


**St. Therese Catholic Church**

Religion of the Day  
*Session I*

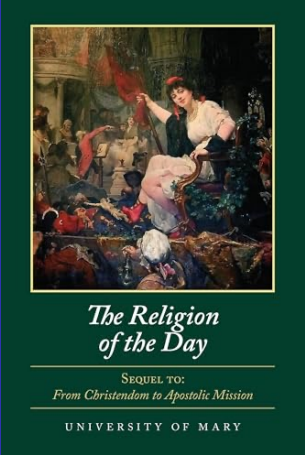
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 **St. Therese Parish**

**Course Book**

- *The Religion of the Day*
- University of Mary Press
- Published in 2023
- Looks at the principles of Modern Progressive Gnostic Religion that Christians often believe; provides a healthy understanding of the Church, including the fact that the Church catches the diseases of the world and develops corresponding antibodies for healing.



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### Overview

Religion of the Day	
Session I	Introduction and the Religion of the Day
Session II	Twelve Aspects of Modern Religion (Points 1 - 6)
Session III	Twelve Aspects of Modern Religion (Points 7 - 12)
Session IV	Further Notes on Progressive Religion
Session V	Catching the Diseases of the World
Session VI	The Winning Stance
Session VII	Conclusion: The Kingdom, the Tribulation, and the Patient Endurance

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### Goals for Today

- Introduce the discussion by highlighting that we are no longer in era of Christendom.
- Look at Introduction
- Look at Chapter 1, *Religion of the Day*, including:
  - Our Modern Religious Age
  - The Primal Heresy
  - Progressive Religion as Religion
  - Structure of Modern Progressive Religion

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## Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- The prequel to the *Religion of the Day* is a book called *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*.
- This book argues that there are two modes in which Christianity interacts with human societies:
  - **Christendom Mode**
  - **Apostolic Mode**



### *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*

Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age

UNIVERSITY OF MARY

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## Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- **Christendom Mode:** The culture's ideas, morality, politics, laws, business, etc. are provided by Christianity (most of Western civilization since the 4<sup>th</sup> century).
  - **Advantages:** The culture (e.g. laws, morality, etc.) is more aligned to Christian truths & great cultural achievements naturally emerge (e.g. hospitals, cathedrals, universities, end of slavery, freedom to worship).
  - **Disadvantages:** The Church can become a worldly institution. Evangelization becomes lukewarm. Laity can assume priests and religious are only evangelizers.

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### Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- Business
- Education
- Politics
- Economics
- Law
- Soil: Christian belief and way of life



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### Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- The great temptation living in an era of Christendom is Christians can become lukewarm. Additionally, there can be many who profess to be Christian, but do not live out of the heart of Christ and his Church.
- During a time of Christendom, the goal is to maintain the prevailing Christian mindset and continually reawaken faith in Christ and to embody a life of intentional discipleship.
- In a fallen broken world, we are always in need of conversation and renewal.

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### Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- **Apostolic Mode:** The Church's faith and way of life are at odds with the prevailing culture. It is the not dominant force.
  - **Advantages:** Christian witnesses can stand out – countercultural way of life and martyrs reveal primacy of God over this life. Leaders must be courageous, creative, and articulate the faith well. Urgency for evangelization. Role of lay faithful is critical in being a leaven in the world.
  - **Disadvantages:** Hard to persevere and maintain healthy spiritual life. Experience hostility from the culture. Temptation is to compromise and go along with the culture.

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### Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- From Christendom to Apostolic Mission argues that our culture, which has long been a deeply Christian culture is unravelling quickly and ridding itself of its Christian foundation. In place of a Christian mindset and ethic is an aggressive secular culture.
- We are seeing a transition where Christianity was the dominant cultural influence for economics, politics, and social life (i.e. "Christendom") to one in which the Christian faith no longer provides the main narrative or outlook ("Apostolic age").
- In other words, the relationship between Christianity and the secular culture is looking more like the early Church where Christianity was a small, but mighty movement in the wider broader secular, and at times, hostile culture.

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### Christendom to Apostolic Mission

- Given the significant change in relationship between Christianity and secular culture, the book argues that our pastoral strategies must change.
  - “It is the difference between floating a canoe downriver with the occasional guiding push (in Christendom mode) or steering it upriver against the current with energetic strokes (in apostolic mode). What happens when the rowing stops is quite different in the two cases. Those who think the current is going their way — when in fact it is against them — will be surprised to find themselves rushing along in a direction they did not intend” (41).
- **Key:** If we continue with “business as usual” as if in a Christendom mode, we will experience a slow and painful death. Christian institutions, including parishes, will slowly decline and close.

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### Introduction

- In a post-Christian age, it is critical to have a Catholic mind (set of glasses in which to see the world) wherein we can articulate the basics of our faith, as well as identify beliefs and ways of life contrary to our faith.
- *Religion of the Day* argues that as Catholics, we can do many Catholic things (go to Mass, send our children to Catholic school, say our prayers, etc.), but not have a Catholic mind (1).
  - **Romans 12:2:** Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.
- Just because you’re in a garage, doesn’t mean you’re a car.

