



All-American Jesus: My Comfortable Life

By C.J.Conroy

Growing up American, I had a hard life of soft living, let me tell you. I went to work part time. I went to school full-time. And I attended church every Sunday on schedule. Like any good person, brought up as a product of western civilization, I believed in a Jesus of a sort and held to religion as it is called, but with all the self assurance of modern Christians, I was living like dead leather, shiny and cool with a religious face... And not else but doomed enthusiasm. For me, faith was easy because it required little of me. Attend the weekly bless-me parties and ponder vast-and-shallow philosophies, but never think on more than matters of the mortal world. Yes, that short-lived religion I was raised on offered me much in the way of Edenic Potential but proved itself only the pursuit of false piety and a tragic waste of truth.

While western civilization has done wonders for the world, and we would never wish away our embarrassing excess, our sundry social, economical, and educational, opportunities to excel, if there is a downside to democracy, I would have to say it lies in the space reserved for our faith, a world of watered-down religion, in which we no longer allow for the belief that excellence matters. We are quite fond of our modernity and make our boast about our founding fathers, but what we forget regrettably are the risks they faced to attain those freedoms we so simply forgo and the rigorous journeys they took to cross the sea to be here and build what we have so carelessly broken asunder. Desiring to do homage to a holy "God", these great men of the breaking-heart stood indifferent to the world which would not let them worship the LORD of Heaven they could not see and serve his Son upon the earth as they saw fit. And setting out with a single savage faith, forsaking the ill-made works of man, our pilgrim fathers, lovely and godlike, made their way to American shores unbowed in every storm. And establishing a colony of heaven in a hostile world, they strove with all their might for the gospel-driven-life seeking something of His Cross and leaving so much for us to care for thereafter.

And yet all that these fiery men left to us, we have lost to the lying years or allowed to degenerate into Christianity-and-water. Listening to the apostles of tranquility and following

after the prophets of tolerance, in our country we have crafted religion as a higher kind of culture with not but a shallow admiration for Christ, and our only offering for the lowest and least is a forlorn hope and no more. This vague slush of humanitarian idealism, being life as we actually live it, holds little of the life-giving Cross, much of those lying prophets, and has grown lamentably out of control, grim, and deadly, and free of the Christian "God". We have all the religion dying of thirst, and we ourselves are starving beyond the banquet hall.

But it doesn't have to be this way, playing second fiddle to Saints. We were Giants once, tiny gods in a terrible world, before we left our primary allegiance. Till we forgot the hardness of Heaven and the softness of Men, we were making enemies and borrowing trouble, bleeding charity and binding up the testimony, in the way of HIS people. Far too long, we've chosen cunning over belief, but we can change if we begin today. If we are willing to exercise the liberty our fathers earned us and to ask for the old paths instead, to stop insulting the dead who gave us the American Dream of religious freedom and get back to the martyrs who brought that dream to life, the time will return when the faith of our fathers was burning and we but felt at home in our FATHER's House, shining in the shadow of a Great NAME.

Beguiled By Pop-Christianity

It happened long ago, our loss of love and wonder. Somewhere along the succession of centuries, we forgot our sense of zealotry, our driving passion for the message of Calvary, and we allowed our Lord's labors to be diminished, his cross converted into a cultural icon, and Christ himself exchanged for a look-alike idol. We have



built a customized faith in a fictionalized Christ who cannot even save us from our sins because nothing is Iniquitous anymore any way ... Or so we say. What began in primitive Christendom as blood and thunder and unquenchable fire, the message of faith from the mountains of power, has grown forlorn in the fading light into faith and fandom, The pleasures of power and candy. Today in the "church of hugs and holding hands" and at every Tom-fool-Bible-school is taught this deplorable folly: all is sugar and sunshine.

