THE TRUE, THE GOOD, AND THE BEAUTIFUL
Sir Roger Scruton

ETERNAL RETURN: HUMANITY AFTER ETERNITY
Laurence Hemming

MARRIAGE UNAPOLOGETIC
Sir Paul Coleridge

FAMILY AND FAITH IN A PAGAN TIME
Mary Eberstadt
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TEN YEARS OF LEANING INTO THE WIND

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THE WHEATLEY INSTITUTION has one central purpose: to produce, support, and disseminate high quality work aimed at preserving and sustaining the core institutions of our society. One might suppose nothing could be easier and less controversial than that, but many of the institutions and common foundational ideas that have sustained our society seem to have slipped and given way. The conjugal family and institutions of religious faith and practice seem to be eroding, and are counted by some as oppressive, rather than as essential to human flourishing. We are decreasingly able to count on the moral and ethical integrity that have been the anchoring values and the presumptive foundation of our way of life. Civic virtue seems to be waning and nothing but self-expression seems to be flowing into our public institutions to take its place. Thus the intellectual work of preserving our core institutions entails, in many cases, “leaning into the wind.”

At one level, few scholars elect to become scholars out of a desire to engage in “culture wars.” At another level, however, the most salient and rewarding experiences I have had as director of the Wheatley Institution have come from meeting sophisticated, like-minded scholars from across the country and around the world who are also leaning into the wind – most often because they cannot do otherwise and maintain their intellectual, scholarly and personal integrity. It has been a revelation of sorts to discover and understand first-hand the strength and the intellectual insight that come from leaning into the wind together.

Our aspiration is that, as the Wheatley Institution continues to produce sound scholarship in critical areas of cultural and moral concern, others – including our target audiences – can find strength, support, and, perhaps above all, sound reasons for leaning into the cultural wind with us. We can have great confidence that solid scholarship, articulate reason, and truth will win out, however blustery the present may seem.

Richard Williams
DIRECTOR
THE TRUE, THE

SIR ROGER SCRUTON
Visiting Professor, Oxford University
April 6, 2017
What do we learn from art? Is what we learn from art a kind of truth—a truth that we, perhaps, couldn’t learn from any other human activity? Art is not one kind of thing. There is abstract art and representational art. Abstract art is like music or abstract painting, abstract sculpture, it doesn’t actually have a subject matter. That’s the whole point of it. You’re supposed to appreciate it for what it is in itself, for the harmony of lines and figures, for the ways in which things balance against each other. It’s supposed to attract attention purely for its own sake and not for the subject matter that it represents. Already that makes it rather difficult to say exactly what it is that we learn from art.

What about fictions? The realm of art includes things like novels, plays, films, poetry—all of which are about the world in some way but they don’t give you literal truths about the world. They are about fictional worlds, and it requires an effort of the imagination both to create a
fiction and also to appreciate it. When you read a great novel like Jane Austen’s *Emma*, it’s not in order to find out about some person called Emma Woodhouse. You know there is no such person. But you do know, nevertheless, in the creation of this fiction, Jane Austen has put some part of herself and some part of her deep observations of the human condition. But there aren’t literal truths about a particular person’s life. What kind of truths are they? Or, is there another kind of truth? That’s one of the problems that we encounter in this area.

Then there is the problem of the role of experience. If you read a poem to yourself, or recite a poem, you know what matters is the sound of that poem, the structure of it, the way the verse unfolds, the form of it, but not what it literally says—or, at least, not what it literally says when extracted from that form. It is not like a textbook. If you are curious about nuclear physics, you might pick up a textbook of nuclear physics, read it, and absorbed it and memorized the whole lot. You put it on the shelf and that’s it, that’s the last time you look at it because you’ve extracted the information from it. But that’s not the way that people appreciate poems, is it? It’s not that they extract the information and then never visit it again.

On the contrary, a good poem is one that gains from repetition, even when you know it by heart, and even when it says something that seems extremely light. Even if it touches with a light touch on the realities of this world, like say Robert Frost’s “Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening.” It doesn’t say very much, but the form, the rhythm, and the way in which it seems to touch something deep in you means you will want to repeat it, to go on reading it again and again. One thought, then, is that we don’t actually go to art for information. The information content is not the primary thing. It’s the experience. But, of course, not all truth is information. We have lots of different ideas of truth.