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### Introduction

- **Key:** When the Christian faith is abandoned, it is replaced by another way of viewing the world, i.e., another religion with its own first principles, a new constellation of dogmas, and a new story.
- The book we will look at discusses the “Religion of the Day”, including twelve aspects of modern religion.
- Such times of significant change, times when the tectonic plates of the society are on the move, tend to be marked by a greater degree of corruption within Church authorities and structures and a greater number of Christians who either lose their faith or life (3).
- **Key:** Turbulent waters beat against the little boat of Jesus.

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### Introduction

- Such times of change are also characterized by dynamic movements of Christian renewal and new developments responding to new challenges, and they are always accompanied by the gift of impressive saints who help lead the Church into the next stage of its perennial struggle (4).
- **Key:** Times of significant change lead to a kind of death (corruption inside the Church, members falling away, etc.) and to a new birth (deeper understanding and renewed commitment to Christ, a new batch of saints, new strategies of proclaiming the gospel, etc.).

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### Not a Blueprint

- Pope Benedict XVI once remarked that while the Church will become smaller in the future, there will be “creative minorities” – a small but faithful minority of Christians who will become wellsprings of significant transformation as they are given time to grow (5).
- These small communities will follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he guides them; they will be given needed leadership in an era of massive change (5).
- Additionally, we are tempted to look for techniques or programs that will guarantee success (5).

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### Not a Blueprint

- More important than programs or techniques is flexibility to the Holy Spirit who will guide these communities through the shifting cultural sands.
- In short, the book does not offer a blueprint or program that will bring about renewal of the Church.
- Instead, it lays out fundamental principles for Christians to engage in a spiritual battle in every age since the time of its founding by Christ (6).

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### Three-Front Battle

- **External Battle:** Against the unbelief of a fallen world;
- **Internal Battle:** An internal battle against disloyalty and corruption among Church members;
- **Spiritual Battle:** Against the darkness and unbelief of one particular member of the Church: namely ourselves.
- These three battles are true in every age and place – every race, culture, nation, and people. It is a battle for truth and winning the allegiance of non-believers to Christ (6).

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### Structure of the Book

- The book addresses how the Church can best negotiate the religion of the day along the three main battle fronts (external, within Church, with self).
- **Key:** We need to understand the religion of the day, and how it has affected Christians and how to best address it in our apostolic endeavors (7).
- Chapters 1-3 look at “Twelve Aspects of Modern Progressive Religion” – what religion we need to be converted *out of*, if we are to be truly converted to Christ.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Structure of the Book

- Chapters 1-3 look at the first battle (external spiritual battle). These chapters look at modern ideologies from the perspective of first principles and fundamental convictions.
- The goal is to identify the consistent underlying threads – dogmas – that unite them (7).
- To be a Christian in any age is to believe the Gospel *instead of* some alternative. In other words, we need to understand the alternative religion proposed to us (8).

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### Structure of the Book

- Second, the book attempts to address the sometimes inadequate view of the Church that many of us hold. It seeks to re-emphasize certain important truths about the Church (8).
- Chapter 4, entitled, “Catching the Diseases of the World” corrects a utopian view of the Church. The religious ideas of our age oftentimes find their way into the Church – diseases. This chapter looks at the second battle (the battle inside the Church).
- The Church must develop antibodies to cure those diseases and make them available to the wider culture (8).

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### Structure of the Book

- Chapters 5 and 6 look at the spiritual battle within ourselves so as to live as a fully converted and faithful followers of Christ (9).
- Chapter 5, entitled, “The Battle for Deeper Conversion” looks at ways serious Christians can be taught and formed by the religion of the day rather than by Christ and can unwillingly take on attitudes and modes of behavior that mirror that false religion (9).
- Chapter 6, entitled, “The Winning Stance” outlines a posture for the Church in the apostolic age we are increasingly inhabiting.

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### Our Modern Religious Age

- Chapter 1 begins by looking at what it means to be “religious.”
- If religion is defined as a system of rites and practices that govern our relationship to the supernatural world and teach us our duties toward God, then it is becoming less religious (13).
- If religion is defined as a particular set of beliefs and practices that a person or society holds in order to provide a meaningful vision and narrative of life, then we have not become less religious (14).

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### Our Modern Religious Age

- **Key:** Humans are inveterate meaning-seeking beings. We must have some sense of why we are alive and what we are living for (14).
- We need a way of looking at the world and our place in it that provides hope for the future, that organizes our moral life, and that points out our path forward (14).
- In other words, we need a personal commitment to a set of beliefs and moral doctrines and also an embrace of dogmas that cannot be simply proven and that are held with a tenacity alien to the mere acquisition of information (14).