The smells are pleasant. The sounds are pleasing. All the people are pretty, and every moment's a party. We have crushed the crucified and cast out the master, lest he call us to account and make us pay the piper. Gone are the good man of old allied with the majesty, and moved to the fringes of memory are the holy ones who held true through torment and death. Far better to keep near to us the blessed and beatific of bird baths and stain glass, for these are more manageable and breakable than their name sake's. And living out our mullet life, amid the shards of sainthood, business upfront and party in back, all the saints of this

age, brave little believers one and all, with their self caressing luxury of phony faith, sickly sweet and somehow evil, have all the thrills of religion and none of the cost, all the stage to themselves and nothing worthy to say, all the spotlight and the sugar high to show how easy it is to fall from grace in spectacular fashion, to begin well and end poorly.

Our generation has been taught to worship at the altar of a Hollywood God, to follow Christ on Facebook and talk about him on Twitter yet not to follow in His footsteps or show who he was and is and why it should matter. We've learned to love a celebrity Jesus, to be his biggest fans, but not to be his smallest disciples. But the lie behind the lights is this; there is nothing in all this noise, and we've been dealt the high card in the devil's hand. Sure it all looks quite special and precious, but it is descending ever so gloriously into madness. Beneath the lovely lies the enormous force of institutional religion and the state of being half dead. Last time I checked, Jesus doesn't need Facebook friends or super fans or groupies. Belief in "the great whatever" is not nearly enough to get you by. Where is the fear of Heaven?! Where are the heroes who gave their all for the gospel and the good Lord above? We have been boasting over broken branches and dancing on martyrs dust, but we are no better and no better off for all our braggadocia, bravado, and brummagem.

The lights are bright, the smiles white, and we can sing the day away to our hearts delight, but while we are sitting pretty at the end of the world, our religion of rights and privilege is doing little and less to rescue the dying and the damned. We are doing our damndest to party hearty, watching as the world burns, but for all our time diluting our own doctrine, dumbing it down to be devoured by the masses deceiving them into believing it to be medicine, we ourselves have become wholly broken and so sickly we cannot guide the willing through the low gate of the high Kingdom where only resides Salvation. At the Bible's demise, we doled out our lies and to all of our surprise, our placebo preaching could not produce the cure for what ails the heart of man. We gave the people sugar pills and pleasant propaganda. We told them they could trust in a story, stay the same, and start to experience eternal life. Here in the afterglow of day, as the wonders we've built burn low and our sugar high crashes spectacularly, we find we have outdone Jezebel. In our efforts to blaze a new trail to paradise we've only paved the road to hell. The only question now remaining is, "can we repent in time?!"

Finding "God" in the Ruins of the "Church"

In this post modern and even, dare I say it, post Christian age, many and more are moving away from faith and what they call institutional or organized religion, because they see through the phoniness and the fakery. The stuck up self-righteous Saints turn them away for

not being spotless, and the shiny and stupid celebrity cults turn them off just as surely as the superstitious and supercilious. The people are leaving, not to go to some other church, but to go away from church itself... And I don't blame them. It is not hard to see that something is rotten at the core of this thing we believe in and built our world around. But when the church turns sour, to whom do you turn? When the fear of the Heavenly FATHER is gone from His own faith, where do you go to have faith? I agree that something is amiss within our midst, and the more we try to fix it, the more we make a mess. But I also believe that the answer is not to leave, but to stay. Heaven forbid we go away and break what little is left to us, what minor part remains. Moreover, if we go, we will discover the same sins wherever we find ourselves, because we bring them with us by being no more than our basic selves. There is no escape since we are the very issue that is at stake. Our own sins have shaped the faith from which we now seek to run away. No one else is to be blamed. No one else can be. We alone decide what the gospel of Christ will mean in our day. If it is easy believism, or oppressive legalism, it is our fault either way. We have grown quiet in the Day of evil and so should not be surprised to find we are become the kinsman of the fiend. And the start of all our trouble? We made a drastic, yet so often done, error. Mistaking devotion to Christ's church with dedication to Christ himself. Mixing up theology derived from the Bible with the Bible itself. And moving ourselves into the position of decision-maker instead of the Creator himself. The church as an entity may not be by nature evil. It was in fact formed from the fellowship founded by Jesus, but the Lord let us have it to lead people to Him, and that is no longer the case. I would still hesitate to say, however, that we should leave and let it fall away. The Lord may yet be found among the rubble of what we've built, and perhaps amid all that remains is the best place to start our search. Long we have been praying among the ruins, but love among the ruins was our purpose. We let the simple message languish for so long it was almost lost, but once the shrines and shiny wonders we raised up in our honor have fallen, we are sure to find the love the Lord left us to give the world bound up behind the walls. Long we have been lambs lamenting our lowliness and professing our grandeur, but if we are to gain true religion once more, again we must be wolves. We must not stay penned up in our Sunday best. We must break out of the barriers we built ourselves. We must run and range and hunt down our prey. The Lord is here for those desiring his presence, but only when the walls have fallen do we discover he never left. We had boarded Him up in His own house. If we can regain that great ambition of the agents who boldly proclaimed, "My goal is 'God' himself" and "In