This brings up the topic of desire and pleasure. There is a connection between desiring something and feeling pleasure on obtaining it. If you really want a glass of water, then upon obtaining that glass and drinking, you feel pleasure—the pleasure of satisfying a desire. But it’s not a simple connection because we know that many things that we desire don’t give us pleasure when we obtain them. This is one of the most important parts of moral education: to recognize the difference between those things that you desire which will bring satisfaction when you obtain them, and those things which you desire which, when you taste them, you push
them away with revulsion.

I won’t go into that, but of course, you might think that maybe art has something to do with that, too. Maybe it can teach us in advance about the things which we won’t enjoy when we possess them. There are many kinds of pleasure. There’s pure sensual pleasure: you sink into a hot bath at the end of the day. This is a pleasure of the senses as the warmth spreads through your body. It doesn’t tell you anything about the world. It’s not based on any kind of thinking, but it’s the kind of pleasure that animals have.

But we also have intellectual pleasures—pleasures which come from thinking things. The pleasure of reading a book is not a sensory pleasure at all, is it? It’s a pleasure of the mind, the pleasure of following an argument, of playing with words, and so on. Then there’s what I call intentional pleasures. The word “intentional” means directed outward onto the world, like the pleasure you take on somebody giving you a present. Or the pleasure you take when you go to see your child take part in a hundred meter race (or in the long jump or whatever) and you see in the playing field—there he is! He’s done it! He’s got the first prize! That’s a pleasure about something.

When you have a pleasure about something that means you can make a mistake as well. The race was at the other end of the field and it looked exactly as though your son had won it. Only later do you discover it was someone else; a look-alike. So was your pleasure real, or not? In a sense, it was real, but it was also a mistake. There are mistaken pleasures and that’s a very interesting fact. Pleasures can be at something. I can take a pleasure at the beautiful scene out of the window. I can take a pleasure in the triumph of my son in the long jump and so on.

Aesthetic pleasure is of the first kind. It’s pleasure at something. It’s not like pleasures of taste. When you eat strawberry ice cream and take pleasure in it, that’s a pleasant taste in the mouth. When you look at a profound picture and are moved by it, that’s not a pleasant feeling anywhere in you, is it? It’s not a sensation of pleasure. You’re pleased at this thing that you’re looking at, maybe pleased about what it is saying. It’s completely different from a sensory pleasure.

There’s a great question, therefore, of what is the relation between tastes in food and drink, and tastes in music and painting? They’re not the same kind of thing at all. You like strawberries, and I like blueberries.
There’s no real disagreement between us, just different tastes. But you like Beethoven and I like heavy metal. This is a bit more like a disagreement, especially if you then go on to say, “Your liking heavy metal is a sign of the degeneracy of your soul.” The argument can begin then. It may not be possible to resolve it. But the fact is, in matters of artistic and aesthetic judgment, we do argue, and the arguments are very important to us.

The great question, then, is: what is the value of this kind of pleasure—the pleasure that we feel in works of art and aesthetic objects? Can it be a vehicle of truth? It’s very interesting that we can feel pleasure in works of art, even when the works of art are sad or even tragic. We take pleasure in a sad story because the story does something to the sadness. The weepy movie may have enormous appeal. You may feel like it hasn’t worked if you haven’t had a bit of a weep during the course of it.

The sadness is part of what was promised; it’s part of the deal. Yet it can’t be real sadness because nobody voluntarily submits himself to that. It’s something like sadness put in a frame. The story puts it in a frame and makes it such that it doesn’t hurt you in the way that, for instance, the death of someone you love would hurt you. That framing of our emotions seems to be one of the things that works of art do for us.

We seem to be able to come to terms with the sadness of human life, partly because we can represent it in ways that make it more meaningful—framed and isolated. To pleasure, we always say “come again,” but to knowledge, we say, “thanks.” Once you’ve obtained the knowledge, that’s it, you’ve got it. The pleasure, you’ve had it once, but you want it again. Especially in the case of works of art, the repeatability of the pleasure is what it’s all about. But perhaps there is knowledge in
Moving on now from truth to goodness, what is the moral value of art? What kind of moral improvement can art generate in us? Has it got a particular role in presenting the moral world and improving our own engagement in it? Obviously, art is a source of moral examples, but the work of art does not merely present the example. There are lots of examples which prompt you to sketch for yourself ideas of good behavior and bad behavior. It puts us in a position of judgment.

