



Written by [Dr. Duke Pesta](#) on December 4, 2020

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## Christianity Today Surviving the “Woke” Church

A strong case can be made that the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) is the most significant and prescient Christian apologist to emerge since the Enlightenment. Four decades before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Dostoevsky not only anticipated the communist takeover of Russia, but also saw the inevitable persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church and the subsequent driving of Russian Christianity underground. More than any other thinker of his age — or indeed any age since — Dostoevsky recognized that the church and her teachings were not being out-argued by a superior form of socialist dialectic: rather, the Christian narrative was being slyly coopted by a new breed of socialist evangelism that methodically confused and replaced the ideals and aims of Christianity with those of socialism.



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To paraphrase G. K. Chesterton, it was not that the verities of Christian thought had been tried and found wanting. They were deemed difficult and therefore left untried in the wake of a new set of quasi-religious doctrines that promised the redemptive salvation and atonement of Christianity without the need to affirm individual free will or acknowledge a world or a Creator that transcended material reality.

The apogee of Dostoevsky’s thinking on these issues comes in his magnum opus, *The Brothers Karamazov*, published in 1881, less than four months before his death. As in his earlier novels, Dostoevsky engages with questions of faith and doubt, existence and negation, and salvation and damnation, but in ways that dramatically supersede his previous works. Originally titled “Atheism,” *The Brothers Kara-mazov* marks Dostoevsky’s most direct link between socialism and disbelief: “For socialism is not merely the labor question, it is before all things the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism today, the question of the tower of Babel built without God, not to mount to Heaven from Earth, but to set up Heaven on Earth.”



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**Storming Heaven:** The biblical story of the Tower of Babel tells of humans' direct challenge to God and His word. Nowadays, churches themselves are flouting God's word. (The Tower of Babel, Lucas van Valckenborch, 1594) (*Photo credit: publicdomain*)

For Christian churches over the last 50 years, the consequences of atheistic socialism have been devastating, however neatly it has been repackaged and commercialized. Whether it is labeled liberation theology, or democratic socialism, or social justice, or Black Lives Matter, or Antifa, the results are always the same: the calculated erosion of values and traditions linked to the practice and celebration of faith-based liberties and freedoms. Dostoevsky identifies the origins of this destructive worldview in the story of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis, where a massed humanity, independent of God, come together to build a mighty tower “whose top is in the heavens” and to “make a name” for themselves, all without any consideration for the will of their Creator. As punishment for this presumption, God scatters them and confounds their speech so they can no longer communicate and act as one. God's rebuke forces them back to a radical state of individuality — the state in which they were conceived — and from whence they are left with no choice but to confront their collective hubris in an exclusively personal manner.

Over the past few decades, the Western church — or better to say Western churches of all denominations — has been especially susceptible to the influence of socialist recasting of Christian doctrine. Like the story of the Tower of Babel, this modern apostasy — for it is the primary heresy of post-medieval Christianity — seeks to remove from Christian thought and practice the idea of the transcendent, the idea that this material world is a broken and frail shadow of the eternal and immutable life that awaits us beyond death.

According to the socialists and their cultural allies, not only is this material world our original home and ultimate destiny, it is a limitlessly perfectible world that can one day become a terrestrial utopia. Worship of a transcendent God, then, is the opiate that fixes our attention on other-worldly fairy tales that distract us from radical social change now. And the implication that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary to “redeem” us, to unbelievers, is nothing more than a demeaning slur against our supposed innate rationality and inherent moral goodness. As Dostoevsky insightfully explains above, it is the aim of utopian socialism to create Heaven on Earth, despite the impossibility of the task owing to our flawed human nature.



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## Surrendering God and Heaven for Social Change

Early Christianity grew in prestige and power by boldly and unapologetically preaching the Gospel of Christ. What separated Christianity from the Judaism out of which it emerged was the same thing that ultimately allowed Christian thought to make inroads with the pagan cultures of Greece and Rome. Christ's message of salvation and redemption was first and foremost an individual responsibility and an individual blessing. The God of the Old Testament made His covenant with the Hebrew/Jewish people as a group. They were collectively "His people" and He was collectively "their God." Down through the centuries, the collective nature of this relationship was guaranteed by contractual (covenantal) decree that applied to all as to one. But the promises of Christ offered that covenantal promise on much more personal terms. Simply belonging to some favored group no longer guaranteed anything — consider Christ's incessant calling out of the Pharisees — and eternal salvation was predicated on individual choice and conviction, not conformity and contractual obligation. In the new covenant as Christ formulated it, mother and daughter, father and son, might be saved or severed without regard to the other depending on what they chose and how they lived.

