

REDEEMING
THE TIME

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Gospel Perspectives on the Challenges of the Hour

ROBERT BARRON

FOREWORD BY JOHN L. ALLEN JR.

WORD
on FIRE.

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FOREWORD

With regard to current events, the perennial temptation of Christianity is to become either too vertical or too horizontal. That is, we end up either so obsessed with otherworldly contemplation as to be completely detached from what's happening just outside the doors of the chapel, or so invested in a social or political program as to all but ignore the spiritual dimension of human existence and destiny. The more subtle form of the same temptation, probably, is to think the solution is a neat mathematical 50/50 split, with half one's time devoted to the here and now and the other half to the life beyond.

Naturally, the proper Catholic answer is something different entirely—it's "both/and." The aim is a life utterly tied up in the hurly and burly of the day, and, at the same time, totally permeated by the transcendent. Put simply, the trick is to be completely horizontal and completely vertical at the same time.

In recent Catholic life, the best example was St. John Paul II, the would-be Carmelite mystic whose entire life radiated spiritual depth, but who was also at least as well-informed and engaged in the nitty-gritty of geopolitics and the movements of history as most secular politicians and diplomats of his era. In today's America, the best public example we have of that capacity to fully incarnate the horizontal and the vertical is probably Auxiliary Bishop Robert Barron of Los Angeles, founder of Word on Fire, as this collection of essays abundantly illustrates.

Certainly no one could accuse Barron of paying short shrift to the spiritual. His best-known works aren't commentaries on current affairs but artful expositions of the perennial faith of the Catholic Church, crafted by someone who's clearly drenched in belief. While Catholicism has many fine evangelists, however, Barron's particular gift is to make the Church's timeless

tradition nevertheless seem timely by addressing it to the peculiar zigs and zags of the postmodern era, from our quasi-Jansenist fundamentalism about science to our toxic addiction to snark.

At one point Barron evokes St. John Henry Newman to the effect that the Church moves through a culture like a foraging animal in a forest, taking advantage of what it can and fighting off what it must. This book captures Barron at both his foraging and his fighting best.

I've always known that Bishop Robert Barron is a keen consumer of journalism, and that he appreciates the pressures journalists face in compiling the first draft of history; the Fellowship I hold at the Word on Fire Institute devoted to St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of journalists, is one proof of the point. Unlike many religious figures one meets in this line of work, Barron doesn't expect journalists to be the fifth evangelist instead of the fourth estate; he understands that journalism is a different animal, with its own logic and principles of tradecraft, and he wants it to be probing, critical, and un beholden to other agendas. When he's critical of the journalistic enterprise, it's because he wants us to do better journalism, not to be spokespersons for the system or advocates for some other cause.

I make my living covering the Vatican, and, over the years, I've had more conversations than I can count with bishops about whatever the latest madness unfolding in or around the Eternal City happens to be. I can testify that I've rarely been asked smarter questions than those I've taken from Barron, and it's because he's got the heart of a priest and the mind of a professor, but also the savvy of a good beat reporter. (To this day, a question he once asked about papal elections haunts me because I still don't have a good answer to it, but that's for another time.)

What I hadn't realized until reading this collection of essays, however, is that Barron is actually a fellow member of the tribe, a journo flying below radar. He's so well known for his video projects, his homilies, his lectures and speeches, that it's easy to miss the fact that he's also an old-school newspaper columnist, a sort of Walter Winchell in a mitre and cassock. Had most of these essays been printed on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* or *Wall Street*

Journal, they would have been right at home—and, frankly, the level of our civic discourse in America would be much higher if they were.

Strictly as an essayist—the word for which in my professional neighborhood is “columnist”—Barron exhibits three towering strengths, all abundantly illustrated in this collection.

First, Barron writes with real intelligence. His piece on the fiasco surrounding ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, now also ex-priest, begins with a reference to Luca Signorelli’s image of the Antichrist in the Orvieto Cathedral and veers quickly into exegesis of René Girard, with no apologies for the eggheaded discursions. He’s also in the habit of dropping words such as “evanesce” and “deracinate” into sentences, with no sense of artifice. Barron assumes his reader is smart enough to handle high-level content and makes no effort, like so many contemporary columnists, to dumb things down or to smother an absence of insight with clichés and one-liners.