There are two sides to the aesthetic experience: the relishing side and the exploring side. Relishing a beautiful work of art or a sublime work of music is something that you can do without necessarily exploring the depths of the human heart, even though the work of art touches on them. Perhaps this kind of aestheticism means forgetting the cognitive dimension of aesthetic pleasures and realizing that they’re not just sensory pleasures. They’re not just pleasures in the way you experience things. They’re also directed toward a vision of the world.

Each of those goals that I’ve talked about is important because they are what you’re focusing on but they seem to reduce art itself to an inadequate means. They seem to leave out the aesthetic dimension. Only when combined in a unity—the kind of truth and the kind of goodness of which beauty is the sign—do these values mark out a path for art. If beauty is the way in which truth is presented, the way in which goodness comes to your consciousness, then we seem to have something like an account of the value of art.

Again, in religion, as in art, repetition is very important. You repeat the service every week. You say the Lord’s Prayer every day. If somebody said to you, “What a waste of time. You’ve said it once. Why say it again? You know what it means. You know the words. What’s all this about?” You know that that’s not what prayer is for. Prayer is about putting you back into the relation with God that you’re constantly slipping out of. Therefore, it demands repetition.

There are truths that have to be rehearsed if they are to be owned, to know exactly how to feel something and what to feel towards the world around you. You might feel you know it one moment but you’ve lost it the next. Getting the right words helps you to recapture it. That idea of revealed truth that comes to you through repetition (as in prayer) is a bit like the aesthetic experience as I’ve been describing it.
Perhaps it gives you a secular version of revealed truth. That’s what people like Nietzsche and Wagner thought. They went further and thought art could, therefore, be a substitute for religion; that’s what we really should be now devoting ourselves to. We have art, as Nietzsche says, so as not to die of despair. Art is still there, giving us this meaning, even when we’ve lost faith.

Finally, some thoughts about the intrinsic values of art. Poetry and plays and paintings present imaginary worlds. Representational art gives us an opening onto the world of the imagination, and they all rescue their subject matter from a purely instrumental conception of its significance. Things portrayed in art are not portrayed as useful. They’re portrayed as interesting for their own sake so they’re rescued from the instrumentality. That’s why every allusion matters; the image is a distillation of the thing depicted. Poetry and painting work in the same way.

Take the Wheat Fields landscapes by Van Gogh, which everybody knows, probably. The brush strokes there imbue the landscape with an observing consciousness. They are marks of the moral being for whom this is not a thing, but a vision. To absorb that, you recognize it’s a very long way from the way a field of wheat with a flock of rooks above it would look. This doesn’t look in any way realistic but somehow it has a power that it wouldn’t have if it were wholly realistic because the brush strokes of the painter imbue that landscape with his own soul. It’s as
though the imagination of the painter had reworked the thing that he’s painting so that it isn’t just the thing. It’s also that thing distilled into his own consciousness.

In the imagination, we are thinking about absent and nonexistent things, but the consciousness involved is a creator of its own object, as in that case of Van Gogh. The imagination is something that we can will. I can ask you to imagine some things. I can say, “Imagine a field of wheat.” You won’t be able to imagine it like Van Gogh did, but nevertheless, you will summon it up in obedience to that order. That is an interesting thing.

Through works of the imagination, we bring distant things into close relation with each other. That’s what we do in figures of speech, in poetry. We’re bringing things into relation with each other. The brush strokes in the painting bring a human action into relation with a landscape. Art is certainly not going to be any help to us if it loses sight of what we are and what we need.
I have witnessed more than once the peculiar phenomenon of non-Mormons, invited onto Mormon platforms, spelling out why we are not Mormon. My experience has been rather different: I have learned much more about what it means to be a Catholic from speaking and studying with Latter-day Saints than I could by any other means.

There is so much we share, and what I want to offer to you tonight is in that spirit. I want to offer here, for the first time, some questions concerning something that besets all of us who go under the name of Christian in these present days; especially in the West, and especially, but by no means exclusively, here, in the United States.

Catholicism is rich in religious founders: St. Benedict, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Theresa of Avila, to name but a few. Catholics naturally understand what it means to live in a tradition shaped by charismatic founders. We are shaped by those who founded the things we have come
to know. I recognized the same thing in Mormonism as soon as I began to realize who Joseph Smith was.

