the prophecies of Ezekiel found their fulfillment in the First, and Second Temple with the destruction of the Temples, the holy city of Jerusalem, and the captivity and diaspora of the Jews. Now its our turn, the Church, the Third Temple, is looking down the barrel of judgment for the same sins of unfaithfulness, fruitlessness, and idolatry that Ezekiel and Jesus described for the previous temples; and like the Scribes and the Pharisees the shepherds of the Church will be the first, I am sorry to say, to be sighted-in. It is not too late, but we will need bold Nathans who are willing to speak the truth in love to those who may not want to hear and do not believe we have the right to say it.

Jesus Laments Over Jerusalem

³⁷ *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!*

This sounds very much like a reference to the parable of the wicked tenants that Jesus told the day before. (Matt 21:33-46). Jesus asked the people what they thought would happen to the wicked tenants who killed the vineyard owner's servants and son. They responded,

"He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." (Matt 21:41)

Jesus replied to them by reciting Psalm 118:

*'The very stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?* (Matt 21:42 & Psa 118:22-23)

Jesus had been warning the religious authorities that a day of reckoning was soon in coming. They would pay a terrible price for their recalcitrance. The kingdom of God would be taken away from Israel and given to the Church.

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him." (Matt 21:43-44)

Jesus had been speaking the hard truth to the Shepherds of Israel since He had begun His

public ministry. They, as shepherds of the flock of Israel, are the builders who rejected the stone, Who is Christ, and had Him executed on the cross. Yet, at His resurrection, the Father made Him the corner stone of the Third Temple, the Church.

It is upon Jesus, the cornerstone, that we must deliberately fall so that our wills, our ideas, and image of ourselves and of God, are broken into pieces so that these may be reassembled in Truth by grace so that we may be “conformed to the image of the Son.” (Rom 8:29)

How Jesus yearned that they would turn to him so that He might gather them as children to Himself.

How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

But they would not. Why couldn't they? The Jewish religious authorities would not come to Jesus because He did not match their expectation, the image they carried in their mind, of the Messiah. Their entire worldview had been constructed upon the assumption that the Messiah would come to deliver them, like Moses had done millennia earlier, from the oppression of their adversaries, and not the slavery of their sins. They were unwilling to fall on the stone that they rejected and the stone fell on them and they were crushed by it.

³⁸ *Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.* (Matt 23:38)

What house is Jesus speaking of that will be forsaken and desolate? He is not asked that question, but Jesus answers it shortly in the next chapter of Matthew:

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.² But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.” (Matt 24:1-2)

The Temple would be destroyed, along with the city of Jerusalem, many of her inhabitants with the remaining survivors sold into slavery. Why? The Jewish people, particularly their leadership, had rejected Jesus. This happened some forty years later in 70 AD when the Roman army crushed a Jewish rebellion. How bad was it? I have included the account of Josephus Flavius, the Jewish historian who had traveled with the Roman legions. It is a graphic depiction of destruction and slaughter. Why am I including this? When Jesus said, “your house in forsaken and desolate,” He meant it. Let us pray that Jesus never says that about our house.

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Excerpt from Josephus Flavius: Josephus' account appears in: Cornfield, Gaalya ed., Josephus, The Jewish War (1982); Duruy, Victor, History of Rome vol. V (1883). You may also go to: <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/jewishtemple.htm>

“...the rebels shortly after attacked the Romans again, and a clash followed between the guards of the sanctuary and the troops who were putting out the fire inside the inner court; the latter routed the Jews and followed in hot pursuit right up to the Temple itself. Then one of the soldiers, without awaiting any orders and with no dread of so momentous a deed, but urged on by some supernatural force, snatched a blazing piece of wood and, climbing on another soldier's back, hurled the flaming brand through a low golden window that gave access, on the north side, to the rooms that surrounded the sanctuary. As the flames shot up, the Jews let out a shout of dismay that matched the tragedy; they flocked to the rescue, with no thought of sparing their lives or husbanding their strength; for the sacred structure that they had constantly guarded with such devotion was vanishing before their very eyes.

...No exhortation or threat could now restrain the impetuosity of the legions; for passion

was in supreme command. Crowded together around the entrances, many were trampled down by their companions; others, stumbling on the smoldering and smoked-filled ruins of the porticoes, died as miserably as the defeated. As they drew closer to the Temple, they pretended not even to hear Caesar's orders, but urged the men in front to throw in more firebrands. The rebels were powerless to help; carnage and flight spread throughout.

Most of the slain were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, and they were butchered where they were caught. The heap of corpses mounted higher and higher about the altar; a stream of blood flowed down the Temple's steps, and the bodies of those slain at the top slipped to the bottom.

When Caesar failed to restrain the fury of his frenzied soldiers, and the fire could not be checked, he entered the building with his generals and looked at the holy place of the sanctuary and all its furnishings, which exceeded by far the accounts current in foreign lands and fully justified their splendid repute in our own.

As the flames had not yet penetrated to the inner sanctum, but were consuming the chambers that surrounded the sanctuary, Titus assumed correctly that there was still time to save the structure; he ran out and by personal appeals he endeavored to persuade his men to put out the fire, instructing Liberalius, a centurion of his bodyguard of lancers, to club any of the men who disobeyed his orders. But their respect for Caesar and their fear of the centurion's staff who was trying to check them were overpowered by their rage, their detestation of the Jews, and an utterly uncontrolled lust for battle.

Most of them were spurred on, moreover, by the expectation of loot, convinced that the interior was full of money and dazzled by observing that everything around them was made of gold. But they were forestalled by one of those who had entered into the building, and who, when Caesar dashed out to restrain the troops, pushed a firebrand, in the darkness, into the hinges of the gate. Then, when the flames suddenly shot up from the interior, Caesar and his generals withdrew, and no one was left to prevent those outside from kindling the blaze. Thus, in defiance of Caesar's wishes, the Temple was set on fire.

While the Temple was ablaze, the attackers plundered it, and countless people who were caught by them were slaughtered. There was no pity for age and no regard was accorded rank; children and old men, laymen and priests, alike were butchered; every class was pursued and crushed in the grip of war, whether they cried out for mercy or offered resistance.

Through the roar of the flames streaming far and wide, the groans of the falling victims were heard; such was the height of the hill and the magnitude of the blazing pile that the entire city seemed to be ablaze; and the noise - nothing more deafening and frightening could be imagined.

There were the war cries of the Roman legions as they swept onwards en masse, the yells of the rebels encircled by fire and sword, the panic of the people who, cut off above, fled into the arms of the enemy, and their shrieks as they met their fate. The cries on the hill blended with those of the multitudes in the city below; and now many people who were exhausted and tongue-tied as a result of hunger, when they beheld the Temple on fire, found strength once more to lament and wail. Peraea and the surrounding hills, added their echoes to the deafening din. But more horrifying than the din were the sufferings.

The Temple Mount, everywhere enveloped in flames, seemed to be boiling over from its base; yet the blood seemed more abundant than the flames and the numbers of the slain greater than those of the slayers. The soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased the fugitives."