I mean, no one who ends columns with quirky slogans such as “Down with Kantian reductionism!” is really appealing to the lowest common denominator, is he?

Second, Barron takes a stand. There’s never any mistaking which side of an argument he’s on; just read his essay on Bill Nye the Science Guy’s views on philosophy, for example, and you won’t come away muddled about what Barron thinks. (I’m too old to have watched Nye’s 1990s-era program, which was pitched at the youth of the day, but I share Barron’s skepticism that hosting a TV kids show necessarily qualifies someone to make pronouncements on metaphysics.)

Yet while Barron can be critical, even caustic, he’s never mean. In fact, he’s emerged as the great opponent of twenty-first-century Catholic snark, especially on social media. A whole section of this collection is devoted to calling out what Barron calls a “culture of contempt” online, which is hardly just a Catholic problem, but which Catholics arguably have a higher calling to resist. Carefully ponder his diagnosis of social media comboxes in the essay on “The Internet and Satan’s Game,” and you’ll never again be confused about the difference between argument (good) and calumny (bad).

Third, Barron is just a flat-out good writer. Consider, for instance, the way he wraps up an essay on the movie *The Shape of Water*, in which Barron makes the argument that the film exalts freedom and individualism at the expense of structure and participation in something larger than the self: “If all we have is the shape of water—which is to say, no shape at all,” Barron writes, “we’re actually in bad shape.” (Fair warning: someday, I will find a context to steal that line.)

In the essay in this volume on misuse of the term “culture warrior,” which he considers a good example of treating an abstraction as if it’s a real thing, Barron suggests following Bernard Lonergan’s epistemic imperatives:

- Be attentive (see what is really there to be seen).
- Be intelligent (form plausible hypotheses to explain a given phenomenon).
- Be reasonable (make judgments so as to determine which of a variety of bright ideas is in fact the right idea).
- Be responsible (accept the full implications of the judgment made).

You’ll find no better example of a spry Catholic mind trying to put those principles to work than the essays collected here. As we say in Italian, *Buona lettura!*

John L. Allen Jr.

PART I

FIGHTING THE
SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

Tintoretto and the Reform of the Church

At the close of a long session of walking and musing in the National Gallery of Art, I was drawn by an empty and comfortable-looking couch situated at the end of one of the galleries. Plopping down to rest, I looked up at the picture right in front of me. At first glance, given the color scheme and the peculiar modeling of the figures, I thought it was an El Greco, but closer examination revealed that it in fact was Tintoretto's depiction of Christ at the Sea of Galilee. The drama at the center of the composition is the Apostles' boat, buffeted by choppy waves, and St. Peter taking a gingerly, tentative step onto the bounding main at the invitation of the Lord, who beckons to him. My seated posture conduced toward contemplation, and I spent a good deal of time with this painting, first admiring the obvious technical skill of the painter, especially in the rendering of the water, but eventually moving to a deeper perception of its spiritual theme, of particular resonance today.

Whenever the Gospels present the disciples of Jesus in a boat, they are, of course, symbolically representing the Church. So Tintoretto is showing the Church in its practically permanent condition across the ages: at sea, rocked by waves, in danger of going under. Indeed, with a handful of remarkable exceptions, every age has been, in some way, a perilous one for the Mystical Body of Christ. The boat is filled with the specially chosen Apostles of the Lord, those who spent years with the Master, learning his mind, watching his moves, witnessing his miracles with their own eyes, taking in his spirit. One would think that even if everyone else failed to follow the Lord, these men would hold steady. And yet we see them cowering, timorous, obviously at a loss as the storm rages around them. And the Gospels, in a manner that sets them apart from most other literature dealing with religious founders

and their disciples, do consistently portray Jesus' inner circle as deeply flawed. Peter denied the Lord at the moment of truth; James and John succumbed to petty ambition; Thomas refused to believe the report of the Resurrection; Judas betrayed his master; all of them, with the exception of John, abandoned him on the cross, protecting their own hides. And yet Tintoretto shows Peter tentatively placing his foot upon the sea, commencing to walk toward Jesus. The great spiritual lesson—shopworn perhaps to the point of being a cliché, but still worth repeating—is that as long as the Church keeps its eyes fixed on Christ, it can survive even the worst of storms. It can walk on the water.