In the Catholic tradition, we speak of being, and of having been, shaped, not just by God and in Christ, but also by those in a particular tradition in which we stand. If we are a Benedictine monk, for example, shaped by Saint Benedict. Every Mormon I have ever met is shaped, it seems to me, strongly in the spirit of Joseph Smith.

If Mormonism is one of the newest expressions of Christianity, it manages to accomplish what many Christian traditions increasingly forget to do, and it does so first in the person of Joseph Smith. It reaches into the very soil of history and unearths precious things long hidden but still at work, still—even if they are somewhat occluded—full of power.

Mormonism reaches right back as an incipient expression of some of the West’s most ancient ideas. Joseph Smith reopens, actually by simply setting aside, the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, and in this simple gesture, he sets aside the unforgiving nexus of causality that has constituted the history of metaphysics and defined the agonistic confrontation of necessity with free will in Christianity’s confrontation with Greek thinking.

The question of the eternal—the question of time—and the question of who is “man” (or the human being) are perhaps the greatest challenges in thinking that ever stand before us. The mere ability to measure time—time as it stands on the clock or the succession of “now”—does not resolve the meaning of time as to cover over the possibility of its resolution altogether. Merely biological conceptions of humanity confuse not only the meaning of “man” or the human person but, as we stand in advance of huge medical changes that are going to come, so there are those around who are at least contemplating the possibility of human beings frankly living forever. This also confuses further the question of what eternity is itself.

I want to undertake reading a poetic text that points to something far more ancient than itself. I begin with a translation of a poem most often known in English as “The Horses of Achilles,” by Greek author C. P. Cavafy, written in 1910:

Patroclus: whom they saw in death’s darkness

He who was so brave, and strong, and young
The horses of Achilles started shedding tears
The deathless nature that was theirs
Grew indignant at this thing of death
They tossed their heads and shook their long manes
Beating the earth with their hooves, lamenting
Patroclus, whom they knew to be without life—present, absent—
Destitute of flesh—his spirit lost—
Defenseless—without breath—
Returned to the vast nothing by life itself
Zeus saw the tears of the deathless-divine horses
And was himself pained. ‘At the wedding of Peleus’
He said, ‘I should not have acted so rashly;
Better that we had not given you away! What business, my horses,
Had you down there among the wretched race of men,
The playthings of fate? You, whom neither death nor old age awaits,
Are yet tyrannised by ephemeral misfortunes. Men have embroiled you
In their troubles.’ Yet the two noble creatures went on
Shedding their tears for the everlasting calamity of death.

I chose this poem because I think it puts together humanity, eternity, and the divine in exactly the way that modern people do. Cavafy presents us with an entirely conventional, modern view of the relationship of gods to humans, of the fate of humanity as tragic and concerned only with death, of the chasm between the deathless gods and the race of men.

In this view, gods alone are eternal. There is no eternity in the life of man. For Patroclus is dead and this is as yet unknown to Achilles. Homer says Patroclus is φιλος to Achilles: beloved. More than that: hoi polu philtatos (οι πολυ φίλτατος) “by far the most beloved.”

Who Patroclus was to Achilles has bothered scholars. The bother takes the form of “were they/weren’t they/did they/didn’t they?”—were they lovers or just good friends? How are we to understand the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus? In Cavafy’s sensitive, but
also cunning, reading of Book 17 of the Iliad, nothing is as it seems, and as we shall see, something is left out.

Homer has Zeus ask the question why. Why did he give these horses at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis for them just to be miserable in the fragility of human affairs? Cavafy’s poem, and the Iliad itself, therefore shows not the metaphysical gap between divine and human being, but rather that Zeus’s power and continued rulership over the cosmos depends upon, indeed requires, the actual and historical world in which Achilles’ existence and fate unfold. Achilles is the reason that Zeus is still all-powerful, still the head among the gods.

What do the horses of Achilles represent? Horses draw chariots, and no divine chariot is of greater significance than that which bears the sun across the heavens. These immortal horses signify the eternal passage of time—the passage of the day from sunrise to sunset and its night, and that this passage is eternally repeated. Not as the passage of the hands of a clock across its face, but as the two faces of eternal time—they reveal how time is visible to mortal men and women.

These two are the “moment,” in its day and “eternity,” the endless repetition of days. The horses have come to a standstill before the body of the warrior beloved of Achilles. Time and fate itself, the lawfulness of time, stand still in the gap between Patroclus’ death and Achilles coming to know of it. The horses, whom “neither death nor old age awaits” are the harbingers of cosmic time.