* * *

Am I suggesting that these horrible events might have been averted had the Jews recognized Jesus as their Messiah? That if the Shepherds of Israel had been open to receive Him, to allow their assumptions and understanding of Scripture to be reshaped by His words, and to be humble enough so that they were not threatened by His authority or the love of the people for Him—Israel would have been spared this great calamity? Yes. Since Jesus said this would happen why should we be surprised when it did? If this is difficult to accept then perhaps we are having a problem squaring our image of Jesus with the real Jesus and this could have disastrous results for us as it did for the 1st century Jews. We are going to make the same mistakes the shepherds of Israel made if our image of the Messiah doesn't square with the Christ of Scripture. In the next Photo-Journal essay we will read that Jesus is answering the question, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" This will be the beginning of His Olivet Discourse, prophetic proclamations that are relevant not only to the Jews, but to Christians as well. Will we be willing to lay down our errant, modernist images of Christ for the Truth? What will be the consequence if we don't? Can we learn a lesson from the 1st century Jews?

³⁹ *For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'*" (Matt 23:1-39)

Yet in the midst of this desolation and forsakenness, Jesus, holds out a promise of restoration. In doing this Jesus once again quotes from Psalm 118,

*Blessed is he
who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
The Lord is God and has enlightened us.
Join in procession with leafy branches
up to the horns of the altar. (Psa 118:26-27)*

In many ways this sounds a lot like Palm Sunday when the Jews greeted Jesus when He entered Jerusalem, but Jesus is not talking about His entry into Jerusalem since that had already happened. Jesus is speaking about a future event, His Return in Glory, when every eye shall see him, even those who pierced Him:

¹⁰ *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. (Zech 12:10)*

The Jewish people will recognize Jesus whom they had pierced at Calvary, but this time they will rejoice and cry out, "Blessed is he whom comes in the name of the Lord." And all of Israel will be saved.

²⁵ *Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in,*
²⁶ *and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";*
²⁷ *"and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (Rom 11:25-27)*

Reflections

Kevin's Reflections: Ezekiel and God's Judgment of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Responsibility of Shepherds

The ideas we have been discussing above and throughout Holy Week thus far have revolved around six major themes in the Book of Ezekiel:

- The Unfaithfulness of Israel
- The Responsibility of Shepherds

- The Consequence of Unfaithfulness
- Restoration
- Judgment Upon the Nations
- The Third Temple and God Dwelling with His People

Ezekiel was writing about these themes in the context of the destruction of the First Temple, the Fall of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian Captivity. The Book of Ezekiel also includes prophecies of the Restoration of Israel, the Judgment of the Nations, and the Third Messianic Temple. Throughout His public ministry Jesus had also touched on many of these themes through word and action, especially in this last week where He makes explicitly clear what will happen to the Second Temple and Israel in the near future. Now, on Holy Tuesday, Jesus puts the spotlight on the Unfaithfulness of the Shepherds. Let us examine what God had to say about the shepherds of Israel through the prophet Ezekiel:

The word of the LORD came to me:² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep.⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts.⁶ My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

⁷ “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:⁸ As I live, says the Lord GOD, because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep;⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. (Ezekiel 34:1-10)

When I read I found myself wondering, “How did the shepherds of Israel think that they were ever going to get away with such abuse against God’s people?” Unfortunately, I am reminded of the shocking abuses of the sheep physically, financially, and spiritual by the shepherds in my own Roman Catholic Church. I understand that the Pope does not want the laity to talk about this terrible scandal in the Church, but I have come to the conclusion after much reflection and prayer that I cannot be silent. I am going to give just a brief summary of the situation in the United States Catholic Church as it stands now in April of 2019. I have obtained most of this data from the website: [bishop-accountability.org](http://www.bishop-accountability.org).

- In May of 2017 the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) they reported 18,565 victims of sexual abuse. (http://www.bishop-accountability.org/AtAGlance/USCCB_Yearly_Data_on_Accused_Priests.htm#table)
- According to USCCB data released in June of 2016, 6721 priests have been abused on sexual abuse. There have been forty bishops in the United States accused of sexual misconduct, the most infamous being former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. (http://www.bishop-accountability.org/AtAGlance/USCCB_Yearly_Data_on_Accused_Priests.htm#table)
- The Catholic Church in the United States has paid out nearly \$5,000,000,000 (yes, that five BILLION dollars) in out-of-court settlements paid out to victims of clerical sex abuse. Consider that this is an estimate based on 5048 survivors of sex abuse and does not include the 15,235 survivors who never came forward. (<http://www.bishop-accountability.org/settlements/>)
- As a result of these payouts, most unbeknownst to the faithful who ultimately paid for these settlements, 19 dioceses have had to declare bankruptcy because of settlements paid to sex abused victims. (<http://www.bishop-accountability.org/bankruptcy.htm>)
- This problem never would have escalated to the moral and financial crises that it became if it were not for the cover-up by diocesan bishops who shuffled abusing priest from parish to parish giving these vile shepherds to prey on more innocent victims: “Since the Boston Globe published the secret documents of Cardinal Law in 2002, hundreds of bishops and other senior Catholic supervisors in the U.S. have been accused in civil filings, news reports, and grand jury investigations of enabling child sexual abuse. However, fewer than ten complicit officials and dioceses in the U.S. have been criminally charged.” (http://www.bishopaccountability.org/criminal/charges_for_enabling/index.html)

I'd like to add on a personal note that having spent my career as a public high school teacher I was mandated by law to report to the authorities even the suspicion that one of my students might have been abused. If I did not I could have lost my teacher's credential and would have been subject to prosecution. The same would be true if I had suspicion that a colleague or administrator was abusive to a student. Given this secular standard it is difficult to understand why bishops who are guilty of this have not been prosecuted. Does the Church set the bar for morality and justice for its clergy lower than the secular society? Apparently it does.

- Law enforcement officials from up to 45 states have sought assistance from Pennsylvania authorities in pursuit of alleged misconduct by Catholic priests and related efforts to conceal that abuse by the church, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro said. Eighteen State Attorney Generals are official investigating the Catholic Church for covering up sex abuse crimes. Recently the United States Attorney General, William Barr, sent a letter to the President of the USCCB, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, asking him to inform all diocesan offices throughout the country not to destroy any files in what many believe will be the beginning of a Federal investigation into criminal activity of the Catholic Church in the United States. Some believe that the Justice Department may employ RICO laws that were developed against organized crime syndicates against the Catholic Church which would allow the government to confiscate Church property. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/12/17/josh-shapiro-more-horrors-coming-catholic-clergy-abuse-scandal/2329159002/>)

- As disturbing as all of this is, how can anyone excuse the fact that sexually abusive clergy and the complicit bishops that have not properly addressed this issue have created a "crisis of faith" for many faithful Catholics. Pew Research interviewed Catholics in late 2018 and early 2019 and obtained the following results: (1) 22% of Catholics who attend mass weekly said they were considering leaving the Catholic Church, and (2) 37% of Catholics who attend mass nearly weekly said they were considering leaving the Catholic Church. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/03/13/more-us-catholics-are-considering-leaving-church-over-sex-abuse-crisis-poll-says/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b8509851aed1)