The Catholic Church is once more enduring a moment of extreme trial in regard to sexual abuse. This time, the focus of attention is on the failure of some bishops to protect the vulnerable, and in at least one terrible case, the active abuse perpetrated by a cardinal archbishop. The whole world is rightly outraged by these sins, and the Church appropriately feels ashamed. Many wonder, understandably, how those specially devoted to Christ could fall into such depravity. But then we recall that every bishop today is a successor of the Apostles—which is to say, of that band that both sat in easy familiarity with Jesus and denied, betrayed, and ran from their Master. In stormy times, the first Apostles cowered, and their successors, we have to admit, often do the same.

But there are grounds for hope. They are found, however, not in institutional reform (as important as that is), not in psychological analysis (as indispensable as that might be), not in new programs and protocols (as helpful as they might prove), but rather in a return to Jesus Christ. Eyes fixed on him, hearts attuned to him, minds beguiled by him, action determined by him, the leaders of the Church can, even now, walk on the water.

Tintoretto sheds considerable light on this issue of apostolic weakness and strength in the very manner in which he has arranged the figures in his composition. The painting is foreshortened in such a way that the disciples appear very small, almost doll-like, whereas Jesus, looming in the extreme foreground, looks gigantic. As John the Baptist put the principle: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). When our anxieties and egos are

placed in the foreground, Christ necessarily recedes. Crucial to the reformation of the Church is the reversal of that perspective.

The McCarrick Mess

This article was released on August 9, 2018. That October, the Holy See announced an investigation into Theodore McCarrick's abuse, culminating in a report released in November 2020.

When I was going through school, the devil was presented to us as a myth, a literary device, a symbolic manner of signaling the presence of evil in the world. I will admit to internalizing this view and largely losing my sense of the devil as a real spiritual person. What shook my agnosticism in regard to the evil one was the clerical sex abuse scandal of the nineties and the early aughts. I say this because that awful crisis just seemed too thought-through, too well-coordinated, to be simply the result of chance or wicked human choice. The devil is characterized as “the enemy of the human race” and particularly the enemy of the Church. I challenge anyone to come up with a more devastatingly effective strategy for attacking the Mystical Body of Christ than the abuse of children and young people by priests. This sin had countless direct victims of course, but it also crippled the Church financially, undercut vocations, caused people to lose confidence in Christianity, dramatically compromised attempts at evangelization, etc., etc. It was a diabolical masterpiece.

Sometime in the early aughts, I was attending a conference and found myself wandering more or less alone in the area where groups and organizations had their booths. I came over to one of the tables and the woman there said, “You’re Fr. Barron, aren’t you?” I replied affirmatively, and she continued, “You’re doing good work for the Church, but this means that the devil wants to stop you. And you know, he’s a lot smarter than you are and a lot more powerful.” I think I just mumbled something to her at that moment, but

she was right, and I knew it. All of this has come back to me in the wake of the McCarrick catastrophe. St. Paul warned us that we battle not against flesh and blood but against “powers and principalities.” Consequently, the principal work of the Church at this devastating moment ought to be prayer, the conscious and insistent invoking of Christ and the saints.

Now, I can hear people saying, “So Bishop Barron is blaming it all on the devil.” Not at all. The devil works through temptation, suggestion, and insinuation—and he accomplishes nothing without our cooperation. If you want to see the principle illustrated, Google Luca Signorelli’s image of the Antichrist in the Orvieto Cathedral. You’ll see what I mean. McCarrick did wicked things, and so did those, it appears, who enabled him. And we have to come to terms with these sins.