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### Our Modern Religious Age

- **Pope John Paul II:** Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself". (*Redemptor Hominis*, 10)
- We are to some degree religious by nature, i.e., we are meaning-seeking beings. We develop a narrative of meaning or a meaningful story on which to build our lives.

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## Our Modern Religious Age

Our narrative of meaning helps us to answer fundamental questions:

- Where did I come from?
- What's my identity?
- What is happiness and how do I obtain it?
- Why is there evil? Where does it come from?
- Why is there conflict in the world? What causes it?
- How is it resolved?
- What is "success" and "failure?"
- Where am I going?
- How will the world end?

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## Our Modern Religious Age

- **Key:** A person goes into crisis when the narrative by which they have been living loses its cogency (14).
- When a person realizes the narrative that has guided their lives is a lie or bears no fruit, they are ripe for conversion to the Christian narrative.



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### Our Modern Religious Age

- For hundreds of years, Christianity was the dominant narrative by which people guided their lives. For example, there is one God, who created the world. Human beings broke relationship with God, which only God could heal. God intervened, offering salvation which we can accept or reject.
- As the Christian narrative has unraveled, other narratives (with their belief systems, new religious visions, new rituals, new moralities, etc.) have taken hold.
- Chapters 2-3 will look at the fundamental principles that undergirds these new narratives.

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### The Primal History

- The overarching name for a dominant religious vision contrary to Christianity is “Progressive religion.”
- **Note:** The use of progressive is not in contrast to conservative (as in politics) but rather a religion that deviates from what God has revealed.
- **Gnosticism:** Heresy in the early Church that proposes we are saved by secret knowledge. It denied that God’s revelation was completed in the apostolic age. Gnostics borrowed from the gospels whatever it suited their purpose and wrote gospels of their own. It was a parasite heresy.

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### The Primal History

- Gnostics claimed to have a higher knowledge, not from the Bible, but acquired from a mystical higher plane of existence. They claimed to have a deeper knowledge of God. One is saved through knowledge, i.e., acquiring secret knowledge. The elect or those who have secret knowledge are saved.
- Gnosticism has been called the “primal heresy within the Christian worldview to which all subsequent heresies belong.” (17).
- Wherever Christianity has flourished, Gnostic variants (parasites or deviant beliefs) have also flourished. Gnostic variants are like barnacles on the boat of Peter.

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### Not a Religion?

- Most moderns would not identify themselves as Gnostics. However, they remain firmly committed to holding their dogmas with a tenacity incommensurate with their provability, their propensity to seek out fellow-believers who can cooperate in their sacred project with whom they can experience communion, and their quick vilification of heretics of their faith (18).
- Ironically, they denounce that “religious” considerations be left out of all the questions of the day, not realizing that they are promoting and often coercing the practice of their religion upon others under the false guise of being religiously neutral (18).

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### Not a Religion?

- Proponents of a secular religion typically know exactly what they are attempting to do, i.e., to create a new narrative of meaning (meta-narrative) that reshapes how we see ourselves, our relationship with the State and one another, what it means to be happy, what constitutes virtue and vice, what it means to be happy, etc.
- For example, the proponents of the French Revolution in 1792 instituted an entirely new calendar (1792 was Year I), a ten-day week, new religious feasts and enthroning the “goddess reason” in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (18).
- **Key:** Create a “religion of humanity” while dropping religious language as modern democracies disallow establishing religion.

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### Structure of Modern Progressive Religion

- Principles that give unity to so many seemingly disparate cultural currents and ideas that surround us.
- A modern Gnostic belief system is:
  - A scheme of self-initiated salvation;
  - That locates the source of the world’s evil not in the individual human heart, but in the fundamentally corrupted and therefore oppressive structures of human existence, whether spiritual, material, societal, or psychological;

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### Structure of Modern Progressive Religion

- That promotes to radically overcome the evil of the world and the alienation and lack of fulfillment experienced by humans;
- That accomplishes this salvation through escape from or destruction of prevailing structures of oppression, however they may be identified;
- That claims to bring about a new type of human and to inaugurate an entirely new age of freedom that has overcome the past age of oppression;
- And that accomplishes its salvation through the application of some form of specialized technical knowledge (gnosis) gained by human effort (19-20).

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### Structure of Modern Progressive Religion

- **Key:** Neo-Gnostic belief is essentially, not accidentally, an expression of human pride (20).
- Neo-Gnostic religion seizes upon the overall narrative of Christianity, to altar it in the direction of self-redemption, and to pursue a destructive course, claiming the dramatic sweep, moral seriousness, and missionary spirit of Christianity from which it arose and to which it owes most of its potency, even as it lays waste to the world (20).
- **Key:** Neo-Gnostic religion is the cancer of Christianity.

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## Structure of Modern Progressive Religion

- Read chapter II
- Twelve Aspects of Modern Progressive Religion (first six principles).
- Pages 21 – 30.