all things, glory to 'God'. Amen," and "my 'God' and my all", then not only will we have the Lord we long for, but we will at last grow to be the very church he planted in this world. We can become this, but we have to be willing to bleed for it. Everyone hates the bleeders, but we are the ones who love. So if you want to find your Heavenly FATHER, don't go. Don't run away. Stay... And love what's there, and the Almighty who is there will appear.

Her Violent Slumber

As with any human institution, we too are prone to insanity, instability, and in our particular scenario, somnambulance. We may be moving forward, but that doesn't mean we are awake. So long ago we fell asleep, and the slumber of centuries has brought us much comfort. We have been given bright lights and beautiful appearance, the glitz and glamour of the global religion healing health, wealth, and happiness as the highest aspirations of a Christian people, but we bought all this bliss and blessing at the price of purity. All our worldly wonders came at the cost of godliness. We were told in the Good Book that godliness with contentment is great game, but our gains have been acquired at the Bible's demise in a godless temperament craving comforts and candies. And with that sugar crash came the resulting ruin, this slumber of the church of Jesus Christ — itself fueling the further erosion of faith and excellence in our society.

Amidst the madness, we made as a faith, we are dreaming. We are dreaming while the world is dying. Jonah in the bottom of the boat, abed and oblivious, as the storm we summoned by our sins strikes the unsuspecting people that surround us. The organization the Almighty founded to awaken the nations to His everlasting life, the house of the FATHER, is fast asleep instead enjoying the prophets' profits as the ghosts of those days of old stand aghast and enraged at the mess we've made of their martyrdom. Oh sure, there are believers still, holding orthodox doctrine at heart and having the Scriptures all stuck in their heads, yet now at the zero hour, as we stand on the edge of the end of all things, what benefit has all that holy hullabaloo been for the generations blundering toward eternal hellfire, themselves sleeping beside us? Here among the ruins, how has all this "Jesus stuff" served our neighbors so nearer to perdition with every passing second? Has standing at the end of a broken road blaming the lost for not knowing the right way actually helped them out at all? Especially when most of those wandering fools are only out of place because they followed us this far. So far, as the frozen chosen, we've signed and cried over abominations done by outsiders, but we've succeeded only in being a whore preaching modesty.

To shock all faithful Christians, I say that all our church going, tithing and hymn singing, the fussy time-wasting botheration of it all, shall not save a single soul nor rouse them from their spiritual REM if they can all see us with them sleepwalking together. The damned have to be able to look in our eyes and see very heaven there. They must know our way of walking upright in the daylight, awake and alive to truth, that within our breasts beat all hearts fit to break with love and grace for their well-being both now and forever more. If we keep holding to a faith built on the feeding light of a fallen world, rather than clinging to the madness of old and the muchness of Calvary, we can be sure and certain as the sun in the sky that we will one day wake to find ourselves before that otherworldly court, the façade we fashioned ripped away, that we Van Winkled our way through life, and are left with only fantasies for all our hours on the earth. As we adhere to the faith, however, may we find instead that greater is the blood of Jesus than any of our dreams. And may we experience an awakening in time to be as the Almighty's very own agents of grace ere the end of the age and the reckoning which all men must face.