Before I broach the subject of how to do this, permit me to say a few words about unhelpful strategies being bandied about. A first one is indiscriminate scapegoating. The great philosopher René Girard taught us that when communities enter into crisis, people typically commence desperately to cast about for someone or some group to blame. In the catharsis of this indiscriminate accusation, they find a kind of release, an ersatz peace. “All the bishops should resign!” “The priesthood is a cesspool of immorality!” “The seminaries are all corrupt!” As I say, these assertions might be emotionally satisfying at some level, but they are deeply unjust and conduce toward greater and not less dysfunction. The second negative strategy is the riding of ideological hobby horses. So lots of commentators—left, center, and right—have chimed in to say that the real cause of the McCarrick disaster is, take your pick, the ignoring of *Humanae Vitae*, priestly celibacy, rampant homosexuality in the Church, the mistreatment of homosexuals, the sexual revolution, etc. Mind you, I’m not saying for a moment that these aren’t important considerations and that some of the suggestions might not have real merit. But I *am* saying that launching into a consideration of these matters that we have been debating for decades and that will certainly not admit of an easy adjudication amounts right now to a distraction.

So what should be done? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has no juridical or canonical authority to discipline bishops. And even if it tried to launch an investigation, it has, at the moment, very little credibility. Only the pope has juridical and disciplinary powers in regard to bishops. Hence, I would suggest (as a lowly back-bencher auxiliary) that the bishops of the United States—all of us—petition the Holy Father to form a team, made up mostly of faithful lay Catholics skilled in forensic investigation, and to empower them to have access to all of the relevant documentation and financial records. Their task should be to determine how McCarrick managed, despite his widespread reputation for iniquity, to rise through the ranks of the hierarchy and to continue, in his retirement years, to function as a roving ambassador for the Church and to have a disproportionate influence on the appointment of bishops. They should ask the ecclesial version of Sen. Howard Baker's famous questions: "What did the responsible parties know and when did they know it?" Only after these matters are settled will we know what the next steps ought to be.

In the meantime, and above all, we should ask the heavenly powers to fight with us and for us. I might suggest especially calling upon the one who crushes the head of the serpent.

Sowing the Wind and Reaping the Whirlwind: A Reflection on the Irish Referendum

I will confess that as a person of Irish heritage on both sides of my family, I found the events in Ireland in May 2018 particularly dispiriting. Not only did the nation vote, by a two-to-one margin, for the legal prerogative to kill their children in the womb, but they also welcomed and celebrated the vote with a frankly sickening note of gleeful triumph. Will I ever forget the unnerving looks and sounds of the frenzied crowd gathered to cheer their victory in the courtyard of Dublin Castle? As the right to abortion now sweeps thoroughly across the Western world, I am put in mind of Gloria Steinem's mocking remark from many years ago to the effect that if men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament. I say this because abortion has indeed become a sacrament for radical feminism, the one absolutely sacred, nonnegotiable value for so-called progressive women.

One of the features of the lead-up to the vote—and this has become absolutely commonplace—was the almost total lack of moral argument on the part of the advocates of abortion. There was a lot of political talk about “rights,” though the rights of the unborn were never mentioned; and there were appeals to “health care,” though the lethal threat to the health of the child in the womb was a nonissue. There was, above all, an attempt to manipulate people's feelings by bringing up rare and extreme cases. But what one hardly ever heard was a real engagement of the moral argument that a direct attack on a human life is intrinsically evil and as such can never be permitted or legally sanctioned.

Accompanying the entire process, of course, was the subtext of the Catholic Church's cultural impotence, even irrelevance. Every single story that I read in advance of the vote and subsequent to it mentioned the fact that overwhelmingly Catholic Ireland had shaken off the baleful influence of the Church and had moved, finally, into the modern world. How sad, of course, that being up-to-date is apparently a function of our capacity to murder the innocent. But at the same time I must admit—and I say it to my shame as a Catholic bishop—that, at least to a degree, I understand this reaction. The sexual abuse of children on the part of some Irish priests and brothers, not to mention the physical and psychological abuse of young people perpetrated by some Irish nuns, as well as the pathetic handling of the situation by far too many Irish bishops and provincials, produced a tsunami of suffering and deep injustice.

And we must remember a principle enunciated by my colleague Fr. Stephen Grunow—namely, that the abuse of children in any society, but especially in one as insular and tight-knit as Irish society, has a tremendously powerful ripple effect. When a young person is sexually abused, particularly by a figure as trusted as a priest, that child is massively and permanently hurt; but once the abuse becomes known, so are his siblings, his parents, his friends, his extended family, his parish. Now multiply this process a dozen times, a hundred times, a thousand times—again, especially in a country as small as Ireland—and you will find that, in very short order, the entire nation is filled with anger, indignation, and a legitimate thirst for setting things right. I do believe that what we witnessed last week was a powerfully emotional reaction to the great crimes of the last several decades. The deeply sad truth is that the abuse of young men and women has given rise to an even more dramatic abuse of unborn children. When you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind.

