

faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Spring 2023

Asbury Revival a 'Spontaneous Outpouring'

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Students pray together during a days-long revival at Asbury University. See story on page 8. (Photo: The Asbury Collegian)



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Cover: Students pray over one another in the first days of the Asbury Revival in Wilmore, Kentucky (Photo courtesy of Sarah Thomas Baldwin)

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The ‘Evil Empire’ Speech, 40 Years Later

The establishment hated it, but Ronald Reagan and evangelicals stand vindicated

Evangelical support for **Ronald Reagan’s** resolve against the Soviet Union was crucial to America’s winning the Cold War. March 8 marked the 40th anniversary of President Reagan’s “Evil Empire” speech to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), a key moment for evangelicals and Reagan. Reagan gave that speech because he knew that evangelical support was politically essential. He also knew that American strength against the Soviet Union and against communism was especially important to evangelical Christians.

Reagan’s speech was effective because it was sincere, reflecting his own deepest convictions, and echoing his audience’s equally passionate convictions. For him, and for them, the Cold War was not just a rivalry between superpowers but a spiritual struggle between freedom and totalitarianism. As Reagan told the NAE in Orlando, Florida:

Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness—pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.

Part of Reagan’s purpose with NAE was to warn against the nuclear freeze movement, which opposed Reagan’s rearmament plans, especially placing U.S. missiles in Western Europe to counteract a Soviet buildup. Some church officials, mostly but not entirely on the left, supported a nuclear freeze, which the Soviets also supported, since it would lock in their superiority. Reagan pleaded:

I urge you to speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority. You know, I’ve always believed that old Screwtape reserved his best efforts for those of you in the church. So, in your discussions of

the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride—the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and labeling both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.



President Ronald Reagan addresses the National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983 in Orlando, Florida. (Photo: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

Reagan’s words to NAE became known as the “evil empire speech.” That the Soviet Union was wicked seems uncontroversial today. But 40 years ago, such rhetoric was deemed incendiary, possibly hastening the Cold War’s degeneration into nuclear apocalypse. Peacemaking required building bridges with the Soviets, not hurling verbal bombs that could ignite the world.

In 1982, the U.S. Catholic bishops had called for eliminating nuclear weapons. The United Methodist bishops would later follow. Massive protests

in Western Europe marched against U.S. missile deployments. Huge anti-nuclear protests also occurred in America. Disarmament, and not U.S. resolve much less rearmament, was deemed the world’s greatest need.

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Mark Tooley



Mark D. Tooley is the President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

First Global Methodist Annual Conference Moves Forward



The Rev. Joann Dominguez, assistant pastor at First Methodist Church of Waco, prays on January 21, 2023, over the first Global Methodist annual conference session held in America (Photo: Mid-Texas Annual Conference of the Global Methodist Church)

“We’re seeing a new church being born!” Seedbed founder **J.D. Walt** declared at the inaugural session of the Mid-Texas Annual Conference of the Global Methodist Church.

The January 19-21 event was the historic first session of any Global Methodist Annual Conference in America.

“The inspiring teaching, helpful equipping, encouraging fellowship, and individual decisions for Jesus showcased the best of what a Methodist annual conference can be,” enthused **John Lomperis** of IRD’s UAction program, who attended the Waco, Texas gathering.

Emerging initially from the United Methodist Church’s Central Texas Conference, the Global Methodist annual conference lists 90 congregations. Approximately 600 registered attendees met alongside 90 participants at a concurrent youth retreat, which saw many decisions for Christ.

Officially named the “Inaugural Annual Awakening,” the event was reminiscent of Seedbed’s New Room conference for evangelical Wesleyans. The receiving of reports and budget approval took less than 90 minutes to complete. Connecting, inspiring, equipping, and spiritually awakening the people of this new Global Methodist annual conference was treated as the conference’s main “business.”

Speakers included now-former United Methodist bishops **Mike Lowry** and **Scott Jones** who transferred into Global Methodism. Lowry stressed that his being “Bishop Emeritus” is a retired status and emphasized that the GMC will reconstitute the role of bishops as a teaching office. At a reception, Dean **Todd Still** of Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary announced that Jones, a former professor at Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology, will teach at Truett this semester. The seminary recently opened a Wesleyan House of Studies for Methodist students. Jones will also relate to emerging conferences in the Southern United States as well as the Philippines, while Bishop **Mark Webb** will similarly work in the Northern and Western United States as well as Eurasia.