And in the pagan cultures of Greece and Rome, the afterworld was a collectively bleak affair where the overwhelming majority of the dead received neither reward nor punishment. Ultimately, forgetfulness and eventual loss of individual identity was their fate, regardless of how they had lived on Earth. For many, the profoundly personalized and individualistic promises, obligations, and rewards of a monotheistic God — in whose image they were individually created — resounded deeply. And the idea that the God of that individualistic philosophy once entered the material world *as an individual* to definitively reject materialism and worldliness was both moving and authentic. In short, at the core of Christian expansion was evangelism, a missionary compulsion to convince potential converts about their absolute value to God as individuals. Each of them was called to enter a deeply personal and intimate relationship with a God who was both accessible and responsive.

It's hard to believe that we are just one generation removed from the great crusades of Billy Graham and Fulton Sheen. In that short span of time, Western Christianity has all but entirely rejected evangelism, opting instead for a frail and scripturally unjustifiable form of multicultural ecumenism. Not ecumenism in the sense of a call for all Christian peoples and denominations to unite, but rather a multicultural mandate to downplay any aspect of Christian thought or practice that suggests Christianity might be true or exclusively in possession of truth. Christian priests, ministers, and theologians of almost every stripe not only reject evangelism, but often exhibit shame and embarrassment at the prospect of preaching the particularity of Christ or the idea that salvation comes through him alone.

In 2008, for instance, then-Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams insisted that Christian doctrine was inherently offensive to Muslims, suggesting the possibility that key aspects of Christian belief might be on the negotiation table as a means of bringing the two faiths closer together in a materialist alliance. Among the offending aspects of Christianity that Williams was willing to barter in the name of multicultural understanding was the very idea of the Trinity itself, which, Williams fussed, was "difficult" and "sometimes offensive to Muslims." Williams also informed Muslims without any sense of irony that "Christianity has been promoted at the point of the sword and legally supported by extreme sanctions," despite Islam being guilty of that very thing. Islam was not required to alter or reject any tenets of its faith or worldview to bring about this new partnership, predicated on demystifying



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Christianity from all that transcendent blather about Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The very socialist idea behind this transactional theology is that the foundational Christian mysteries — i.e., those aspects of the faith that engage the transcendent, spiritual aspects of belief — can easily be traded away if the result is the implementation of left-wing social-justice measures in the materialist here and now.



**Methodist madness:** The New Testament of the Bible repeatedly states that homosexuality is wrong (sinful), yet mainline Methodist churches are surrendering the faith to political correctness, even ordaining homosexual pastors. (*Photo credit: AP Images*)

This socialist mania for stripping away the sacred and the spiritual from the altars of faith to promote a purely materialist and political form of social-justice activism — one that jettisons the unique metaphysical rites and transcendent responsibilities of traditional belief — has given rise to the latest iteration of Marxist erasure: The Woke Church. As Rowan Williams demonstrates, the Woke Church takes that first pivotal leap required of all socialist appropriations by rejecting the supernatural order while striving to make the “natural” super. As far back as the 1940s,

C. S. Lewis anticipated this development and tied it to the rise of “the Historical Jesus” in his own day, the idea that while Jesus might have been a good and sincere moral teacher, we must not confuse his historically bound decency — which we may honor — with all that embarrassing nonsense about “the Son of God.”