Is there a way forward for Ireland? I think a significant sign of hope is the considerable number of people who took the extremely unpopular stance against this legislative innovation. Knowing full well that they would likely lose and that they would be subject to ridicule and perhaps even the loss of their professional positions, they courageously argued for life. On

that foundation, much of value can be built. But what Ireland most needs at this moment—and indeed for the next hundred years—are saints and mystics. Moral arguments can and should be made, but if the Church wants to recover its standing as a shaper of the Irish culture, it has to produce men and women who give themselves radically to the Gospel. It needs figures in the mold of Teresa of Kolkata, Oscar Romero, Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day—indeed of St. Patrick, St. Brendan, St. Columbanus, and St. Brigid. And it requires men and women of prayer, like the founders of the great Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Cistercian, and Trappist houses that still dot the Irish countryside—and like the strange denizens of Skellig Michael, who for six centuries clung to the edges of the world off the coast of Ireland and lived in total dependence upon God.

Finally, only prayer, witness, radical trust in divine providence, honest preaching, and the living of the radical Gospel will undo the damage done last week.

Letter to a Suffering Church: Conclusion

The sexual abuse scandal has been for me, for millions of other Catholics, and especially for the victim-survivors, lacerating. I know many Catholics are sorely tempted just to give up on the Church, to join another religious group, or perhaps to become one of the religiously unaffiliated. But this is not the time to leave; it is the time to stay and fight. If I may, I'd like to make a historical reference to a key moment in our political history. By the 1850s, it had become unmistakably clear to Abraham Lincoln that slavery was not only a moral outrage but also an institution that posed a mortal threat to American democracy. One can hear his arguments along these lines in the great speeches he gave while debating Stephen Douglas during the 1858 Illinois senatorial campaign. But nowhere was his case more pithily put than in his famous address before the Illinois General Assembly just after his nomination for the Senate: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe that this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free."

It was this conviction that led Lincoln, upon becoming president in 1861, to accept and prosecute a terrible war. Midway through that conflict, while dedicating a cemetery for those who died in its decisive battle, Lincoln explained why he continued to fight: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." There were indeed many people in the North who, appalled at the losses on the battlefield and less than persuaded of the utility of the war, were rancorously calling for Lincoln to give up, to let the Confederacy have what it wanted. But the president knew that

something more than military victory or national pride was at stake in the struggle; he knew that slavery constituted a rot upon American democracy, a disease that undermined the principles of our founders. Therefore, despite the pain, he had to fight.

I understand that it's not a perfect analogy, but I think it sheds at least some light on the present situation in the Church. The sexual abuse of young people by some priests and the countenancing of that abuse by some bishops is more than a moral problem; it is a rot, a disease, a threat to the great principles of the Church that we hold dear. Yes, an easy option is to cut and run, to give up on the operation. But if you believe, as I do, in the doctrines and practices and convictions of the Church, if you think it is indispensable that the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ abides as a light to the world, then take the Lincoln option: stay and fight!

Fight by raising your voice in protest; fight by writing a letter of complaint; fight by insisting that protocols be followed; fight by reporting offenders; fight by pursuing the guilty until they are punished; fight by refusing to be mollified by pathetic excuses. But above all, fight by your very holiness of life; fight by becoming the saint that God wants you to be; fight by encouraging a decent young man to become a priest; fight by doing a Holy Hour every day for the sanctification of the Church; fight by coming to Mass regularly; fight by evangelizing; fight by doing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

God is love, and he has won the victory through the cross and Resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, we inhabit what is finally a divine comedy, and we know that the followers of Jesus are on the winning side. Perhaps the very best way to be a disciple of Jesus right now is to stay and fight for his Church.