The conference was overwhelmingly positive, forward-looking, and hopeful.

“This is NOT a church for those who hate LGBTQ people!” Lowry declared to enthusiastic applause. “It is a church for people who love the Lord Jesus” and who are committed to the GMC’s mission statement “to make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly.” He added, “we’re not going to get lost in the culture wars.”

While there were brief allusions to learning from past experiences, no speaker criticized The United Methodist Church.

In opening worship, Dr. **Leah Hidde-Gregory** stressed the urgent need for every congregation to “check our foundations,” and ask “what kind of church will we be?”

“We have come through too much” to be self-centered and ineffective, Hidde-Gregory insisted. Instead, she exhorted Global Methodist congregations to “build a good house” with “a firm foundation,” take inspiration from the church of Acts 2:37-47, truly “love each other,” and avoid low-commitment Christianity. Stressing that “our communities need us,” she declared “we have to make Methodists ‘vile’ again” as they go out to spread God’s love, so that “we can’t wait to overflow and share the love of Jesus with others,” and in our churches offer broken people genuine, deep welcome.

Walt urged recovery of John Wesley’s teaching on sanctification. He recalled the history of how Methodist commitment to this “second half of the gospel” led to “a first-half-of-the-gospel revival” of many coming to a saving faith. He strongly encouraged rebuilding early Methodism’s accountability-focused small groups known as bands, declaring, “We are justified alone, but we will only be sanctified together—it’s a team sport!”

Walt encouragingly reminded that because Christians already know the ultimate end of world history, they should not merely have hope about the future but rather “hope from the future.” ✝

John MacArthur and ‘We’ vs. ‘They’

by Clifford Smith

A particular thought pattern now permeates our civic discourse: “We” don’t have to believe what “they” say, because “they” are dishonest, unfair, speak in bad faith, etc. Meanwhile, “we” are virtuous and fair. Indeed, a lot of what passes for dialogue on social media often ends up with a self-selected group of people reinforcing comforting narratives and denigrating troubling ones.

But what if “they” are right?

Ponder a recent discussion concerning **John MacArthur** and his influential Grace Community Church (GCC) in Sun Valley, California.

A recent report by *Christianity Today* (CT), an outlet generally seen as centrist in the Christian world, casts MacArthur and GCC in a bad light, claiming GCC’s leaders ignored signs of abuse in their counseling sessions and attacked those who raised questions about this practice.

William Wolfe, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense in the Trump administration and self-described Christian nationalist (according both to his own definition and prominent academic definitions from critics) was aghast.

“If you can’t see that there’s a concerted effort by the woke mob to destroy John MacArthur’s reputation and legacy in his final years of ministry, you don’t have your eyes open,” Wolfe wrote on Twitter. He further explained his gratitude for MacArthur’s ministry and specifically critiqued the messenger. “I’m not going to trust the reporting from the likes of [*Christianity Today*], [David French] or [Kristin Du Mez], etc., for one second on this issue.”

Wolfe was hardly alone. Pastor **Tom Buck** of First Baptist Church of Lindale, Texas, echoed Wolfe’s sentiments almost precisely, saying this was “part of the bigger agenda” to “destroy those who stand against the social Justice movement.” Wolfe and Buck are just two examples.

Yet the accusations against GCC are almost certainly *true*. Wolfe is de facto

dismissing a former elder at GCC, **Hohn Cho**, who is at the center of the story. *CT*’s report, authored by **Kate Shellnutt**, cites Cho, who is a lawyer, extensively. It details a case of church discipline against a woman for refusing to take back her husband, whom she accused of child abuse. It also details that there are other women



John MacArthur preaches on October 28, 2013 (Photo: R. Huggins / Wikimedia Commons)

in the church whose concerns were not heeded.

Cho, then an elder and lay pastor at GCC, was asked to review the issue after the woman’s husband was sent to prison for child molestation. Cho’s investigation found clear wrongdoing on the part of church leadership, and he urged them to make amends. When MacArthur dismissed Cho’s findings and Cho continued to press his case with the elders, Cho was asked to resign.

Since leaving GCC, Cho reports talking to many women who were also dismissed after complaining of spousal abuse and seeking church counseling. “At the end of the day I need to do what’s right,

as the Spirit and my conscience and prayer and counsel and the Word all lead me, and let God take care of the results,” Cho said. “And the man who taught me that was John MacArthur.” Cho has confirmed on his own Facebook page that the article quotes him accurately and in context.