What passes between Achilles and Patroclus is of such a magnitude that it is capable of upholding and making visible such a singular moment, a moment of such decision. The question is not whether or not Achilles and Patroclus were lovers but is of an altogether greater magnitude: what is the consequence of what is decided between them? The answer is: a world. They bring about a world, the world of Hellas. The end of the Trojan War will bring about the world of Hellas.

It is in this that the real meaning of the term philos can be understood, that each is beloved for the other ahead of every other means the world they bring about stands itself in philia, as philtatos, most dearly, foremost, highest. Philtatos signifies nothing merely romantic or sentimental. There is nothing here of driving inner passion. It signifies how they constitute world: both for each other, and in relation to others, and—still more importantly—for many others too. Thus the phrase boi
polu philtatos—by far the most beloved—does not mean over against others, but for the very sake of others.

Do we find here a prefiguration of eternal return? In what ways? My title speaks of humanity “after” eternity. By this, I mean that eternity is a concern for men and women, but not in ways that are easy to resolve. We have to chase after it, to seek out how eternity is to be found and by what means.

I think this is what Joseph Smith’s own meditation on eternity is about and his meditation on eternity which founds a world for Latter-day Saints and indeed, for those like me who can learn something of this. Every man and every woman is confronted with the question of what does eternity mean—even if you turn away from it and think, “But I am only mortal,” and resolve to yourself that there is no eternity for you.

The eternal return brings us before the whole of present being as what has been, and is, and will be, but with the overwhelming threat of the valuelessness of all present being. This is the essential connection for Nietzsche of eternal recurrence with the will to power: we do not choose to exercise the will to power. Rather, we are driven into it by the eternal return to the valuelessness, the weightlessness, of the totality of being. Martin Heidegger argues in this the ring of being, time—the circle—plays a role, requiring that “man be grasped through the world and world through man himself.”
MARRIAGE UNAPOLOGETIC

Sir Paul Coleridge
Founder and Chairman of the Marriage Foundation, UK
October 19, 2017
FROM THE FIRST CHAPTER (almost the first page) of the Bible to the very last, the centrality of marriage and the husband/wife relationship to the whole of humanity pervade the text. Our relationship to God, to Christ, and to each other is, in the end, a quasi-matrimonial one, with all the implications which that adjective conveys. But, in the same way that it is in most cases impossible to convince people of the truths of Christianity by saying, “Pick up your Bible and read what it says,” it is impossible to convince people of the uniqueness of marriage by saying it is God-inspired and fashioned.

I talk as someone who has spent his entire working life in the family justice system: thirty years as a barrister in London specializing in family law of all kinds and fourteen years as a High Court judge. It is very difficult to discuss, let alone confront, the subject contained within the title without sounding censorious, judgmental, and sanctimonious—especially if one is fortunate enough to have survived the slings and arrows inherent in any long marriage. If we are to have a useful debate on these sensitive issues, it is essential that we do not pretend to be the sole occupants of the moral high ground, a land inhabited only by the sane and responsible, the middle class, the middle-aged, and the middle-minded—or, indeed, that marriage by itself is the panacea for all of life’s
ills. It is not, but it has proved to be the most enduring and, in the end, most fulfilling type of relationship both for its participants and, crucially, most effective and useful for raising of children.

The Marriage Foundation is persuaded that the reaffirmation of marriage as the gold standard is the starting place, with all its faults. Marriage is by no means perfect or the only way or only structure for living with a partner but statistically it has proved to be the most enduring and, statistically, the children of such relationships perform the best. The evidence from every study is now incontrovertible. It is a simple, provable fact which has to be faced, however unpalatable to its detractors. Support for marriage, therefore, makes pragmatic common sense because it is demonstrably in the public interest and ultimately saves money (just like eating healthily or not smoking or recycling your litter!)

If we are to win the argument—and we will—we must not leave ourselves vulnerable to the charge that this is just a bunch of right-wing fanatics who cannot face inevitable changes to society; or, for that matter, Christians (and Jews and Muslims) who are banging a moral drum. That cuts no ice with the vast majority of the populace; indeed, it is a turnoff. But fortunately, the true facts speak for themselves.