- And in spite of all of these revelations of moral, financial, and spiritual abuse the laity is not only told to be quiet, they are accused of being in league with the Great Accuser (Satan) should they speak for the abused, and for justice. (<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope-francis/mass-casa-santa-marta/2018-09/pope-francis-mass-great-accuser-bishops-scandal.html>). Is it any wonder that a recent Gallop Poll (Feb, 2019) found that 25% of US Catholics have little to no confidence in their bishops, local priests, or in the Pope. Frankly, I am surprised that the statistic is not significantly lower; it is possible that many Catholics are simply unaware of the depth of the problem. Perhaps the imposed silence has been working in a perverse sort of way. In any event, it is clear to the reader that I have chosen to disregard the Pontiff call for silence. How can I justify my action and still be a faithful Catholic? Once again, I will refer to the Book of Ezekiel:

¹⁷ "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ¹⁸ If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you will have saved your life. ²⁰ Again, if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. ²¹ Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you will have saved your life." (Eze 3:17-21)

I do not think I am something special because I believe we are all called to speak the "truth in love" to each other and our even to our shepherds. It is for this reason that I will not keep silent. So now returning to the question I had asked earlier about the shepherds of Israel, "How did the shepherds of Israel/Catholic Church (you are welcome to insert any other Christian denomination) think that they were ever going to get away with such abuse against God's people?" We shouldn't be surprised that we can find the answer to this question in the Book of Ezekiel:

⁷ And he brought me [Ezekiel] to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold, there was a hole in the wall. ⁸ Then said he to me, "Son of man, dig in the wall"; and when I dug in the wall, lo, there was a door. ⁹ And he said to me, "Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here." ¹⁰ So I went in and saw; and there, portrayed upon the wall round about, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. ¹¹ And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, with Ja-azani'ah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up. ¹² Then he said to me, "Son of man,

have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'" (Eze 8:7-12)

The elders of the house of Israel sinned against God because they thought that He wouldn't see them. Really? How could they believe that God would be unaware of their sins when their own scripture made it clear that God sees all?

The Lord looks down from heaven, he sees all the sons of men; ¹⁴from where he sits enthroned he looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds. (Psa 33:13-15)

For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he watches all his paths. ²²The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin. (Prov 5:21-22)

They thought God would not see them because He had forsaken them.

'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'

Yet again, they should have known better because their scripture says that He will never forsake His people.

For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage.... (Psa 94:14)

As elders and shepherds of Israel they knew the scriptures, but they had just lost their faith and turned to false images and satisfied themselves with worldly power and pleasures. Jesus encountered the same issues with the shepherds of Israel. They knew the scriptures; Jesus even acknowledged this when He told them,

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life.... (John 5:39)

But they saw in the scriptures what they wanted to see in them, what served their own purposes, and as a result they missed Christ.

...and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (John 5:39-40)

And unfortunately for the sheep they were being led by blind guides and they all fell into the pit together (Matt 15:14); that pit being the judgment that visited Jerusalem in 70 AD.

We live in such a time again, when too many shepherds of the Church have lost their faith. They have turned to idols, false images of Christ, so as to justify their currying the favor of men while allowing them to pursue their own lustful desires for power, wealth, worldly honors, and sexual perversion. It is bad enough that these men (and in some cases women) will be held to account if they do not repent, but the lessons of the First and Second Temples are that the sheep suffer as well. We should not kid ourselves in thinking that the Third Temple, the Church, will be immune to judgment; indeed judgment begins with the house of the Lord (1Peter 4:17). The gates of hell may not prevail against the Church, but it is still a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God (Heb 10:31), just ask the Jewish people. And while the Church will survive, the Church clearly teaches that there will only be a remnant that makes it through to the other side of the refining fires of God's judgment:

"Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh." (CCC 675)

This is in line with the words of Jesus Himself (Matt 24:12; Luke 18:8) and with the Epistles (2Thess 4:4-12, 1Thess 5:2-3, 2John 7; John 2:18, 22), and with a number of Marian apparitions including Fatima and Akita. All of these sources suggest that a time is coming which is known as the Great Apostasy in which when Christians will turn away from the faith. Are we living in this time? You tell me?

• As mentioned previously 50% of White Catholics in America support abortion in most if not all cases. (<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/poll-50-percent-of-all-catholics-support-abortion-in-all-or-most-cases>)

- According to the Public Religion Research Institute survey conducted in 2017: Two-thirds of Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and white mainline Protestants now say they are in favor of same sex marriage. (<https://www.nronline.org/news/opinion/same-sex-marriage-has-support-among-most-american-religious-groups-study-shows>)

These are just two of the great moral issues the Church is now facing, and it would appear that the secular Modernists are doing a better job of inculcating American Christians than the churches. But, it is not just moral doctrine for which the Church is failing; consider the results of a Pew study of Americans regarding religion entitled, “Who Knows What About Religion” that was conducted in 2010. (<https://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey-who-knows-what-about-religion/#the-bible>) The survey interviewed 3412 people who identified as Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Jewish, and atheist/agnostic. I will cover some of the highlights of the report, but if you want to do your own research I have provided the link above. Although the survey included questions on World Religions and Religion and Public Policy I’m just going to focus on the two sections, the Bible, and Elements of Christianity. In this section the survey asked the following questions:

The Bible:

- What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
- What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels? (Open-ended)
- Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
- Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others..., no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
- Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
- Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
- Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?

Elements of Christianity:

- What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
- Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
- Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
- What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
- Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

Knowledge of the Bible

% who know...	Old Testament					New Testament		Avg. # correct out of 7
	First book in Bible	Golden Rule	Religious figures			Birthplace of Jesus	Four Gospels	
		Is NOT a Commandment	Moses	Abraham	Job			
Total	63	55	72	60	39	71	45	4.1
Christian	66	57	71	61	41	74	50	4.2
Protestant	76	56	74	63	48	78	57	4.5
White evangelical	85	67	80	69	58	83	71	5.1
White mainline	61	49	68	53	34	79	43	3.9
Black Protestant	83	49	73	61	51	70	50	4.4
Catholic	42	57	65	55	25	65	33	3.4
White Catholic	47	63	71	60	26	74	40	3.8
Hispanic Catholic	29	45	48	40	19	47	15	2.4
Mormon	85	81	92	87	70	83	73	5.7
Jewish	65	62	90	83	47	61	17	4.3
Unaffiliated	54	50	72	56	31	62	28	3.5
Atheist/Agnostic	71	62	87	68	42	70	39	4.4
Nothing in particular	48	46	67	52	27	59	24	3.2

Q39, Q40, Q41, Q46, Q47a-d

Result Highlight:

There were seven questions on the Bible. The highest score goes to the Mormons with 5.7 out of 7, that’s an 81% or B- in my book. White Evangelicals received the highest number right among the Protestants surveyed 73% (C-), followed by Black Protestants at 63%, D-, who, incidentally are tied with atheist and agnostic. Jews come next at 61%, again a D-. Then come the Catholics at 49%, or Fail—even the atheist and the agnostics did better than Catholics on their knowledge of the Bible, now that’s just disgraceful!