Take Him Off the Totem-Pole

C. S. Lewis once said, "... A supposed 'historical Jesus' to be dug out of the Gospels and then set up in opposition to Christian teaching is suspect." Between our preoccupation with acquiring property and pleasure and our distracted devotion to the idea of the divine and demure Jesus, we have created in our western worldly-wise way of viewing our faith, a kind of idol out of our Savior instead of opening our hearts to give him a home. The church's dangerous dream state has delivered to the American mind a religion of sentimentalism and stagnation in which the Lord Jesus is either stuck as a crying baby in a manger, a weak little child, or stuck on a cross and dying, meek and mild. Everywhere we turn, he is there and helpless to save. He is special, the center of attention, but always plastic and metal, stone and stained glass. Always, our Lord is left at arm's length, austere and out of reach. Stern and silent. Sad and simple, a god, good and gracious, but never given reign to be more than the good shepherd. In our country, we've been taught to revere Jesus Christ, to call on his name, to carry his image around to make us feel better about ourselves, blessed and better than the unbelievers. From a young age, we learn to pray to him, to ask him for stuff, to call him our copilot, wing man, and homeboy. We grew up in America with our very own personal pocket-God and buddy-Christ, and grown we keep him around as our general good luck charm. He brings us positive energy, keeps us in good standing in the community, and wards off demons and any unwanted juju, jinxes, and bad mojo... And we wonder why the masses are fleeing the church like rats from a sinking ship! With half of Christendom asleep at the wheel and the rest partying hearty like the apocalypse wasn't pending, we should not be



having nothing to do with us. With the Lord restricted in our religion, we always know where to find Him when we need Him, and we'll never know we always need Him unrestricted.

surprised in the least to discover that 2000 years after dying for our sins, the Lord and Savior, has been hailed as a God while held as an amulet.

Certainly we have set the Son of the Almighty up atop the totem pole, but we have required He remain there rather than totally transforming our lives in righteousness. If we keep Him perpetually on the cross and in the manger, he cannot manage to call us out on our hypocrisy and heathenry.

What impact can Christ make us when we keep him shut out of every area of our lives? The place of honor is reserved for Him, okay, but what honor is this when every place belongs to Him by right?! We feel good about giving Jesus a special place in our hearts, a holy area just for Him, because that way we feel good about that same holiness having nothing to do with us. With the Lord restricted in our religion, we always know where to find Him when we need Him, and we'll never know we always need Him unrestricted.

True religion, as the Lord intended, frees Jesus to reign supreme as king over the centuries and not as some sacred totem, icon, or good luck charm hung on the wall or around our necks. Taking Him down and turn Him loose in our lives is the only way we will see Him be raised high as He deserves and raise us up too, as He influences every aspect of our world. Otherwise we will be the ones dictating right and wrong for ourselves by ourselves and squandering the whole mess of it beautifully as we have so far accomplished with aplomb. To see Jesus truly exalted as all our excellent songs and speeches have so proclaimed Him to be (yet had never produced the resulting elevation) we need change ourselves so we see Him in revelatory power and glory not as a baby boy or bleeding Corpse.

The Discomforts of His Cross

Our side of the world, with regularity, both religion and culture (if there exists a difference) regards to cross with a welcoming familiarity, fondness and warmth the rest of the planet and particularly other generations closer to Calvary itself do not share. The world over, the presence of the cross has become envisioned as a brand of religious bigotry and butchery due to misuse and maltreatment of the masses during the middle ages under the sign. Thereby

in our time, the symbol of love living in us, denotes to most the hatred of long dead devils instead. And even further back to the beginning of our religion, the cross of Christ as something comfy and fun was a concept as far from the minds of first century Disciples as paper money or microwave ovens. In our world the Cross says more about fashion sense than it does about saving faith, a decoration but not a proclamation. Because after all, it is far easier to hang the cross upon yourself than to hang yourself up on the cross.