The divorce rate has risen steadily since 1970, although it has now begun to decline but from a very high level. In 1970, 22 percent of marriages ended in divorce within fifteen years. By 1995, that same figure had risen to 33 percent, i.e. 50 percent increase. The divorce rate as it is now described is hovering just under 41 percent. Much, much too high, I would suggest.

But the real mischief is not to be found there. It is amongst the unmarried parents. Why? Because cohabitation, however it is defined, is far less stable. The cohabiting population as a percentage of the total number of those cohabiting with children make up 19 percent; 81 percent are married couples. However, that 19 percent produce nearly half (48 percent) of family breakdown. Unmarried parents are nearly six
times more likely to break up before their first child’s fifth birthday. Does any of this matter? Yes, as I have already emphasized, it most certainly does. On every measure of success and happiness, children from intact families perform better. This is now regarded as fact, supported by rigorous research and no longer regarded as controversial.

Recently, Iain Duncan Smith, former UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, drew attention in the press to the fact that at present, 45 percent of children aged 15 do not live with both their birth parents. At arguably the most important time in a child’s life, during their early adolescence, they are not with both their birth parents. It is a crucial statistic although, with respect to him, it is not a new one. The Marriage Foundation had been saying it since the very day of our launch. If you look at our website and newsletter printed at the time of the launch, it is a headline statistic. But it is very good news that this responsible politician now gives this shocking fact a prominent platform.

If we are to persuade young people of the benefits of marriage, we must tackle the illusion that stable and fulfilling marriage is only about finding the right person and then all will be well. That is simply not true. Money may buy you a million pound wedding but does not buy you long-term love and stability; in fact, quite the reverse.

Another myth is that marriage is dying and that it is an arrangement of the past. No, it most certainly is not. The other side of the coin, which identifies that 40 percent of marriages end in divorce is, of course, that 60 percent of married couples are still married at death. Do not be persuaded by casual talk that marriage is dead or over. It is still the norm for the majority of adult couples.

Ok, you say, those are the stats but what is it then that makes the difference? Surely, as some of the sloppier commentators and even politicians are wont to say, “Marriage is just a piece of paper and adds nothing. All relationships are equally valid and valuable.”
In a word, the difference is rooted in basic human psychology and commitment. It is between planning and deciding to become a couple; looking and going forward “for better and for worse, for rich and for poor, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” A prospective decision intended to affect and last for your whole life, backed by a public commitment called a wedding.

On the other hand: sliding or drifting into a relationship which has no intentional prospective element and no pre-agreed basis. This is the topic for a whole lecture or even series, but that in a few sentences is what explains the massive difference in outcomes. Scholars at Denver University coined the phrase to describe this phenomenon as “sliding versus deciding.” It is very apt.

We need to make the case based on hard data even if it does not always fit our case. The public task of the Marriage Foundation is not only carrying out the research but making it freely available. We have other important tasks on the ground but engaging in the public debate is very, very important. We must not be afraid to do so. The case is overwhelming when it is properly and reasonably advanced and supported by the best facts and figures.

I, for a long time, have refused to believe that counsel of despair, not because I am an eternal optimist who refuses to face up to what some see as the inevitable, but because it is new public attitudes and behaviors which have driven us here. It is by that route, I suggest, we shall stop the decline, improve things, and move forward.

We all, as individuals, have to share the responsibility and the blame for too easily and uncritically espousing the new models of family life. None of us like to be thought of as out-of-date, out-of-touch, and not moving with the times. Some parts of the media have—wittingly or unwittingly—fanned the flames of this attitude. The baby boomers are some of the worst of them all.

But just as the greed of individuals—not the institutions they
inhabit—drove us into the banking and credit crisis, the same ambitions of individuals—but properly directed—will ultimately pull us out. It is always so much easier and pain-free to blame the central government, social services, or the courts for everything. But in the end, it is the behavior of individuals which has driven us here. It is only changes in behavior that can make a radical difference and ease the burden on the services.

Wherever human life has been found, marriage, in the sense of a public act and binding act of commitment to the future, in some form or other has existed as the core unit. But that assumption simply cannot be taken for granted any longer. Marriage has to articulate its case for survival and win the argument on its own intrinsic merits and not by virtue of the fact that it has been around a long time, seems like it is an attractive part of our traditional way of life, and so has some kind of divine right to survive.