PART II

REACHING THE “NONES”

The Least Religious Generation in US History: A Reflection on Jean Twenge's *iGen*

Jean Twenge's book *iGen* is one of the most fascinating—and depressing—texts I've read in the past decade. A professor of psychology at San Diego State University, Dr. Twenge has been, for years, studying trends among young Americans, and her most recent book focuses on the generation born between 1995 and 2012. Since this is the first cohort of young people who have never known a world without iPads and iPhones, and since these devices have remarkably shaped their consciousness and behavior, Twenge naturally enough has dubbed them the “iGen.”

One of her many eye-opening findings is that iGen'ers are growing up much more slowly than their predecessors. A baby boomer typically got his driver's license on his sixteenth birthday (I did), but an iGen'er is far more willing to postpone that rite of passage, waiting until her eighteenth or nineteenth year. Whereas previous generations were eager to get out of the house and find their own way, iGen'ers seem to like to stay at home with their parents and have a certain aversion to “adulthood.” And Twenge argues that smartphones have undeniably turned this new generation in on itself. A remarkable number of iGen'ers would rather text their friends than go out with them and would rather watch videos at home than go to a theater with others. One of the upshots of this screen-induced introversion is a lack of social skills, and another is depression.

Now, there are many more insights that Dr. Twenge shares, but I was particularly interested, for obvious reasons, in her chapter on religious attitudes and behaviors among iGen'ers. In line with many other researchers, Twenge

shows that the objective statistics in this area are alarming. As recently as the 1980s, 90% of high school seniors identified with a religious group. Among iGen’ers, the figures are now around 65% and falling. And religious practice is even more attenuated: only 28% of twelfth graders attended services in 2015, whereas the number was 40% in 1976. For decades, sociologists of religion have been arguing that, though explicit affiliation with religious institutions was on the decline, especially among the young, most people remained “spiritual”—that is to say, convinced of certain fundamental religious beliefs. I remember many conversations with my friend Fr. Andrew Greeley along these lines.

But Twenge indicates that this is no longer true. Whereas even twenty years ago, the overwhelming number of Americans, including youngsters, believed in God, now fully one-third of eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds say that they don’t believe. As late as 2004, 84% of young adults said that they regularly prayed; by 2016, fully one-fourth of that same age cohort said that they never pray. We find a similar decline in regard to acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God: one fourth of iGen’ers say that the Scriptures are a compilation of “ancient fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.” Her dispiriting conclusion: “The waning of private religious belief means that young generations’ disassociation from religion is not just about their distrust of institutions; more are disconnecting from religion entirely, even at home and even in their hearts.”

Now, what are some of the reasons for this disconnect? One, Twenge argues, is the iGen preoccupation with individual choice. From their earliest years, iGen’ers have been presented with a dizzying array of choices in everything from food and clothes to gadgets and lifestyles. And they have been encouraged, by practically every song, video, and movie, to believe in themselves and follow their own dreams. All of this self-preoccupation and stress upon individual liberty stands sharply athwart the religious ideal of surrendering to God and his purposes. “My life, my death, my choice” (a rather iGen-friendly motto that I recently saw emblazoned on a billboard in California) sits very uneasily indeed with St. Paul’s assertion “Whether we live

or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). A second major reason for iGen dissatisfaction with religion is one that has surfaced in lots of surveys and polls—namely, that religious belief is incompatible with a scientific view of the world. One young man that Twenge interviewed is typical: "Religion, at least to people my age, seems like it's something of the past. It seems like something that isn't modern." Another said, "I knew from church that I couldn't believe in both science and God, so that was it. I didn't believe in God anymore." And a third reason—also attested to in lots of studies—is the "antigay attitudes" supposedly endemic to biblical Christianity. One of Twenge's interviewees put it with admirable succinctness: "I'm questioning the existence of God. I stopped going to church because I'm gay and was part of a gay-bashing religion." One survey stated the statistical truth bluntly enough: 64% of eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds believed that Christianity is antigay, and for good measure, 58% of those iGen'ers thought that the Christian religion is hypocritical.

Dismal stuff, I know. But Dr. Twenge performs a great service to all those interested in the flourishing of religion, for she lays out the objectivities unblinkingly, and this is all to the good, given our extraordinary capacity for wishful thinking and self-deception. Further, though she doesn't tell religious educators and catechists how to respond, she unambiguously indicates what is leading this most unreligious generation in our history away from the churches. Her book should be required reading for those who wish to evangelize the next generation.