Knowledge of Christianity

% who know...	Catholicism and Protestantism		Religious figures			Avg. # correct out of 12*
	Catholics teach bread/wine become body/blood	Protestants teach salvation through faith alone	Mother Teresa was Catholic	Martin Luther inspired Reformation	Jonathan Edwards participated in First Great Awakening	
Total	40	16	82	46	11	6.0
Christian	41	16	83	46	11	6.2
Protestant	35	19	81	47	13	6.5
White evangelical	40	28	86	52	15	7.3
White mainline	36	14	83	46	10	5.8
Black Protestant	25	9	66	40	10	5.9
Catholic	55	9	87	42	8	5.4
White Catholic	59	9	88	47	7	5.9
Hispanic Catholic	47	8	83	34	10	4.2
Mormon	40	22	89	61	10	7.9
Jewish	33	10	84	70	12	6.3
Unaffiliated	32	13	80	45	10	5.3
Atheist/Agnostic	41	22	89	68	8	6.7
Nothing in particular	30	10	77	37	10	4.9

Result Highlights:

We see a similar pattern as above when participants were asked specific questions regarding Christianity. Note, the “Ave. # Correct includes the previous 7 questions from the Bible survey. Mormons scored the highest 66% or D. This was again followed by White Evangelicals at 61% or D-. And total Catholics scored a 45% or Fail. Jews scored better than

Catholics with a 53% and they are not even Christian. Worse than that atheist and agnostics also did better than Catholics with a score of 56% and they don't even believe in God.

These are frankly pitiful results for all the Christian groups surveyed, but Catholics did significantly worse, and for me as a Catholic this is very disconcerting. Some might protest, "Why does it matter; it's not like Jesus is going to quiz before you're allowed to pass through the Pearly Gates of Heaven?" No, I don't think that He will, but ignorance of the Faith can place the believer in jeopardy of deception of doctrine with respect to Scripture, Tradition, and the Moral Law. Remember earlier I quoted a passage from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass **through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers.** The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will **unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth.**" When will this occur? No one knows. There are signs that those times are already beginning, but I will discuss this tomorrow, that is, Holy Wednesday. Whether we are entering that time now, in the near future, or not until some distance era we should be prepared as Satan is always on the prowl for an unknowing Christian to devour (1Peter 5:8).

Recognizing deception is not an easy thing, and Satan, the "father of lies," is a master at deception. We are exhorted in the Epistles to be prepared to "test" everything:

but test everything; hold fast what is good, (1Thess 5:21)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1John 4:1)

In my prior life as a chemistry teacher one of the things I had my students do is to perform tests on unknown substances to determine what they were. We might determine their density, melting or boiling points, perhaps their reaction to certain chemical such as acids. In each case the students had to compare the "unknown's" value they obtained to a "true" or "accepted" value of the known substance. If the values lined up, then one could be pretty sure that the unknown substance had the same identity as the known. To be certain other test could be performed to confirm the original test. So what can we compare the teachings of a catechist, priest, bishop or even a Pope to? The "true" value of any teaching is whether or not it lines up with Holy Scripture, Tradition, the Church Councils, and Magisterial teaching (I'm speaking of Catholics now; Orthodox and Protestants would have a different approach to this issue). In order to do this one must have knowledge of all of these sources of "true" values. Of course that's a daunting task to acquire such knowledge, and I don't think anyone would expect us lay folks accomplish that. However, one must have a solid working knowledge of all of these so that should a shepherd say or teach something that may be off you have enough knowledge of the "true value" that you recognize they are not in alignment. Then, from here you can begin your research to confirm or deny your concerns.

Who's job was it to make sure my students knew how to determine if something was real gold jewelry or just costume jewelry? Well, as their chemistry teacher that was my job. Whose job is it to make sure that the sheep recognizes the Shepherd's (Jesus) voice and not be deceived by the cry of the wolf? God gave shepherds to the Church (Eph 4:1) for the "equipping of the saints." (Eph 4:12) What is this equipping? It is attain to "the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:13): "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles." (Eph 4:14)

But what if shepherds are not doing their job? Then you have the situation we have been discussing in our study of the Book of Ezekiel and Palm Sunday through Holy Tuesday. Are we living in such a time now? I believe we are and that has been the premise of this reflection. Some might question the validity of a layperson in the Catholic Church criticizing clergy and the Church's hierarchy. In response I would refer them to the Code of Canon Law 212 of the Catholic Church:

Can. 212 §1. Conscious of their own responsibility, the Christian faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors, inasmuch as they represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church.

§2. The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

§3. **According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion**

known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was a regular fixture on our family's television when I was a child growing up in the fifties and sixties. I'm pretty sure the show did not last much after 1965, but then the culture wars were already taking its toll of American society and the bishop's show, "Life is Worth Living" would have been too hot for the networks. My memories of the show are scant, but I do remember the chalkboard; that he always wrote "JMJ" (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph) on it, and he was frequented by an angel who helped draw pictures on the chalkboard when it was off camera. His shows are having a bit of a Renaissance on You Tube where you can find them in abundance. What a wonderful discovery of nostalgia and wisdom and all within less than thirty minutes. Anyway, to the point. I've watched enough Bishop Sheen to know that not only was he a man of God, but a prophet. One cannot help but think that he was trying to prepare us for the day we are living in right now. And so I will leave this reflection with a quote from Bishop Sheen given a month before I graduated from High School:

"Who is going to save our Church? Not our bishops, not our priests and Religious. It is up to you, the people. You have the minds, the eyes, the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to see that your priest act like priests, you bishops act like bishops, and your Religious act like Religious."

~Archbishop Fulton Sheen
Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa
Doylestown, PA May 28, 1972

Ad Orientem

Part III: *Adversus Hominem*

The decade of the 60's ushered in an era of disruption, disorientation, and disintegration into the West. Modernism broke free from its sequestration in the hot zones of academia and had spread like a virulent pathogen into every sphere of human activity. Continuity with the past was severed; history was no longer studied except through the lens of what was done wrong, and the contributions of the past were held with suspicion.

“The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was made in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.” (Alan Bloom, from the Introduction to The Closing of the American Mind, 1987)

This is not the history my parents learned or their parents learned, or thousands of generations learned before us. Sure, we can debate the accuracy or objectivity with which history had been taught in prior times, but the same challenges can be posed about the history being taught today. What had changed were the “values” and “assumptions” (axioms) which had been transferred from one generation to the next via education were now disrupted resulting in discontinuity and the disintegration of the West. Something was radically introduced into the education system that changed our understanding not only of history, but also of ourselves, and of our societies in the West.

Robert Maynard Hutchins (1899-1977) was the dean of Yale Law School, the president of the University of Chicago. He was known best as a philosopher of education. In a lecture in 1951 he made a prophetic comment on the state of education and its consequence for the West:

“If the object of education is the improvement of men, then any system of education that is without values is a contradiction in terms. A system that seeks bad values is bad. A system that denies the existence of values denies the possibility of education. **Relativism, scientism, skepticism, and anti-intellectualism, the four horsemen of the philosophical apocalypse, have produced that chaos in education which will end in the disintegration of the West.**”

Let me give a brief explanation of these “four horsemen” so that we are all on the same page before we examine how these characters could have such a corrosive effect on education and Western Civilization. I'm going to change the order in which Hutchins presented them to facilitate this understanding.