This need to stand up and be counted and to put the case for its survival is by no means all bad. Indeed, it is very invigorating. We should not feel threatened or frightened to engage in the debate, or frightened into silence for fear of being branded out-of-date. It forces those of us who would support it to stand up and be counted and to think in-depth why marriage is the best model and where to back it by the best research around. Nothing like a bit of persecution to wake people up and consider their position.

If marriage has to engage in the debate, I say bring it on. Whenever
FAMILY AND FAITH IN A PAGAN TIME

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MANY PEOPLE IN OUR TIME have sensed the terrain of Western civilization has shifted, perhaps irretrievably. They point to the political and cultural tumult that seems to be everywhere these days, to the anger and incendiary tone of public discourse, and above all, to the defiance and repudiation in some powerful venues of the Judeo-Christianity that created civilization as we know it in the first place. In surveying the landscape out there—from Main Street to Hollywood or Snapchat to Netflix—one can’t help but suspect they’re on to something.

Once, belief in God and traditional religion were unremarkable. Now, increasing numbers of Western people seem to think that both of those things require explanation and perhaps, to use a favorite word of the moment, resistance. That difference between cheering God and jeering God is not just a sea change. It is wholly unchartered, open water, regardless of who is captaining the White House or any other place.

What should we call this civilizational term, this new time that we have entered, willingly or not? To some people, the most apt description is that we live in a post-Christian age. It’s understandable why people resort to that label, given the determination with which some secularists now try to scrub the public square clear of anything remotely religious.
We are told increasingly that religion is something to be practiced in private. We’ve seen case after case of religious symbolism suppressed where once it was allowed, like nativity scenes or copies of the Ten Commandments removed from public grounds. You can see where post-Christian might come from.

But even so, I admit a hesitancy about that term. The trouble with post-Christian is that it seems to assume exactly what the adversaries of religion assume: there’s some unfolding of a capital ‘H’ history in which religion is just some stage that society moved through before moving on.

I’d like to argue that the proper name for what we are now witnessing in the countries of the advanced west is paganization. I think we should call this a pagan time because the essence of paganism is defined in opposition to Christianity and other traditional world faiths.

We can also call this a paganizing time in the sense that paganism seems to be spreading, especially in corridors of influence—most obviously, secular universities and popular culture. This paganization is especially ascendant among the young. Surveys and polls for years have documented a rise in people who check “none of the above” when asked for a religious affiliation. As of 2017, according to Pew Research, the combination of self-described atheists and self-described “nones” is the fastest growing group of opinion on religion in the United States.

We live in a paganizing, or re-paganizing, time. Here I would like to advance a thesis that has not been advanced before, so far as I know: it is that the essential features of today’s new paganism are not incidental to the collapse of the family across the west. To the contrary, essential features of this new paganism appear to be driven by the collapse of the family across the west. To put the point differently: no family collapse, no new paganism.

What do we know about this new paganism? We know, first, that the antipathy we see toward religion today is not simply the absence of religion itself. The idea that today’s western people are “simply secular” is repeated frequently these days—reporting on the latest round of numbers in the rise of “nones,” for example. An essay last year in National Geographic was titled “The World’s Newest Major Religion is No Religion.”

But I don’t think that’s right. In my latest book, *It’s Dangerous to Believe*, I spend some time disputing this notion that the division out there is
between believers on the one side and non-believers on the other. To the contrary, all human beings are people of some faith. The question is, what do they put their faith in?

I think the evidence shows that a new chapter has opened in American history in which people of traditional faith are on the receiving end of an ascendant secularism as they have never been before, and that the treatment of today’s religious believers is unjust and violates traditional American understanding of fair play. Evidence also shows another important development unique to our time. Beneath the mercilessness and vindictiveness of today’s anti-religious atmosphere is something deep and new: the development of a rival faith, a rival secularist faith that sees Christianity as a competitor to be crushed rather than as a different set of beliefs to be tolerated.

What else can we say about this rival faith, also known as the New Paganism? Well, for one thing, it behaves in ways that only a faith would behave. It includes within its ranks the equivalent of religious zealots. Consider one snapshot: the scene on the steps of the Supreme Court of the United States on June 27, 2016, following the announcement of the decision in *Whole Women’s Health V. Hellerstedt* (the Texas abortion decision), taken as a victory by proponents of abortion on demand. All day long after that decision was announced, videos documented what resulted: a huge outdoor party spilling from the court steps out into the city; a gyrating, weeping, waving, screaming sea of people, mostly women, behaving as if they were in the throes of religious ecstasy. This was not politics as usual. This was not even politics out of the box, as usual, as you might find with an Occupy Wall Street demonstration. This was something different.