Across the denominational landscape of modern Christianity, we see this fevered drive to awaken the faith from the nightmare of transcendence, subordinating it instead to the imperatives of materialism. A critical aspect of this “Wakening” is virtue signaling. Unlike the pre-Woke days — when virtue was first and foremost an individual attainment, earned through personal self-denial and voluntary suffering — today’s concept of virtue is wholly collective, attained without sacrifice simply by espousing the “correct” ideas and opinions. Claims to “inclusivity” are the hallmark of virtue signaling: the eager willingness to reject any deeply held belief, break any longstanding vow, or abandon any moral precept that doesn’t also embrace and promote its opposite. A Catholic diocese in Australia, for instance, has adopted a new religious curriculum that introduces young students to LGBT studies, gender fluidity, identity politics, and even atheism in an attempt “to make religion more relevant to students’ lives.” These students will be asked to “recognize sexuality as an exploration in forming personal identity” and will consider if the church’s teaching on sexuality has “any value or relevance to modern life.” This is a sharp reversal from pre-Woke times, when the purpose of Christian education was not to make religion





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relevant for students, but to show students how the eternal truths of Christianity necessitated a change and accommodation in their own hearts and minds.

The Church of Iceland, meanwhile, released an advertisement for Sunday School that depicts Jesus prancing and leaping while sporting a long beard and a pair of flamboyant, bouncing female breasts. Petur Georg Markan, the church's media representative, defended the image in the face of criticism: "In this ad, we see a Jesus who has breasts and a beard. We're trying to embrace society as it is. We have all sorts of people and we need to train ourselves to talk about Jesus as being 'all sorts' in this context." No one bothered to ask if "embracing society as it is" aligns with the teachings of Christ, who repeatedly called for a rejection of worldliness and any embrace of secular moral values outside of scriptural contexts. The church, loosely defined as Evangelical Lutheran, also produced minister Guorun Karls-og Helgudottir to defend the ad. Helgudottir said, "Each person interprets something in this picture. Some people interpret it as a trans Jesus, others as a woman. Some see Mary with a beard, and others see a genderqueer person. Views within the church are just as diverse as elsewhere." Right, so everyone is encouraged to see Christ exclusively as if He was them — and not Himself — and you're only doing it correctly if the self-modeled Jesus represents something markedly different from what scripture tells us He was.

This approach, which you will find in almost every university religious studies classroom, enshrines diversity for diversity's sake, not Christ, at the heart of Christianity, projecting Christ's divinity onto ourselves in ways that align perfectly with socialist understandings of human nature. Eventually, the pressure against bosomy Christ caused the Church of Iceland to back down and remove the image, but only after warning the world that they were just beginning their experiments in de-Christifying Christ in the name of worldly inclusion.

## **Fleecing the Flock While Courting Globalists**

In tracing the evolution of these materialist trends in Western churches, it is impossible not to mention the role of the Roman Catholic Church, whose primate is for all intents and purposes the most highly placed socialist ever to hold the Chair of Saint Peter, his Jesuit *bona fides* earned in the Latin-American fever swamps of liberation theology. Pope Francis has repeatedly compared migrants to Jesus, suggesting that the harsh welcome Christ received is very much like the reception many migrants experience: "Jesus knows well the pain of not being welcomed," the pope said in a tweet for International Migrants' Day. "May our hearts not be closed as were the houses in Bethlehem." Francis has made immigration a major feature of his papal platform, encouraging nations to be more inviting to migrants — legal or illegal — while insisting that a failure to welcome them is rooted in selfishness and greed and fueled by "populist rhetoric." Not surprisingly, given this pope's oft-documented soft spot for communist regimes, there has been no direct papal condemnation of China's highly restrictive border policies, let alone its infamous treatment of over one million Muslim Uighurs. Incidentally, Justin Welby — the current archbishop of Canterbury and leader of the second largest denomination of Christians — has also failed to condemn the Chinese Communist regime. Both men, however, have been eager to criticize American, British, and European efforts to deal with unauthorized, large-scale refugee border-crossings.

The pope's tenure has been marked by repeated papal attacks on populist movements across the world, including here in the United States where a wave of populist enthusiasm swept Donald Trump to the



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presidency. He is also critical of Brexit, where the democratic process led to a free people rejecting globalism rather than furthering ties with emerging globalist agendas. And it is something more alarming than mere irony that Francis seems unaware that in every respect the movement and call to action of Christ's own ministry is lock-step in line with traditional notions of populism.