GCC has not taken kindly to Cho’s remarks, and the church has scrubbed its website of Cho’s sermons and postings. Cho, for his part, posted a lengthy Facebook post explaining the process he went through to decide to talk publicly and humbly offering to talk to any friends at the church who still want to speak to him about anything, whether or not they agree with his stance.

Of course, Wolfe and Buck are not entirely wrong: Some people undoubtedly *do* want to damage MacArthur’s legacy, for reasons that have nothing to do with his handling of spousal or child abuse. Some also simply want to destroy him because he’s a prominent evangelical Christian. That alone is enough to some people, particularly the “woke mob” types Wolfe complains about. MacArthur’s defenders aren’t wrong about that.

The problem is, they want to stop there.

MacArthur is perhaps the most famous and strident “complementarian,” i.e., someone who believes men and women were each designed to “shine the spotlight on Christ’s relationship to the church” in ways that the opposite sex cannot. There is considerable nuance to debates on this issue, and some versions of complementarianism are mainstream. However, the more strident form of complementarianism, to which MacArthur subscribes, denies that women can be teachers of the gospel, or even speak at all on spiritual issues, and claims they should serve only in supporting roles in the church. Foes accuse MacArthur of sexism and misogyny,

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Seminarians line up to process into chapel at the Episcopal Church's General Theological Seminary in New York, NY (Photo: GTS / Facebook)

Episcopal Church General Seminary on the Ropes

by Jeffrey Walton

Most faculty and programs at the Episcopal Church's oldest seminary will be gone at the end of the current school year.

To readers of this publication, this may seem like a "no news" update: main-line Protestant seminaries have been in consolidation for years. Even among those Christian seminaries with a healthy enrollment, nontraditional online programs comprise most of their growth.

The General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church is not, as has been rumored, on the verge of shuttering and selling its valuable Manhattan campus, according to its shared President with Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), Dean **Ian Markham**. It is, however, at a crucial point: The school is undertaking a five-year plan that will either result in sustainability or the end of the road. Only a handful of Episcopal Church dioceses send seminarians to be educated at General; even fewer overseas Anglican provinces do.

The sustainability plan follows years of deficit spending, deferred maintenance, and wishful thinking prior to General's governance consolidation with VTS, with the two schools technically remaining separate institutions.

As part of that plan, General is to conclude its residential program and will solely offer a hybrid Masters in Divinity (MDiv) program, according to a February 9 announcement made by the seminary. VTS, the largest independent seminary training students for ministry within the Episcopal Church, stepped in late last year as part of a joint affiliation agreement that functionally subsumes General into VTS' leadership structures in all but name.

"Teaching the hybrid MDiv requires four full-time faculty, none of whom need to be in residence," the announcement read. "As such, the number of faculty at GTS will be reduced from eight to four, and faculty will no longer live on campus from the end of fiscal year 2023."

All faculty contracts at General terminate at the end of June 2024 (the VTS-General Affiliation Agreement commits to keeping the Very Rev. **Michael DeLashmutt** on as the Senior Vice President of General). Faculty who are not reappointed will have their contracts bought out this June.

Just how far over the cliff is General Seminary?

"GTS currently has an operating budget deficit of more than \$2 million per

year, due to a downturn in the market, a fall in revenue, rising operating costs from urgent campus maintenance, and increased staffing costs," seminary officials wrote in a press release.

Graduates of General include both orthodox and progressive clergy, among them Anglican Church in North America Archbishop Emeritus **Robert Duncan** and retired Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire Bishop **V. Gene Robinson**.

Once regarded as the church's flagship seminary, General's position receded as the school's enrollment decreased. Properties on its leafy campus in Manhattan's tony Chelsea neighborhood were sold off to developers in order to pay down \$40 million in debt, part of decades-long financial issues.

According to the Association of Theological Schools, the seminary counts fifty students (with a full-time enrollment equivalent of 31.3) and three full-time faculty (with a full-time enrollment equivalent of 4.50). This is down from the 61 enrolled seminarians at the end of the 2013–2014 school year.

General is not the only seminary within the Episcopal Church to see

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significant change in recent years. Episcopal Divinity School sold its Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus, laid off faculty, and merged into Union Theological Seminary on Manhattan's upper west side. Seabury-Western Theological Seminary sold its Illinois campus and merged with tiny Bexley Hall Seminary. The combined Bexley-Seabury Theological Seminary Federation is still slightly larger than GTS, counting 61 students (full-time

enrollment equivalent of 26.4) and three full-time faculty.