It is a terrible tale of the times when a man can bind the cross about his neck and think it not binding upon his nature and character. We read in scripture the apostle calling the cross an offense, but in our day on our side of Life, we can't possibly fathom why. It's just something to wear around our necks, an icon and an amulet, but no more... And yet to our most remote ancestors in the inception of the faith, it was so much more. To them the cross was all at once both life and death, by no means a manner of typical talisman or totem but a very genuine possibility of how life could end, not for someone else in a remote time but personally and presently. Reflecting this notion C.H.Spurgeon said, "The cross before my failing eyes shall be my dying comfort as it is my living strength."



What's missing in our world and from our religion is the knowledge of the cross, not as a symbol, but as a living Sacrifice.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ told us emphatically, "anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple." The master did not mean wearing a gold chain or making a hand gesture. Those are easy tokens of potential intention, but those are not the truest and do not demonstrate real devotion. The true cross killed Christ, and that can't be an easy thing to accomplish. No. Nothing is easy about it. It is hard, plain, cold, and broken, and bearing it means that we must bleed. We must become fixed to it hand and foot, possibly physically put more probably figuratively through forgoing to the Lords will whatever our hands would do and wherever our feet would go.

The easy thing is to say, "I am a Christian," when no one is trying to crucify you for it, but how many of our number would wear the sacred symbol when they see the cost it comes with?! We've grown soft over centuries of freedom and easy believeism, and today we do evil under the cross and call it godliness. We wear the sign of salvation and seem like it was going out of style, but never is there required by our conscience any kind of sacrifice, for seeking, or surrender to grace. No turning. No repentance. No change. Just a simple symbol to cover our sickness and sinister ways. Just a gesture to make all the guilt go away. Lord have mercy, what a mess we've made of faith! And Heaven help us before it is too late! Ere

the culmination of the revelation, may we regain a bit of that long-lost discomfort when we did not justify evil in the bearing of a good symbol of the Crucified, to find ourselves justified by heaven and able to become the bearers of holiness to the broken world. As ever it has been, it now is the same, “the only thing easy is entropy” and “no pain no gain.”

Dreaming Ancient Visions

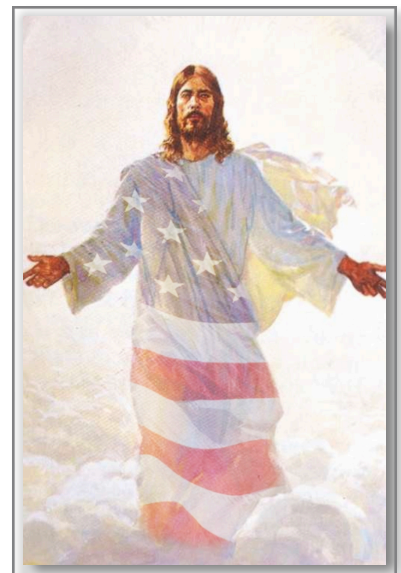
We have been raised in an alternate reality, a fancy religious fantasy where morality is malleable, Christ is casual, and our commitment is questionable at best. For countless centuries the church of Jesus Christ has been sleeping on the job and dreaming of heaven all the while earth itself goes to hell around us. Here in America, we've made our Lord and Savior many things, but king is not one of them. The cult of the kindly Carpenter has captured our Christ and captivated the masses to regard him as a trinket while treating Him as a rockstar, or pal or our personal genie, and the religion built 'round this Blasphemy has thus far bested True religion at every turn. Church is what we do once a week not who we are every day. Carrying the cross consists of wearing a crucifix about our person, but not personally crucifying our fleshly desires. Discipleship means attending Bible studies and telling the Book everything that it should mean to us, but never allowing for that book to scrutinize our souls and call us on our sins.

