

**St. Therese Catholic Church**

Religion of the Day  
*Session IV*

March 26, 2024

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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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## Overview

Review	
Quality VII	Salvation comes through human effort alone
Quality VIII	The application of technique (Gnosis) to bring about salvation
Quality IX	A dualistic view of history; past dark age and future age of freedom
Quality X	Two kinds of humans; those embrace new age and those do not
Quality XI	Revolution as the process by which salvation is achieved
Quality XII	The necessary failure of modern religion; departs from reality

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## Gnostic Outlook

- The Gnostic Outlook Through History
- In one form or another, Gnostic belief systems have been a constant antagonist to Christianity from its beginnings, arising partly from Christian ideas and partly from elements foreign to Christianity (53).
- Even in the pages of the New Testament, one can see John defending Christian belief against Gnostic heresy.
  - 1 John 4:2: This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ **come in the flesh** belongs to God.

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### Gnostic Outlook

- In the fourth century, St. Augustine fell into the Manichean heresy, which was a Gnostic sect. Even the best minds of the day could fall into Gnostic heresy.
- **Note:** A good deal of what goes by the name of progressive religion or liberal Christianity is fundamentally Gnostic in its structure (54).

#### Ancient Gnosticism

Depreciation of all things material

Acquisition of highly esoteric and hidden knowledge known only to a few initiates

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### Gnostic Outlook

- Gnostic belief arises out of the soil of Christian belief. It is a consistent presence or a dark shadow upon the Christian faith and is an inevitable development that comes about whenever Christians grow collectively proud (55).
- Just as variants of Christian faith have fought each other and yet, shared the same basic outlook, so variants of neo-Gnosticism religion war over antagonism toward Christianity.
- For example, Nazism and Soviet Communism were both neo-Gnostic belief systems and hostile to Greek-Christian culture and religious worldview yet combatted each other.

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## Derivative Nature

- The Derivative Nature of Gnostic Faiths
- Gnosticism is a way of thinking founded on key principles but expressing those principles in a different way. Gnosticism is a parasite like a virus, or to put it more neutrally, it is derivative rather than original (57).
- Gnosticism borrows from an existing and internally more coherent way of seeing things (like Christianity) (57).
- It is accurate to say that one falls under Gnostic influential way of thinking rather than moving into a Gnostic religion.

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## Derivative Nature

- Gnostic religion is somewhat like a caricature that distorts certain features – maximizing some and minimizing others.
- Words, institutional offices, concepts, and narratives are given new meanings but are left superficially in their original form (58).



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### Derivative Nature

- For example, in the Christian narrative, freedom is a gift given from God that one grows in through discipline or a growing in virtue. It is always tied to the good.
- For the Modern Gnostic religion, freedom is the ability to do whatever you want - the right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.
- Gnostic ideas take root subtly within the Church and claim to offer the true meaning of the Christian faith even as they are subverting its foundations (58). Gnostic ideas are like termites that burrow into wood and gut it out from the inside.

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### Politics and Religion

- **Politics and Modern Progressive Religion**
- How does neo-Gnostic religion map onto the current political landscape? Is this just a different way of characterizing leftist political landscape? (59)
- The book provides some reflections on the relationship between religion and politics, which is certainly appropriate today.



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## Politics and Religion

- While the idea that politics and religion should be kept separate is commonly accepted, the truth is that they have always been intertwined in important ways.
- The American founders were not attempting to do away with religion; what they wanted to avoid was a confessional state.
- Even the non-believers among founders considered religion a useful means of engendering moral virtues in the populace, without which none of them thought a democratic form of government could long survive (60).

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## Politics and Religion

- It has been generally true that American political leaders have been respectful of religious institutions and content to express their political authority mainly in temporal matters, leaving the moral and spiritual life of the citizen largely to the care of family and church (60).
- This acknowledgement of governmental limits was founded on a long tradition (60).
- Jesus says, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's*" (Mt. 22:21), points to the fact that secular authority is legitimate but not total, that it does not extend to the inner life of the soul (61).

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### Politics and Religion

- In Christian civilizations, there are two distinct authorities governing human life, a spiritual authority and a temporal authority.
- This dual set of authorities has historically been a source of a good bit of friction through the centuries, but it has been a genuine example of “creative tension.”
- For Christians, the political aspect of life is important, but not ultimate (61). In other words, God and His will trump civil law when they conflict. Peter said to the Sanhedrin, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” (Acts 5:29)

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### Politics and Religion

- We should expect that as our society increasingly distances itself from its Christian roots, the Christian sensibility for limited government will wane, and the universal human tendency to unite authority, spiritual, and temporal, in one office or structure will reassert itself (61).
- **Key:** Once a Christian vision of the world has been abandoned, it is very difficult to limit power of temporal governments (61).