Skepticism is doubt regarding the truth or validity of something. Doubt can be a good thing, in fact, in one of my previous Photo-Journal essays I discussed Saint Augustine's famous axiom, “*Si fallor sum,*” generally rendered, “I doubt, therefore I am.” In Augustine case doubt or skepticism became a starting point for *knowing and advancing in the truth*. Skepticism as a Philosophical axiom is the rejection that there is any objective truth, or if there is, that our minds do not have the ability to perceive it. Skeptics believe that the pursuit of knowledge is always subjective and results only in subjective truth, and when agreed upon by an authoritative quorum (as in science or popular culture) such knowledge becomes “conventional truth.” Philosophical skepticism leads to relativism.

Relativism is the belief that since truth does not exist in the absolute sense, then human understanding of reality (ontology), the moral law (ethics), and the way we arrive at knowledge (epistemology) is relative to the context of the subject, and her place in history, culture, and societal constructs. All domains of human experience are understood in the context of relativism. All moral constructs are relative, all means by which human beings form governments are relative (democracy vs. dictatorships), the way we view our selves as human beings is relative (example: gender), or the associations we form (examples: religion, marriage, etc.). In the “light” of relativism it is not possible to adjudicate between differing constructs so the greatest human good can be achieved through coexistence and tolerance. Intolerance becomes humankind's Original Sin and our only remaining Personal Sin.

Human beings were not “built” for skepticism or its offspring, relativism. The most ardent relativist struggles to defend the legitimacy of cruel dictatorships as just one of many forms by which human being may govern themselves, or the relativistic doctrines of multiculturalism when presented with the misogynistic cultures that deny women and girls the right to an education. The skeptical relativists often face retaliation from their fellow comrades when they fail to keep up with the rapidly changing moral standards of Modernism; a comment on social media or a video made a few months or years earlier may put them on the receiving end of the new Cultural Revolution purging them from the ranks of

acceptable Modernist society. Reason has become insufficient to defend the tenants of Modernism, thus they have no recourse but to disregard the laws of reason and yield to the primacy and infallibility of feelings, that is, anti-intellectualism.

Anti-Intellectualism provides the ultimate defense of the indefensible tenants of modernism. One need not provide evidence, or proofs for one's position; all one needs is to be impassioned. Reasoned criticism is not understood in the context of a debate over ideas, but as an attack on one's person. Feelings, not just any feelings but "my feelings" becomes the last word in any and all debates with the anti-intellectual. Refusal to accept the anti-intellectual's position is a refusal to accept the personhood of that individual, which then demands that the offender be punished, and should they be recalcitrant their constitutional rights and privileges attenuated. In a bitter irony, the promise of greater freedom that Modernism offers through skepticism and relativism rapidly devolves into tyranny in the process of anti-intellectualism's defense of itself.

As I mentioned earlier, humans are not "built" for skepticism, relativism, and anti-intellectualism; they were "created" for Truth, and as such Modernists remain in a state of anxiety because their ideology cannot be defended by reason, but only by the whines and the shrieks of anti-intellectualism. To support their main tenants of skepticism and relativism they have turned to science. Science has the gravitas and the track record of discovery and technological innovation, which enthralled modern man, to provide the intellectual foundation for Modernism. Science would offer to the Modernists its "Evolutionary Theory" with its Materialistic explanation for the origins of humanity and its concomitant rejection of the need for a Creator with all His attending moral absolutes, a defined human nature having been made in the "image and likeness" image of his Creator with its attendant obligations and responsibilities, and with an ultimate fulfillment of her union with the Divine. Modernism, in return, would bestow upon Science the position once held by the Catholic Church, that is, Magisterial authority over all domains of Truth and in so doing transforming Science into Scientism.

Scientism is not science. Science has been understood as just one of several means by which humanity acquires knowledge. Science employs the Scientific Method by which it postulates hypotheses for observed phenomena and then tests these hypotheses through experimentation. Underlying this methodology is the assumption of materialism, that is, that only natural causes are allowed in scientific explanation. It did not preclude that there may be other explanations only that they would not be scientific. Scientism underlying assumption of materialism goes beyond it's method and makes the claim that Reality itself is purely material, that there is no supra (above) natural or transcendent existence. Scientism has no "scientific" basis upon which to make this assumption. It got away with it because Modernism, and the academic culture that it controls, has given Scientism its stamp of approval. Now, if an individual or an institution wants to possess the "ring of truth" she must receive an *Imprimatur* from the Magisterium of Scientism. To suggest that science could be wrong will bring down the wrath of Scientism's elite as well as the Modernists. There is a new Inquisition and it can be the death of a person's career if one dares question its all-knowing authority.

Skepticism, Relativism, Anti-Intellectualism, and Scientism, the Four Horsemen of the Modernist Apocalypse have *disrupted* Western Civilization like no other event in the past two thousand years. Continuity was shattered. The great ideas and the art, music, poetry, and literature they produced were relegated to the dustbin of history having been found irrelevant and inferior to the new, and better creations of Modern Man. Ideas and art should not aspire to archetypes, but conform to a new image and likeness, that is, of Man, the Measure of All Things. The *disorientation* that occurred in the sixties and seventies resulted in confusion, angst, and the searching for something firm to hang onto. On the communal level civil unease and even chaos erupted as social *disintegration* manifested itself on the streets of West. And it was precisely at this time that Pope John XXIII decided it was time for the Roman Catholic Church "to throw open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in."

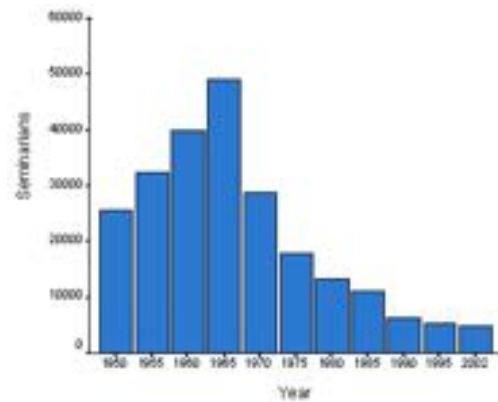
What some, like my father, saw when they looked outside the Church windows was a world in disruption, disorientation, and disintegration. That is apparently not what the Council fathers saw when they looked out of the windows of the Vatican. They saw opportunity to fundamentally change the Church. Modernists recognized the potential to use these forces to disrupt the 1500 years of liturgical and theological continuity. In the ensuing disorientation, Catholics could be re-orientated from "facing Christ" (*adversus Christus*) towards a new orientation, "facing Man" (*adversus Hominem*). With this new orientation the Church could be re-integrated into a new vision of the Catholic Church, one less focused on the Kingdom of God, and more toward the Kingdom of Man.

It would be an interesting discussion to show how the Modernist doctrines of skepticism, relativism, anti-intellectualism, and scientism manifested themselves throughout all aspect of the Church from religious education, to seminarian formation, to its charities, and especially in liturgy. Such a discussion would go far beyond the scope of this essay. I'd like to cut to the chase and apply a simple test to examine the fruitfulness of the reforms arising from Vatican II and its subsequent "spirit of Vatican II" mandates.