And while it is fine for a Christian religious leader such as Francis to support immigrants and call on host countries to treat them as children of God, it is altogether hypocritical that he has nothing to say about the responsibilities of immigrants seeking asylum in foreign countries. Hence, no word from Francis about burgeoning instances of rape at the hands of immigrants in Sweden, no censure for the much-ballyhooed carbon footprint of such migratory endeavors, and no call to peaceable assimilation on the part of refugees to the cultural and religious norms of their new host countries. In a newly released encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti* (Brothers All), Francis goes so far down the socialist path as to insist that "we can then say that each country also belongs to the foreigner, inasmuch as a territory's goods must not be denied to a needy person coming from elsewhere."

The pope also calls for globalist reforms that would confer more power and control onto international agencies such as the United Nations: "It is essential to devise stronger and more efficiently organized international institutions, with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments, and empowered to impose sanctions." Writing specifically about the United Nations, the pope continues: "Needless to say, this calls for clear legal limits to avoid power being co-opted only by a few countries and to prevent cultural impositions or a restriction of the basic freedoms of weaker nations on the basis of ideological differences." He goes on to insist that "the work of the United Nations can be seen as the development and promotion of the rule of law, based on the realization that justice is an essential condition for achieving the ideal of universal fraternity." Ah yes, a universal fraternity of nations under the boot-heel regime of blue helmets. It's almost enough to make you long for the era of the Renaissance warrior popes, who were content to check Islamic aggression while limiting their lust for dominion to Europe and a few overseas papal enclaves.

Francis then asserts that the Charter of the United Nations is "an obligatory reference point of justice and a channel of peace," and thus "there can be no room for disguising false intentions or placing the partisan interests of one country or group above the global common good." Note the language progression — "The rule of law," "justice," "universal fraternity," and "the global common good" — it's as if the leader of almost two and a half billion Roman Catholics is more comfortable addressing some UN undersecretary for emerging regions than zealously shepherding the flock and assiduously protecting and promoting salvation in the name of Christ.

It was just this past August that Pope Francis told pilgrims that, according to the Bible, "The life of Christians is a military undertaking: fighting against the evil spirit, fighting against Evil.... In this way, the task of 'taking up the cross' becomes a participation with Christ in the salvation of the world." Over the years, Francis has condemned free markets, gun owners and gun makers, and even the allies during World War II, those "great powers" who had the pictures of the railway lines that brought the trains to the concentration camps like Auschwitz to kill Jews, Christians, homosexuals, everybody. Why didn't they bomb those rails? So, for Francis, guerrilla warfare to save lives is of course acceptable, but the idea that gun manufacturers might have armed defenseless Jews prior to the outbreak of violence would be a non-starter.



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## Don't Judge Their Words, but Their Actions

Certainly, if in the pope's description Christianity is a "military undertaking" to combat evil — onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war — then a key aspect of this martial commission is the protection of persecuted Christians and Christian institutions across the globe. And here is where we see just how far socialist ideas have undermined Christian churches across Western culture. For the socialist-inspired Woke Church, immigrants from non-Western cultures and non-Christian religions must be allowed borderless access to citizenship in North American and European countries. They must also be granted unfettered access to the wealth and opportunities enjoyed by citizens of Western civilization. And all of this must be offered with no expectation of assimilation, no mandate to learn the native language, and no call to leave behind the prejudices and dysfunctions of their previous homelands.



**Socialists can do no wrong:** Influenced by "woke" thinking, even as Chinese communists bulldoze Christian churches, they bask in the approval of the Vatican. At the same time, Pope Francis castigates every effort in Western countries to uphold laws against rioting, border jumping, and more. (*Photo credit: AP Images*)

But for Christian minorities living in non-Christian (or post-Christian) cultures, there is very little sympathy and support emanating from Western churches. When it comes to persecuted Christians around the globe, the churches are largely silent, as if Christians living and suffering abroad are viewed through Marxist lenses as interloping colonialists and parasites causing trouble and hardship for mistreated indigenous peoples. For instance, Chinese communist officials forcibly removed more than 900 crosses from Christian churches in the eastern province of Anhui during the first half of 2020. Anhui is home to the second-largest Christian population in China, and local authorities zealously implement Beijing's order to eliminate crosses from church buildings, threatening sanctions to those who fail to comply: "If a church refuses to remove its cross, congregation members may lose their social benefits, like pensions and poverty-alleviation subsidies, and possibilities for their children's future employment will be affected," explained one member of a Three-Self church in Yingdong. Cross-removal is part of Xi Jinping's broader Sinicization program to cleanse China of Western symbols and values, including those of Christianity.