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### Church and State

- Church and State have responsibility for distinct spheres – spiritual and temporal
- Each must recognize that it has limits.
- They mutually influence each other.



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### Politics and Religion

- The labels of “left” and ”right” – which first appeared during the French Revolution, when members of the National Assembly divided into supporters of the revolution and supporters of the *Ancien Régime* – have long since ceased to be helpful as descriptors (62).
- The book argues that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stalinist communism (left) and Nazi fascism (right) may appear to be opposites but are very close in their fundamental structure.
- The two are variants of a gnostic faiths (distorted or man-made religions) that ran afoul of each other in WWII (62).

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### Politics and Religion

- Each of these ideologies was attempting to replace a waning Christianity with a new, all-encompassing vision for the society that promised the perfection of the temporal world (62).
- In America, there hasn't been a strong tradition of either fascist or communist neo-Gnostic faith.
- Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the "right" in America was close to the 19<sup>th</sup> century English liberal tradition, tending to promote freedom of markets and to favor less, rather than more, government regulation (63).

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### Politics and Religion

- The American "left" espoused a greater role of government in addressing social and economic questions (63).
- The older America where there was a loose agreement around traditional values centered on the Ten Commandments, has unfortunately been rapidly changing since the 1960s.
- **Key:** The tendency for the pre-Christian tradition of limited temporal government to gather itself all authority, moral and spiritual as well as temporal, is working its way on all political fronts. This presents a subtle temptation for Christians (63).

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### Politics and Religion

- As Christianity wanes in modern culture, there is a movement to collectivize all more, spiritual, and temporal power in one office or structure.
- While Christians must be involved in political affairs, the great temptation is that societal problems can be fixed by recourse to this sphere.

Receding Lake



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### Politics and Religion

- Because Progressive religion expresses its hope to change the world entirely in the political arena, Christians can be influenced to think that politics is the primary activity of humanity (63).
- Christians can imitate the neo-Gnostic temptation to tie their foundational hopes to a particular political ideal and their loyalties to a political figure or a transitory political party, such that elections become events of epic importance (63).

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### Politics and Religion

- They can forget that our most significant battleground is not the political or legislative landscape but the individual human soul; that our ultimate enemy is not a political party but a powerful spiritual being; and that the only way to establish the kingdom of God is by weapons of warfare suited to a spiritual battle (64).
- **Key:** We keep our eye on politics and have a responsibility to put those in office who best espouse God's will. However, the Church has learned never to wed itself with any political party. The Church places its hope not in political parties but rather in Jesus Christ and what He has revealed.

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### Politics and Religion

- Additionally, political elections are certainly important. However, the rhetoric that the nation depends on any election or that the world will end if certain candidates get into office is foreign to a mature Christian way of thinking. It has hints of idolatry.
- We will see in chapter 5 that the center of human drama is not in politics but rather around Jesus Christ, who is the center of the universe and of history. And given that Christ is present and working in the Church, His Body, the center of human drama (or the battle for humanity) happens inside the Church.
- **Key:** Politics is important but is relativized. It is not as important as those without faith claim it to be.

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### A Special Case

- A Special Case: The Rise and Dominance of the Therapeutic
- The 2005 book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* by sociologist Christian Smith introduced the phrase *Moralistic therapeutic deism* (MTD).
  1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth;
  2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most religions;
  3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself;
  4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to solve a problem;
  5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

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### Politics and Religion

- MTD has been the characteristic of whole swaths of the Christian world (64).
- MTD is a degenerate and flaccid state of Christianity that is highly vulnerable to the preaching of a more potent and virulent neo-Gnostic faith (65).
- MTD is not a neo-Gnostic religion, but prone to move in that direction for two reasons.

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## Politics and Religion

- First, while moderns are generally more comfortable physically, we suffer far more than our forebears did from loneliness, depression, and self-doubt. In such circumstances, the therapeutic concern to “feel good about oneself” gains a great deal of potency (65).
- Modern Gnostic belief promises freedom from alienation and this is particularly alluring for those grappling with inner psychic pain (65).
- **Key:** Those experiencing pain seek not only to feel good, but an adventure in helping renew a broken world.

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## Politics and Religion

- Second, MTD orients believers toward happiness in the present world. MTD does not explicitly deny the existence of God or of heavenly reality, but nearly all of its attention is focused on a person’s existence of this current life (65).
- Such a way of thinking easily accommodates itself to a more neo-Gnostic faith that implicitly or explicitly denies the importance of God.
- Those who embrace a beige Church or Christianity lite may easily experience the allure of embracing a more demanding and heroic-seeming faith, readily found in variants of Progressive religion, especially among the young (65-66).

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### Catching All the Diseases of the World

- Read chapter IV
- Catching All the Diseases of the World
- Pages 67 - 80