Nashotah House, University of the South (Sewanee), VTS, and Seminary of the Southwest are now the only degree-granting Episcopal Church seminaries offering traditional residential programs (Pennsylvania's Trinity School for Ministry quietly cut ties to the Episcopal Church last year). Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the only West Coast seminary

of the Episcopal Church, announced in January that it is concluding traditional residential study. ✚



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John MacArthur and 'We' vs. 'They'

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particularly for admonishing **Beth Moore**, a prominent female Christian speaker, to "go home" rather than continue speaking on biblical ideas, and they relate this directly to MacArthur's theological beliefs. MacArthur also defied various pandemic-era rules in Los Angeles, preached sermons some have described as racist, and explicitly stated he doesn't support religious freedom, which he contends "sends people to hell." Needless to say, this has earned him powerful enemies, both within and without Christian circles.

Thus, Wolfe and Buck's case is emotionally powerful. Many of MacArthur's foes *do* have incentives to see him fail, and some hold ideas that Wolfe and Buck believe in. There is a concerted effort by some to oppose MacArthur and his legacy. Several prominent institutions and individuals Wolfe frequently has significant differences with—theologically and politically—are amplifying this story.

Indeed, Wolfe's attack on Trump-skeptic writer **David French** and controversial author **Kristin Du Mez**, is instructive. Beyond the fact that both tweeted CT's article with brief comments, they have no obvious connection to the story. However, French, "woke" mobs, and other Christians deemed insufficiently opposed to Black Lives Matter, LGBT, and related cultural issues are frequent targets of MacArthur's fans.

It could be absolutely true that a "woke mob" is out to get MacArthur and

GCC, but that doesn't mean he's innocent of the charges leveled at him. The testimony of Cho and many women of MacArthur's own church confirm this.

The unspoken question in all this is: Do Wolfe, Buck, and other defenders of GCC really believe this is simply a matter of a "woke mob" and that no other information or context is important, or do they know better? It's hard to know for certain. Cognitive dissonance and motivated reasoning are powerful and can warp the perception of even intelligent, well-meaning people. And maybe these defenders didn't even read the story, just dismissing the messenger without really realizing what was being communicated.

Perhaps, however, it's simpler than that. Perhaps GCC's defenders view MacArthur's message as so crucial and the threat from the "woke mob" as so existential that the message's truth or falsity is essentially irrelevant. It matters only that the larger truth is correct: that in the broad scheme of things, GCC and MacArthur are right, and their critics are evil. When the issue is framed this way, it's very easy to convince yourself that defending GCC and MacArthur is desirable, obligatory even.

The problem with this view is that it is far too charitable—not just toward MacArthur's own tribe but toward human nature. No man, no group of people, can be so sure that evil is on the other side alone. Our corrupt human nature will naturally lead us to mistakes, and

denying that, ironically, denies the very universal truths people like Wolfe and Buck believe themselves to be championing. It is human nature to give the benefit of the doubt to people whom you know deserve it, and it is unwise to ignore critics' motives, which may not be pure. However, it is also wrong to assume our own motives or the motives of our own tribe are pure, and it is downright foolish to ignore even voices from within our own tribe when they point to serious flaws.

This lesson obviously goes beyond the church. There is an epidemic in our time of refusing to believe bad things about our side, simply because we deem truth too inconvenient or detest our opponents too much. But this is not a foundation on which anything lasting can be built.

"By seeking the counsel of those around us, we learn to get outside of ourselves. It teaches us to see our issues from another perspective... It requires humility to open yourself up to another person, to give another person the opportunity to say something that could potentially change our plans or challenge our pride." Those are words written by Cho, and, ironically, they seem to be one of his last remaining posts on GCC's website that was not scrubbed.

Cho's words are powerful and true, whether or not GCC, MacArthur, and their defenders choose to abide by them. ✚



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Asbury Revival a 'Spontaneous Outpouring'

by Jeffrey Walton

Crowds waited hours to worship in Hughes Auditorium on the campus of Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky (Photo courtesy of Asbury University)

Students at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, engaged across two weeks in February in what some participants have characterized as an organic, unplanned revival.