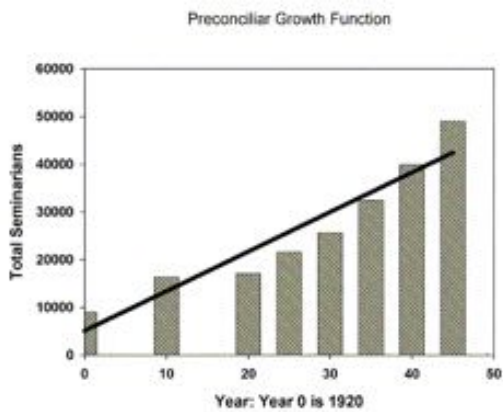
¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. ¹⁸ A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits. (Matt 7:15-20)

One way to measure the fruitfulness of the Vatican II reforms is to compare the numbers of “fruits” the Church produced before and after the Conciliar reforms. In this case we will examine the number of seminarians the Church in America “produced” as a microcosm of the fruitfulness of the pre- and post-Vatican II Church. The data for this discussion is taken from *Index of Leading Catholic Indicators: The Church Since Vatican II*, Kenneth C. Jones. Oriens Publishing Company, St. Louis, Missouri. The graphs for this part of our discussion were obtained from the website <http://catholicapologetics.info/modernproblems/vatican2/decay.htm> by David L. Sonnier. Mr. Sonnier is a mathematician who analyzed the data from Kenneth Jones’ book focusing his analysis of seminarians as a means of measuring the overall health of the Church. The data for this analysis goes up to 2002, the date of publication of the *Index of Leading Catholic Indicators*.

A cursory examination of the bar graph plotting the data of total seminarians versus year shows two distinct regions of the graph, the first from 1950 to 1965 followed by the region from 1970 to 2002. The first region appears to be demonstrating linear growth in the number of seminarians from the years 1950 to 1965. The second region appears to demonstrate an exponential decline in seminarians post 1965.



To analyze this further, Sonnier collected data going back to 1920. Assuming that a linear best-fit line would be most appropriate to use for the time period between 1920 and 1965 he constructed the graph below.



Sonnier determined the slope of the best-fit line and arrived at 829.3 which is equal to the number of seminarians that were approximately added each year. The growth rate P (for Preconciliar Growth Rate) as a function of time (t) in years and t = 0 in 1920 is given by:

$$P(t) = 829.331t + 5093 \quad (\text{where } 5093 = \# \text{ of seminarians in } 1920)$$

Expressed as a function of the year:

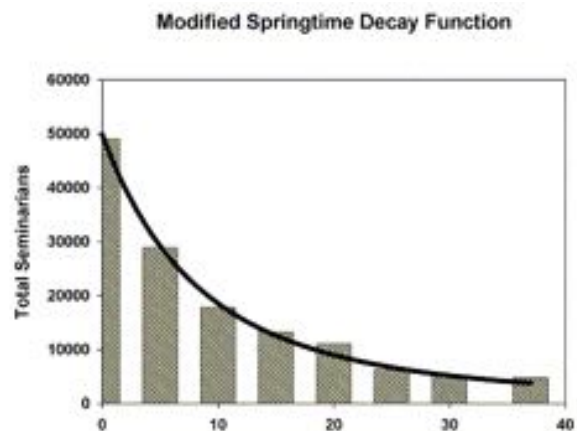
$$P(\text{year}) = 829.331(\text{year} - 1920) + 5093$$

If we were to plug in the data for the year 2017 we would expect the total number of Catholic seminarians in the United States assuming a

Preconciliar Growth Rate to be:

$P(2017) = 829.331(2017 - 1920) + 5093 = 85,538$ seminarians! If we compare that to the total US seminarians for the years 2016-2017 (as reported by <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2017/05/latest-statistics-seminary-entries-down.html>) we find out that there are significantly fewer seminarians than expected, that is, only 5151 or 1661% fewer than expected given the Preconciliar Growth Rate. That is a devastating decrease in the number of Catholic seminarians in the United States and we can certainly understand why there is a shortage of priest to meet the need of dioceses throughout the country. What could account for such a rapid decline in seminarians? Mathematically speaking, only an exponential decline could account for such devastating losses in seminarians in such a short period of time.

Following 1965, Sonnier believed that the data indicated that the decrease in seminarians followed an exponential decline much like the radioactive decay of elements such as radium and uranium. Sonnier called his graph the



Springtime Decay Function (S) because this period of time is often called, ironically, the “Springtime” for the Church. I will not take the time to go into the details of the calculations, but the reader is welcome to study the article from which this is taken (link provided earlier).

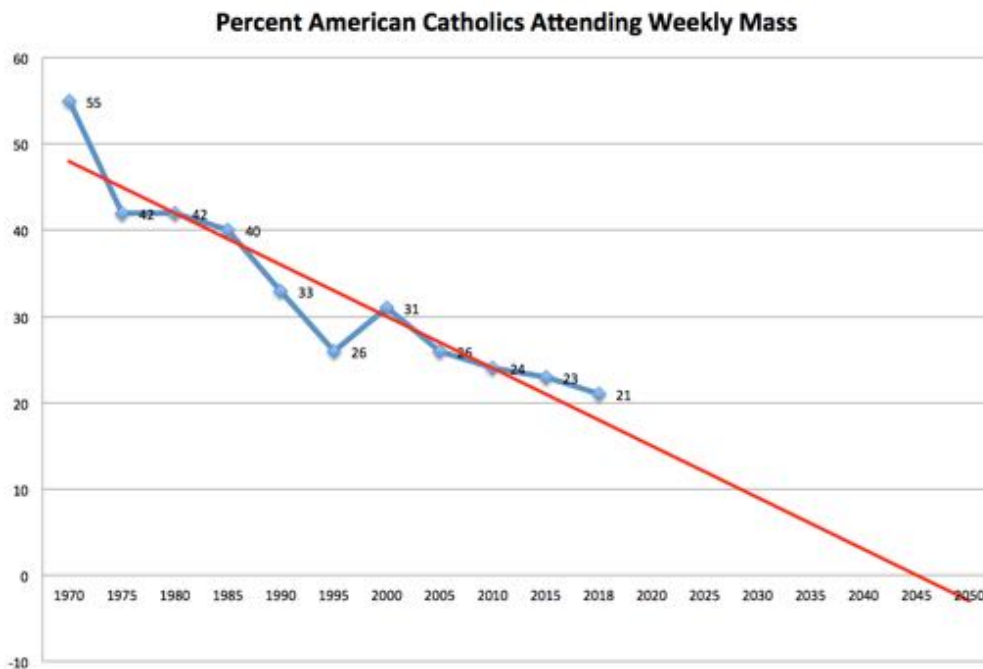
Sonnier arrived at the equation for the trend line:

$$S'(year) = 77.8151e^{\frac{357.8969}{(year-1965)+55.3712}}$$

This formula predicted that in 2065, 100 years after Vatican II, the Catholic Church in America would have only 779 seminarians. I used the formula to calculate the number of seminarians predicted for 2017 and arrived at 2180 which is lower than the number reported earlier of 5151 seminarians. Why the difference? First of all, we are dealing here with people with Free Will and not radioactive elements whose behavior is dictated by the physical laws of nature. Second, the data does not include whether some of the seminarians may be students from other countries enrolled in US seminaries. Nevertheless, the “bottom line” of Sonnier’s analysis is beyond dispute, that is, prior to 1965 the growth of seminarians in the US was linear, whereas after 1965 the data demonstrates an exponential decline in the number of seminarians. There is only one factor that can account for the dramatic change in numbers of seminarians before and after 1965 and that is Vatican II. This however, is not the only data that demonstrates this.

