

**"GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS"
SO, BE "IN, BUT NOT OF, THE WORLD"**

THUS: "STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND"—AN AUGUSTINIAN STANCE

Mt. 28:19; Jn 17:6-19

- I. IN the WORLD: BE REALISTIC re REALITY** ("rain falls on just and unjust")
- A. "World" in Scripture may be either good or evil; thus:
1. Good world to be discerned, respected, sustained; good sociopolitical structures affirmed
 - a. In creating, God repeatedly pronounced his created world "good"
 - b. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (Jn 3:16)
 2. Fallen (Satan-affected/infected) world to be shunned
- B. World inescapably with us
1. Just as we are materially dependent on the physical world, so intellectually & socially we depend on the social world—inescapably interconnected
 2. Thus total self-reliance or small-group separation virtually impossible
 - A. Thoreau at Walden Pond routinely went to town!
 - B. Monks (whether Benedictine or Irish) and utopian communities (Shakers & Oneida members) invariably needed to interact with, trade with, recruit from broader world
 - C. Navajo youngsters with transistors, African tribesmen with cell phones—interested in connecting with, not leaving "world"
 3. N.B. the technological transformations continually transforming our world! No where to flee, given pervasive media & multinational economy—cf. Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* and Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*
 4. Truly "Separatist" endeavors inevitably utopian and thus ephemeral
- II. BUT NOT OF WORLD: DISCERNING ESSENTIAL DISTINCTIONS—Cooperating with as well as separating from worldly systems (Both/And position)—N.B. Letter of Diognetus cited by Chaput in *Strangers in a Strange Land* & Augustine's *City of God* assertions**
- A. Family—by nature, humans *domestic*, needing, thriving in, homes—an absolute GOOD
1. For Christians, marriage sacred (pro-monogamy, anti-divorce)—sustain *sacramental* ("one-flesh") aspects as Christians but also work to extend the truth of sacred unions to broader culture
 2. Children welcomed & reared responsibly (cf. Samuel's mother)—celebrate fecundity, large families valuable in community and nation; then seek social well-being for all children—cf. William Gairdner's *The War Against the Family: A Parent Speaks Out on the Political, Economic, and Social Policies That Threaten Us All*
 3. Estate (private property) guarded, transmitted (cf. Jacob)—stress importance of property, inheritance as part of divinely-given commission re "tending" earth
- B. Church—by nature, man is religious, needing *ecclesia* (more than a "house church" desired)
1. Traditions transmitted—sacraments, liturgies, music, aligned with Early Church examples
 2. Education—both for earth and eternity—establishing Sunday school, adult education, parochial elementary and high schools, colleges, open to world, seeking to evangelize
 3. Cohesive community an essential "subsidiary" society, helping world by preserving religious liberty—remembering Burke's dictum: "When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."
 4. Embracing Christ's missionary commission—proclaim, reach-out, near and far
 5. Necessarily tolerating less-than-perfect congregants—thus tares in wheat, less-than-devout welcomed, "standards" often volitional rather than mandated
- C. State—by nature, humans social/political, needing certain structures
1. Protection: police & military supported, served; thus (unlike Amish) encourage public "service"
 2. Justice good for all men, saints & sinners alike; thus laws & courts, lawyers & judges, legislators all supported—preserving "life, liberty, property"
 - a. Governing relations between individuals: Commutative Justice—lawsuits, trials, punishment
 - b. Governing relations of society to individuals: Distributive Justice—honors, welfare, merits
 - c. Governing relations of individuals to society: Legal or General Justice—taxes, conscription

“STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND”

Philadelphia’s Archbishop Charles J. Chaput has many concerns for the future of Christianity, but in *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World*, he balances those concerns with a robust confidence in the strength of both individual believers and the Church herself to overcome them. He especially urges us to put things into perspective, noting how dramatically a truly global Christianity has emerged during the past century. Thus: “In Africa, 9 million converts enter the Catholic Church each year. By 2030, if current trends hold, China may have the largest Christian population the world” (p. 1). In Europe and America the churches may be struggling, but around the world they may be enjoying their finest hour! And despite much bad news, there’s much encouraging news in both Europe and America as believers creatively respond to our postmodern and post-Christian world.

Rather than despair, Chaput urges us to remember that there have always been, as Augustine taught, two cities—the City of God and the city of man. “We are born for the City of God. The road home leads through the City of Man. So we are strangers in a strange land, yes” (p. 246). The Church has forever suffered setbacks, yet for 2000 years she has endured—and surely she will do so unto He returns. Chaput celebrates St. Augustine, a bishop caring for his flock in the North African city of Hippo. “For Augustine, the classic civic virtues named by Cicero—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—can be renewed and elevated, to the benefit of all citizens, by the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Therefore, political engagement is—or at least it can be—a worthy Christian task” (p. 14). This world is always a good world—what Augustine called a “smiling place.” Despairing at the conditions of society can be as sinful as despairing of one’s own salvation. “As Augustine said in his sermons, it’s no use complaining about the times, because we are the times. How we live shapes them” (p. 17).