They were in religious ecstasy—their kind of religious ecstasy—in which abortion on demand is the equivalent of the central sacrament, the repetition of which is judged essential to their quasi-theology. Or, consider another snapshot: the Women’s March on Washington. This public demonstration, too, was driven in large part by one thing: animus against traditional morality. Sexual revolution theology about abortion, once again, proved central. The only women’s group disinvited was a pro-life group. Think about that. When tacitly asked to choose between women and abortion on demand, the women chose abortion.

That’s what a religion looks like. The roots of the religion are not in
science and they are not in lofty goals, like diversity and tolerance. They are grounded, rather, in a set of beliefs centered on the sexual revolution. The point is not only that religious traditionalism confronts a rival faith in the secular societies of the west, although it certainly does that. The point is that the confrontation would not even exist apart from the sexual revolution and the need of its champions to defend their prerogatives.

Here’s the fundamental question: why the drive toward androgyny in the first place? Who benefits? What is it about our time that makes the attempted abolition of sex difference more attractive or more desirable to some people than it used to be? I believe, again, that the answer is the fracturing of the family has created a new kind of cultural incentive system. The likelihood of divorce, unwed motherhood, and other unprecedented strains on family life are putting stresses on women in particular as never before.

Beneath all the noise about religion and the public square, one can hear the themes of loss and fury—fury about a world that many perceive to be gone. The song of contemporary feminism and contemporary progressivism is not joyful. It is a lamentation in disguise. In saying that family change is driving religious change this way, I don’t mean to suggest anything too simple-minded as a single cause to a multi-dimensional phenomenon. But it does seem that no matter which features of the New Paganism we inspect, the same pattern appears. What sociologists call secularization is not happening in a vacuum.

It is not happening independent of the radical changes to the family that have been unfolding for over fifty years now. No, secularization and the ascendancy of New Paganism are a fallout of those same changes. The diminishing of the family in Western civilization is an unseen player—maybe even the most important player—in the diminishing of Western religiosity.

Now for the good news. The sexual revolution, like all revolutions, is producing counter-revolutionaries. I like to give, as a sort of visual impression of that, the cathedral at Chartres in France, the greatest cathedral of its time until it disappeared in a fire. It was rebuilt within fifty years into the cathedral we know today, the gothic masterpiece that still stands. The point is that many of the people who built that cathedral were burned in the original fire. I think that is what we’re seeing beginning to come out of the sexual revolution: counter-revolutionaries,
burned by the revolution. At the rate things are going, there will be many more.

As a friendly amendment here, I would like to quote Russel Moore, who I think has a beautiful phrase illustrating hope is always around the corner this way. He says, “The next Billy Graham may be drunk right now.” That’s something else we shouldn’t underestimate: the power of Christianity to speak to sin and redemption.

Another reason for optimism is simple arithmetic. Seven years ago, a demographer named Eric Kaufmann in England published a fascinating book. It’s called *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?* He is not a believer, and his answer (spoiler alert) is yes, the religious shall inherit the earth. The reason is what he calls an iron law of demography: religious people have children. This is true, interestingly, across the board: Mormon, Jewish, Muslim—the more religious you are, the more children you will have.

For reasons that are not understood (that sociologists haven’t even touched to my knowledge) is the converse of that: secular people have few children if any. In the long game, Eric Kaufmann would argue, demography is on the side of faith.

There’s one final lesson from history, which is that Christianity has faced obstacles, sometimes enormous obstacles, throughout its history. The mere fact that the Roman Empire ended up largely Christian speaks to the religion’s resilience and suppleness and ability to inspire. The success of missionaries in bringing faith to people who believe differently in almost every other language on earth is also testimony to the ability of the faith to speak across time and to undercut that narrative about inevitable decline.

It is also true that, although I don’t want to make too much of it, one by one, the overt tormentors of the faithful—those who have claimed to have the mantle of history on their shoulders—have ended up as history’s rejects. The Reformation didn’t kill the church. The French Revolution didn’t kill Christianity. Global Marxism and Leninism didn’t either. And that, I think, is the case for optimism in a pagan time.