Thus far, the Messiah, our master and teacher, has been regarded by us, His students, as a friend and an all-around fine person, and that's all well and good, but not nearly good enough for the good shepherd, who also happens to be the Son of the Most High Elohim. And without accepting the rest of the blessedness about our Savior, acknowledging Jesus as some nice guy who did some cool stuff and got killed and came back is in actuality extremely evil after all. In spite of how much we may love our country, Christ didn't live here in the states, and even though our nation was made mostly by people who honored our Lord, Jesus was not an American. Though our faith in Him has largely been American made, Jesus came to earth not in the west but in the east. He came to Israel, and there spent all His days before returning home to heaven. Birth to death and from resurrection to present, the Lord of glory was Jewish and will be so when He returns to rule the world from Israel. He is not as we envision Him. He is not as we've dreamed Him to be, and bless me, would it not be wonderful if we western pleasure seeking believers woke up, put our comforts aside, and looked into the past into the east to understand the gargantuan grandiosity of the Son of Elohim.

For so long we have shaped our faith around ourselves and said it was all for Jesus, but the true Yahshua, as Jesus was known in His day, would have us shape ourselves in faith around

Him, His words, His works, and His ways... but not for Himself. In all things He gave glory to the Father. And if we could bring ourselves to do that, today to our desire to mistake the American dream with amazing grace, what great wonders will await us when we wake. The wonders of the world would be ours because we would be caught up with crowning Christ as king of the world where we used to be consumed with our own comforts and crowning achievement. Everything we claim to desire in our all American religion of consumerism, which things we so far never seem to receive by seeking them will in fact be found in our surrender to the sovereignty of the Lord above and His Messiah over us. Weather within this life or the next, but what we truly want will be ours to have when and only when we are willing to stop daydreaming about future delights and start dreaming Ancient Visions of discipleship.

Of old Christ's disciples discovered quickly how true His words were when He said, "in this world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." They did not believe He was lying when He promised that to His followers, "... Much you must suffer for My Name." And the irony was not lost upon the apostles when Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, in the same way they prosecuted the prophets who were before you, and great is your reward in heaven." Once upon a time, the followers of Jesus weren't on Facebook and Twitter. There were not people who believed some facts about a guy who lived long ago, but they were active students of His every word and gesture, who learned from His life, to model their own lives after His. They didn't do it in secret nor in the safety of Western society, where justice and liberty were guaranteed by law. No, these ancient worthies worshipped the Almighty as the Lord Jesus taught them, and they taught others in turn under the terrible threat of receiving the same fate as Him they followed faithfully.



To the Christians of the first century, reshaping true religion into their own temporal ideas would be terrible and terrifying to say the least. They would rather die than turn from the faith of the ages, and they did so by the thousands instead of twisting what the Most High had given them in trust. Time however has made it okay to remake what was written of old and to make it say what we mean and mean what we say. Time and tradition have paved the way for blasphemy and betraying the martyrs who gave their blood to get a unaltered Word of the LORD to us. They didn't bleed so we could contort the gospel, so that we could mold it into a more socially acceptable, politically correct salvation plan. They deliver to our

generation the way of life and eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and we in turn need to live to do the same, and be willing to die to maintain the integrity of the message the Messiah left us, His disciples furthered, and our fathers fought to forward to us. The church has to become a thing we are without interruption, discipleship our every word and action, a life of studying and structuring all we are around what we learned from our Teacher, and the cross our strength in life and comfort in death.

If true religion, as Scripture describes it, is to last another 2000 years, Or another 200 or even another 20 for that matter, it will be for the believers of this generation to decide now what matters most, what the gospel means, and what we are willing to pay for it. It is high time for Christians to live up to our name and to our Lord, Who laid down His life for us. To let Him down now will be to destroy the memory of the faithful dead who came before us and to annihilate the future hope we've held for all successive generations beforehand for those yet unborn who will believe. They will be more than American Christians preaching a safe, soft gospel but all-time Christians prepared to suffer for it.