Yes, times have changed, Chaput acknowledges, honestly documenting the many harmful cultural currents which have eroded much of the nation’s spiritual and ethical landscape, and we must honestly assess and respond to the challenges we face, knowing that the “Church of tomorrow won’t look like the Church of today, much less of memory” (p. 187). It may very well be smaller and poorer, but it can become more disciplined and effective. Neither despair nor isolation is an option for Chaput. Christians necessarily have hope because Jesus arose from the grave! “This small moment, unseen by any human eye, turned the world upside-down and changed history forever” (p. 146). As a supernatural virtue, hope enables us to see everything in the light of eternity, never despairing of what God may in fact bring to pass. Thus it’s our duty, John Henry Newman said, to set forth on “ventures for eternal life without the absolute certainty of success” (p. 152). Despair results from trusting ourselves. Hope springs eternal because we trust God. Trusting God means following His precepts, summed up so powerfully by Jesus in the Beatitudes, to which Chaput devotes many pages, and embracing the call to holiness as have saints throughout the centuries.

For guidance in the 21st century Chaput finds fascinating clues in a second century document, *The Letter to Diognetus*—a wonderful manual for Christians living as aliens in a hostile land. In that ancient letter we’re reminded that the Christian Faith is not a man-made construct. Rather it was given us by the “Creator of all, the invisible God himself, who from heaven established the truth and the holy incomprehensible word among men, and fixed it firmly in their hearts.” So Christians live normally, following the daily customs (food; drink; clothing, work) of their countrymen. “They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast off their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed.” In sum: “What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but does not belong to the body, and Christians dwelling the world, but do not belong to the world. The soul, which is invisible, is kept under guard in the visible body; in the same way Christians are recognized when they are in the world, but their religion remains unseen.”

Yet even when unseen they animate and uplift the world. Loving God and others, Christians are truly the leaven, the salt, and the light of the world. Not always triumphant, they are called not to succeed but to remain faithful, bearing witness to the Gospel—that greatest of all truths, the Good News the world always needs to hear, especially the post-modern world that despairs of any truths at all, much less one overarching Truth. Our task, as John Henry Newman said, is “not to turn the whole earth into a heaven, but to bring down a heaven upon earth” (p. 218).

THE CITY OF GOD

“These are the two loves: the first is holy, the second foul; the first is social, the second selfish; the first consults the common welfare for the sake of a celestial society, the second grasps at a selfish control of social affairs for the sake of arrogant domination; the first is submissive to God, the second tries to rival God; the first is quiet, the second restless; the first is peaceful, the second trouble-making; the first prefers truth to the praises of those who are in error, the second is greedy for praise, however it may be obtained; the first is friendly, the second envious; the first desires for its neighbor what it wishes for itself, the second desires to subjugate its neighbor; the first rules its neighbor for the good of its neighbor, the second for its own advantage

Although they are now, during the course of time, intermingled, they shall be divided at the last judgment; the first, being joined by the good angels under its King, shall attain eternal life; the second, in union with the bad angels under its king, shall be sent into eternal fire.”

--St. Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, XI 15-20

“Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men, but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience.”

--St. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 28

“And see ye the names of those two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem. Babylon is interpreted confusion. . . . Whereby can those two cities be distinguished? Can we anywise now separate them from each other? They are mingled, and from the very beginning of mankind mingled they run on unto the end of the world. Jerusalem received beginning through Abel, Babylon through Cain: for the buildings of the cities were afterwards erected.”

--St. Augustine, *On Psalm 64*

“So is the Church of God: in some saints she works miracles, in other saints she preaches the truth, in others she protects virginity, in yet others she preserves conjugal chastity, in some she does one thing, in others another; all do that which is severally proper to them, but all share life in an equal degree. So what the soul is to the body of man, that the Holy Spirit is in the body of Christ, which is the Church. The Holy Spirit does that in the whole Church, which the soul does in all the members of a single body. . . . If therefore you wish to live by the Holy Spirit, hold fast to charity, love truth, long for unity, so that you may attain to eternity.”

--St. Augustine, *Sermon CCLXVII*

“On us He has laid the duty of gathering the flock; to Himself He has reserved the work of final separation, because it pertains properly to Him Who cannot err. For those presumptuous servants who have lightly dared to separate before the time which the Lord has reserved to Himself, have only succeeded in separating themselves from Catholic unity.”

--St. Augustine, *Epistle CCVIII*, 2,3

“For what else are we to say to those heretics, save, learn peace, love peace. You call yourselves just, but if you were just you would groan as grain among chaff. For since there are grains of wheat in the Catholic Church, and they are true grains, they endure the chaff until the floor be threshed. . . .”

--St. Augustine, *On Psalm 119*, 9

“The City of God does not care in the least what kind of dress or social manners a man of faith affects, so long as these involve no offense against the divine law. For it is faith and not fashions that brings us to God. Hence, when philosophers become Christians, the Church does not force them to give up their distinctive attire or mode of life which are no obstacle to religion, but only their erroneous teachings. She is entirely indifferent to that special mark which, in Varro’s reckoning, distinguishes the Cynics, so long as it connotes nothing shameful or unbalanced.