The Mass is the central expression of the Catholic Faith. It is at Mass that we worship, are instructed in the faith, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There can be, therefore, no better indicator of the health of the American Catholic Church than the faithful’s attendance to weekly Mass. The graph below is just such a measure and it demonstrates a dramatic drop in Mass attendance from 1970 (when the effects of Vatican II reforms were just beginning to manifest in American parishes) to 2016. The results are staggering.

[Data used to produce the graph below is based upon a survey conducted by CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) for the United States Council of Catholic Bishops. (<https://cara.georgetown.edu/?s=mass+attendance#!>)]



The red line represents a best-fit line assuming a linear decline in Mass attendance. In our previous discussion of seminarians, our data does not represent natural phenomena which follow physical laws (such as the inverse linear relationship between the volume of a gas and its pressure), but rather human beings with Free Will thus even if this best-fit line were a crude approximation it suggests a grim future for American Catholic parishes.

Might Mass attendance improve over the next few years? It is hard to imagine that this trend will turn around given the late 2018/early 2019 Pew (<https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2019-03-13/more-than-one-third-of-catholics-consider-leaving-church-amid-sex-abuse-scandal-study-says>) survey I cited earlier in which Catholics who attend Mass weekly plus those who attend at least once a month were interviewed; combining these two groups a total of 59% of those interviewed were considering leaving the Church because of the sex abuse scandal and cover up. Whether the sex abuse and cover up scandal influences Mass Attendance or not another question still arises. So where are all the Catholics on Sunday morning if they are not in the pews?

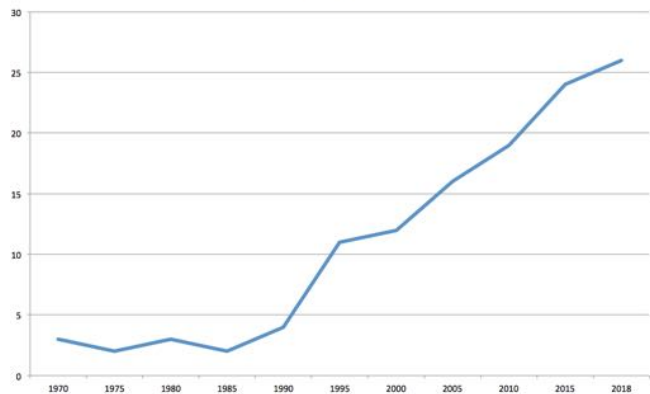
The graph at the right plots the number of Catholics (in millions) who self-identify as ex-Catholics, that is, those who were raised Catholic but no longer identify as such. The graph shows a dramatic growth in the number of Catholics leaving the faith from the period of 1985 to the present with 26.1 million Americans identifying as Ex-Catholics in 2018! However, some might argue that this is not as big of a problem as it may appear because it is possible that in spite of the growing number of Catholics leaving the faith the number entering far exceeds it.

Using data obtained from CARA

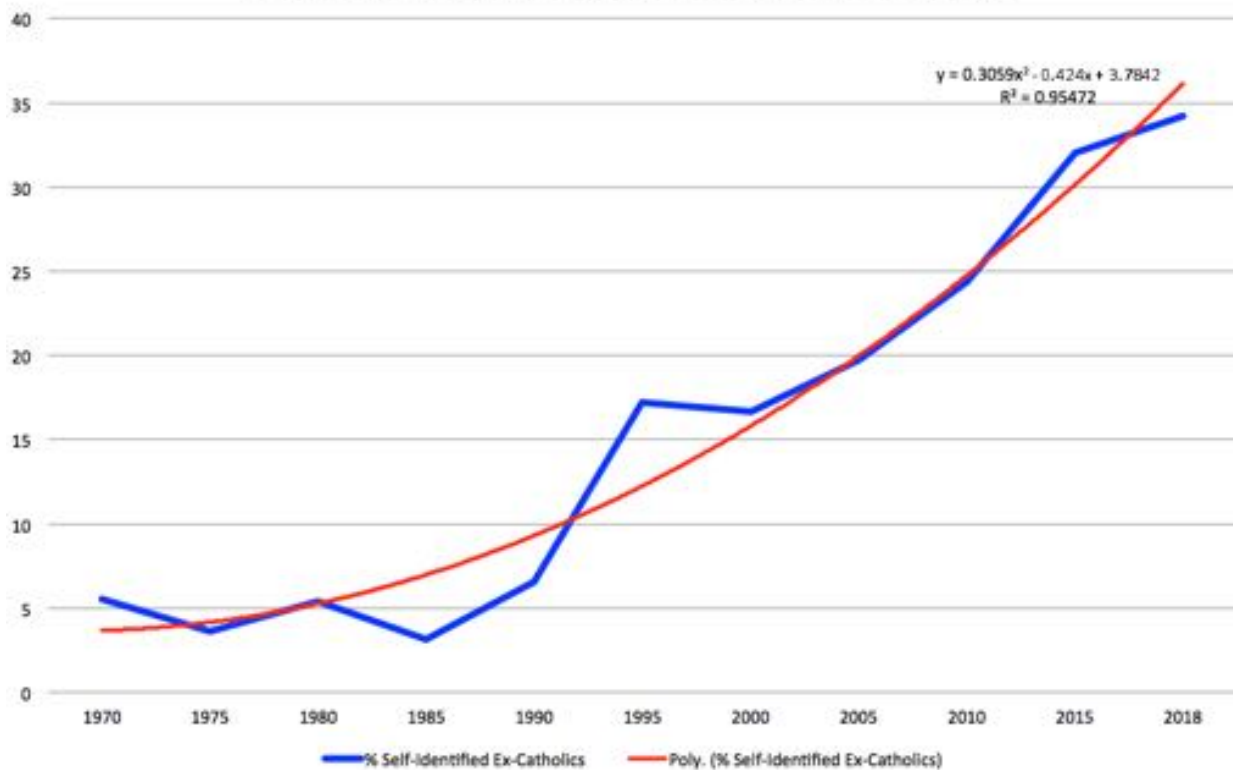
(<https://cara.georgetown.edu/?s=mass+attendance#!>). I

calculated the percent of Ex-Catholics relative to Catholics, plotted this data (blue line) and selected the trend line (red) that best fit the data which turned out not to be linear, or exponential but polynomial. If the rate of growth of people entering the Catholic faith exceeded that of those leaving then the trend line would have a negative slope, if, however, the rate of growth of people leaving the faith is greater than those entering then the slope of the trend line will be positive.