The challenges faced by Christians can be equally daunting in Western nations that have rejected their own Christian heritage. Over the course of one week in July 2020, Catholic churches across the United



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States and Canada suffered a shocking wave of arson and vandalism in conjunction with Black Lives Matter and Antifa protests. The week-long spree included the desecration of statues of Jesus and Mary, one of which was beheaded and another spray-painted. Someone tried to burn down the Queen of Peace church in Ocala, Florida. Another arsonist set fire to a statue of the Virgin Mary in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. Yet another fire broke out at Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in Los Angeles, destroying the building's roof and interior. Vandals beheaded a statue of the Virgin Mary and knocked the monument off its pedestal at Saint Stephen Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Marauders desecrated a statue of Jesus at Sacred Heart Church in Calgary, Canada, and at the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in Ontario intruders cut the heads off several statues with a power saw.

If these were black churches or synagogues or mosques that were targeted, the fallout would be immediate and prolonged, a symptom no doubt of rampant white supremacy. But because of the left-wing politics of the anarchists, these incidents were largely overlooked — if not romanticized — by the legacy media.

In Cremona, Italy, Satanists disfigured and toppled a wooden statue of Jesus, leaving behind a piece of cardboard with the inscription "Satan." In Malmö, Swedish vandals desecrated the Evangelical Lutheran Church seven days in a row, breaking windows and demolishing a statue of Jesus. Northern Ireland has registered over 600 attacks on churches and other places of worship over the past five years, an average of one attack every three days. And a leading atheist in Scotland has hailed a proposed hate-crime bill as an opportunity to target Christians for prosecution. The left-separatist Scottish National Party (SNP) proposed the Hate Crime and Public Order Bill, which is set to criminalize speech that is likely to "stir up hatred" against "marginalized" groups. According to atheist activist Ian Stewart, the bill "will enable the prosecution of all Scotland's religions and their Holy Books for spreading hatred."

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis explained in stark terms the problems and dangers associated with the church, and the ways to exploit them. The book is an ongoing conversation between a senior devil (Screwtape), who instructs his young nephew (Wormwood) about the best ways to lead human souls into damnation. The advice Screwtape offers Wormwood about the church neatly encapsulates the ideas put forth in this article about the socialist coopting of faith:

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. Work hard, then, on the disappointment or anticlimax which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a churchman.

The Church Universal — the body of believers from age to age — is the greatest long-term threat to the evil machinations of those such as Screwtape who would seek to divorce the church from its transcendent and metaphysical origins. This church ultimately cannot be defeated and strikes fear into the hearts of the stoutest tempters, demons and socialists alike. Screwtape's only strategy for defeating this church is indeed the strategy of contemporary atheistic socialism: Get a person to forget the





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transcendent nature of the Church that leads directly back to Christ, its founder, and refocus him instead on the purely material aspects of the “church,” from the dilapidated structure to the shabby worshippers inside. On his death bed, G.K. Chesterton finally achieved absolute clarity on this very question as well. His last words: The issue is now clear. It is between light and darkness and everyone must choose his side.

## **Hurrah for Karamazov!**

Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* also chronicled a world in which atheistic socialism was undermining the churches and corrupting the youth. And even though he saw clearly the difficult times that were fast approaching, he chose to end his novel on a note of hope. Sooner than anyone else, Dostoevsky recognized that it was a certain type of socialist that free societies must fear:

We are not particularly afraid of all these socialists, anarchists, atheists, and revolutionaries.... But there are a few particular men among them who believe in God and are Christians, but at the same time are socialists. Those are people we are most afraid of. They are terrible people! The socialist who is a Christian is more to be feared than the socialist who is an atheist.

The socialist “Christian” is especially dangerous — perhaps the only type of socialist who is truly dangerous at all — precisely because as a Christian he has replaced the transcendent nature God with an utterly fictional narrative about materialist limits and boundaries. The last words of Dostoevsky’s final novel were “Hurrah for Karamazov!” Hurrah for human faith and the power of hope to raise us beyond the base world of materialism.



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