Or take the three modes of life: the contemplative, the active, the contemplative-active. A man can live the life of faith in any of these three and get to heaven. What is not indifferent is that he love truth and do what charity demands. No man must be so committed to contemplation as, in his contemplation, to give no thought to his neighbor’s needs, nor so absorbed in action as to dispense with the contemplation of God.”

--St. Augustine, *City of God*

THE WAR AGAINST THE FAMILY

Though rather unwieldy and repetitious at times, William D. Gairdner's *The War Against the Family: A Parent Speaks Out on the Political, Economic, and Social Policies That Threaten Us All* gives us a Canadian parent's perspective on a variety of issues. A graduate of Stanford University and an Olympic athlete, Gairdner weaves together history, philosophy, theology, education, psychology, sociology and jurisprudence, touching on everything from abortion to taxation. One of his major themes is the doleful impact of the Welfare State, the deleterious effect of all utopian schemes that propose to improve upon the natural order of things. To the extent socialism triumphs, Gairdner argues, the family suffers. This is graphically evident in Sweden, often touted as a grand example of "democratic socialist" success. Following the ideological schemes of the economist Gunnar Myrdal and his wife Alva, a "radical feminist sociologist" (p. 138), Sweden engineered a cradle-to-grave welfare state that has lately paled as its debts mount. In the words of Goran Bruhner, "Sweden used to be a welfare paradise on earth. Now it is the sick man of Europe" (p. 14).

Social, as well as economic, decay also marks Sweden. The government has pursued a markedly secular agenda, evident in a 1968 publication, titled "The Family is Not Sacred." The author of the article declared: "I should like to abolish the family as a means of earning a livelihood, let adults be economically independent of each other and give society a large share of responsibility for its children . . . In such a society we could very well do without marriage as a legal entity" (p. 139). To a great extent that has taken place. Fewer people marry in Sweden than in any Western nation. Two thirds of the people in Stockholm live alone! Swedes who do marry usually cohabit beforehand—getting motivated to marry when a child results from their intimacy. In the midst of it all, the Swedes are having fewer and fewer children. And those that are born are quickly lodged in daycare facilities. Following the Myrdals' socialist agenda, Sweden pursued policies pushing women into the workforce. Today 60 percent of the women work—45 percent of them for the government. The Swedish Welfare State, Gairdner insists, has delivered a lethal blow to the family. But, to the enlightened elitists in Canada—the "Court Party"—Sweden still serves as a model to follow! Beginning with Pierre Trudeau's ascent to power in 1968, Canada's leaders have systematically orchestrated a radical swerve to the left, quickly imposing state controls in virtually every area of life. Should Canadians—and Americans—wonder about what happens to the family when socialism triumphs, simply look to Sweden. Doing so, Gairdner says, should prompt us to reverse directions!

One of the great reversals needed involves education, to which Gairdner devotes several chapters. State-controlled education—one of the goals listed in *The Communist Manifesto*—illustrates the damage children suffer when subjected to a centrally-planned, bureaucratic system. Amazingly, Americans in New England and the old Northwest demonstrated a higher rate of literacy in 1840 than they do today! If you think clearly about it, "there is little difference between a collectivized, command economy and collectivized, command education. Neither can work well, and the unit cost of the product is very great—about double the cost of the same education rendered privately" (p. 198). Failing schools demand more money and more teachers in smaller classes, ignoring solid evidence showing that neither makes much of a dent in students' performance. Public school problems cannot be solved by the public schools, for they are in fact the problem!

The public school movement, strongly championed by "reformers" like the Fabians in England, dislodged churches and private schools as mentors of the young. In 1905, the Intercollegiate Socialist Society was formed, with John Dewey as a founding member. He and his associates envisioned "education for a new social order," and his highly influential *Democracy and Education* said nary a word about home and family while stressing grand themes like "social unity" and "State consciousness." An admirer of the communist endeavors in Russia and the '20s and '30s, Dewey wanted to abolish private property and install a state-controlled economic system. To secure those ends, he taught successive generations of educators to be "change agents" who would transform the public schools into centers for collectivist ideology.

"History will surely show," says Gairdner, "that one of the tragic links in the long chain of Western decline was the surrender by families, to the nation State, of control over their children's education. As Yale historian John Demos has aptly argued, the school is one of the institutions responsible for the long-term 'erosion of function' of the family. And Stanford's Kingsley Davis writes that 'one of the main functions [of the school system] appears to be to alienate offspring from their parents' (p. 208). But we need not abandon our young to the state! To reverse the harm being done to our kids, Gairdner urges us to support private schools, vouchers, anything possible to take back some of the power from the omnivorous state. And, perhaps, there is headway being made in the U.S. today! Ultimately, truth prevails, and it's difficult to evade the truth of G. K. Chesterton, a century ago: "This triangle of truisms, of father, mother and child, cannot be destroyed; it can only destroy those civilizations which disregard it" (p. 584).