Self-Identified Ex-Catholics
(in millions)

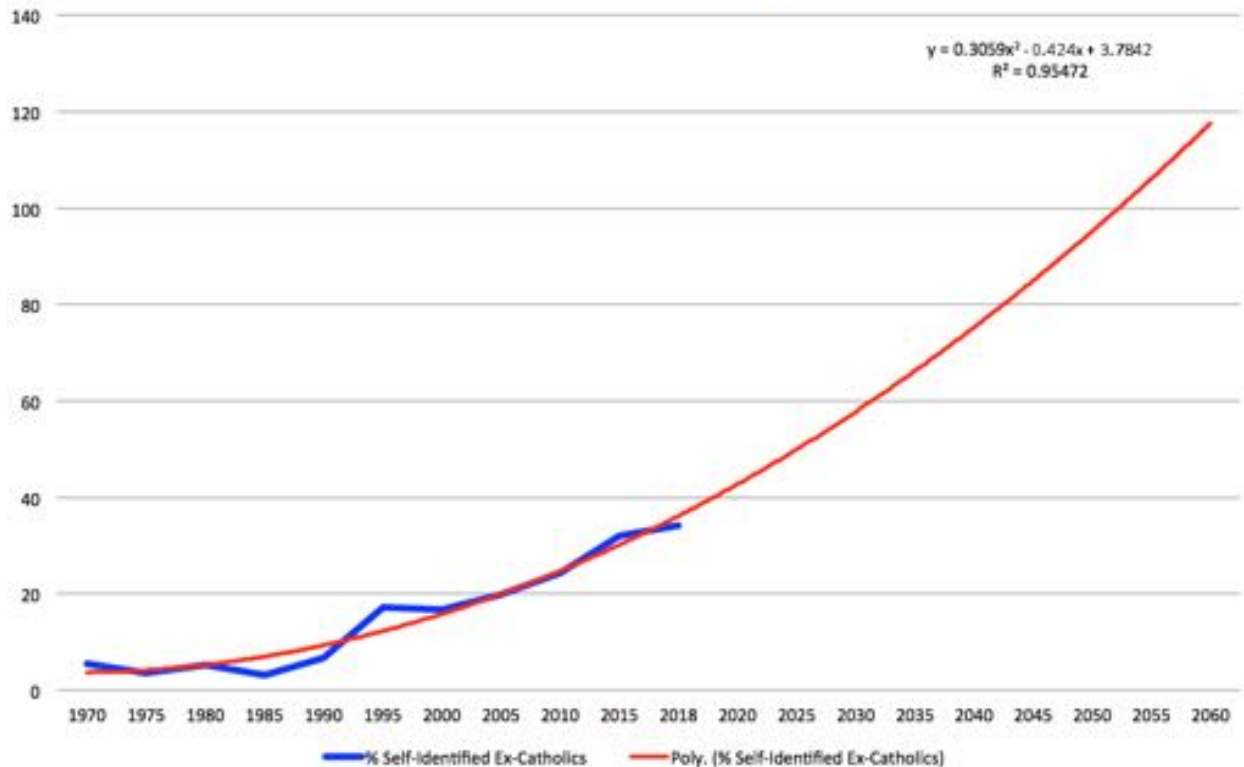


% Self-Identified Ex-Catholics/Self-Identified Catholics



It is evident from the graph that the growth rate of self-identify Ex-Catholics is greater than the growth rate of self-identifying Catholics. The closeness by which polynomial trend line fits the data is represented by the “correlations coefficient” or R; this value squared, R^2 , tells us just how “correlated” the data is. An R^2 of .95 or 95% strongly suggest a relationship between the data points indicates that a common factor(s) governs their values. Just what this factor(s) is that is influencing this data cannot tell us. The high correlation of the trend line and the resultant formula does allow us to predict future values with a high degree of confidence.

% Self-Identified Ex-Catholics/Self-Identified Catholics



The graph above now extends the trend line beyond the current data and past 100%. Notice that the rate of growth of self-identified Ex-Catholics accelerates relative to Catholics as time progresses. For example, the percent growth between 2000 and 2010, a period of 10 years, is approximately 7.7%. However, the predicted growth rate of Ex-Catholics between 2040 and 2050 is expected to be about 20%. What is that old saying, *motus in fine velocior*, that is “things accelerate towards the end?”

At 100% the Catholic Church will hit the “tipping point,” the point when the number of self-identified Ex-Catholics equals the number of self-identified Catholics; beyond this point the number of Ex-Catholics will exceed the number of Catholics. If Catholics in America were a species they would be protected by the Endangered Species Act!” According to this data and graph this event will occur between 2050 and 2055. It should be noted that self-identified Catholics also includes foreign born Catholics so the bishops should not place their hopes on stabilizing parish enrollments on immigration of Catholics for Latin America.

This pattern of decline that we have observed in Church statistics, although highly correlated, does not explain the cause of this decline. If this were a disease an epidemiologist would look for a common pathogen between the various phenomena (declines in seminarians and Mass attendance, increase in the rate of growth of self-identifying Ex-Catholics). There is only one reasonable cause and that is Modernity, both in the culture and in the Church. Modernism in the form of skepticism, relativism, anti-intellectualism (aka the “primacy of feelings”), and scientism has infected the theology, soteriology, catechesis, and liturgy of the Church. Whether this infection is due directly to Vatican II or through its agent, “the spirit of Vatican II,” I am not qualified to comment. However, the data that I have presented here is available to the bishops, and therefore they must be aware of this problem, and yet as far as I can tell little if any effort is being made to seriously address it. I am left wondering if they are in denial or if they believe that the goal of achieving a Modernist Catholic Church justifies the means even if that means is losing a few million sheep in the process.

Shortly before Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He said, “*When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?*” (Luke 18:8) In the light of Holy Monday’s scripture and Jesus’ encounter with the Fig Tree we might rephrase this comment as, “When the Son of man comes, will He find fruit in His Church?” On Holy Wednesday the essay will be focusing on Jesus’ return. Yes we don’t talk about that very much as Catholics, but He most definitely will be returning, and if you think these are going to be happy times then you haven’t read the Bible. Consider these questions, “What if He came sooner than later and found His Church in the condition it is in now? Is he going to be happy with His Bride? Is he going to be please with the shepherds whose job it is to prepare her for the Bridegroom?”

What are the shepherds going to say to the King of kings and Lord of lords when He asks them to give an account?

“Lord, here’s your beautiful Modernist Bride. Isn’t she lovely? Oh, yes, we did lose a few million sheep along the way.”

The words and actions of Jesus during Holy Week were not just for the Jews, but are for the Church now. We are rapidly becoming the “barren fig tree,” and the shepherds had better act fast lest they go the way of the wicked tenants of which Jesus said,

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it. (Matt 21:43)

Jesus offered the Scribes and Pharisees both a cure and a curse for the situation they found themselves in,

And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him.” (Matt 21:44)

The Shepherds of Israel did not take Jesus’ advice, and on Holy Tuesday Jesus final declaration to them was a judgment not only on them, but also on the entire house of Israel,

Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. (Matt 23:38)

Let us hope the same does not happen to the Church, the Third Temple, as it had on the First and Second Temples. We must not be so presumption about our status as Catholics, as the Jews were about their status as children of Abraham:

But when he [John the Baptists] saw many of the Pharisees and Sad’ducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit that befits repentance, ⁹ and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt 3:7-10)

Catholics, laity and shepherds alike, must fall of the stone of Christ and allow our false idols of Modernity and our *adversus Hominem* worship to be broken into pieces so that we, His Bride, can be reshaped into the image of the Bridegroom (Rom 8:29). If we do not we too may be crushed and our house forsaken and desolate.