University officials prefer the term “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” or other descriptors. It is possibly the first major U.S.-based revival of the social media age, rapidly spreading to other colleges and universities.

The spark of “revival,” or whatever it was, ignited student-led chapel services described as “unscripted” at Lee University and Belmont University in Tennessee, Samford University in Alabama, Cedarville University in Ohio, Regent University in Virginia, and Baylor University in Texas. Kentucky schools Campbellsville

University and University of the Cumberlands also reported continuous prayer and worship gatherings. Lee and Regent are Pentecostal institutions, while Cedarville, Cumberlands, and Samford have Baptist roots. Belmont is non-denominational. Asbury is in the Wesley-Armenian theological camp.

'Spontaneous Outpouring'

What we know: On February 8, a regularly scheduled Asbury University chapel service concluded with an invitation for students to receive prayer. (A Christian institution founded in 1890, Asbury requires students to attend a chapel service three times a week during the semester.) Dozens stayed, worship leaders continued to play music, and even more students returned. Evenings

saw overflow crowds spill onto the steps of Hughes Auditorium (seating capacity: 1,489) with some waiting up to three hours to enter. A smaller 375-seat auditorium was also filled, as was the 660-seat Estes Chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary (a separate, but collegial, institution located across the street from Asbury University), and the Great Commission Fellowship at Wilmore United Methodist Church served as an additional overflow site.

People began arriving by bus from neighboring colleges and adjacent states, straining the infrastructure and resources of Wilmore, a town of 6,000.

“It was a simple, regular chapel in which students stayed to pray and

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engaged in a measure of repentance and brokenness,” Dr. **W. Brian Shelton**, Chair of the Christian Studies and Philosophy Department at Asbury University, shared in a telephone interview. “The older people in the back offer a great measure of credibility because they have been praying for this. Essentially they offer an affirmation that this is real.”

Shelton says, “People from all over began coming to Wilmore in order to pray in the auditorium of Asbury. They came to intercede for loved ones, to be healed, to find encouragement in their brokenness. And they just kept coming. I’ve never seen so many people here at Asbury University.”

Students at Texas A&M University witnessed gatherings unfold across at least three nights outside of Kyle Field in the College Station, Texas, campus. In addition to the recurring themes of worship, repentance and prayer, there were reports of physical healing. Students at Northern Kentucky University have also reported at least 15 baptisms at a campus revival.

“The stories of sharing are immense,” Asbury’s Shelton told me. At one point, state police restricted public access to the main road leading into the 6,000 resident community, stating that it was already over capacity with between 20,000–25,000 visitors on the final Saturday of the revival.

Public worship was eventually moved to off-campus locations. Only students and visitors aged 25 and younger were permitted into Hughes Auditorium in the final week (Asbury earlier agreed to host a prayer conference and needed the space to honor that commitment). Lee University officials also suspended the prayer services that began on February 13 as they reflected on next steps.

If you are a regular reader of this publication, you are likely a person formed by, or adjacent to, the Wesleyan tradition in which Asbury is rooted. I’ve heard from

friends of the IRD deeply shaped by the legacy of the 1950 and 1970 revivals there. Other friends recall the 1995 revival at Wheaton College sparked by students from Howard Payne University in Texas that spread far beyond the campus of either institution.

“Asbury has a history of experiencing spontaneous outpourings of God’s Holy Spirit,” Former IRD Vice President **Jerald Walz**, an Asbury University alumnus,

“They came to intercede for loved ones, to be healed, to find encouragement in their brokenness. And they just kept coming.”

explained to me in a phone interview. “I experienced one in 1995, 25 years after the 1970 revival. Much of what I am observing in today’s awakening mirrors what I experienced when I was a student at Asbury in 1995. Then, as now, times of praise, confession, worship, reading Scripture, prayer in small groups, were all common.”

Revival in an Age of TikTok?

Local Kentucky media were the first to cover the ongoing chapel services. The *Lexington Herald Leader* revisited the school’s history of spontaneous revivals. National Christian media began coverage, including *Christianity Today*, *WORLD*, and CBN (which reported revival spreading to Tennessee’s Lee University).

National secular media took notice about a week into the worship services. The *Washington Post* picked up Religion News Service coverage, Fox News and NBC News quickly followed with their own reports. Fox News host **Tucker Carlson** (an Episcopalian) interviewed Asbury

University Student Body President **Alison Perfater** in prime time. *TIME* featured a two-page essay with a photo of Hughes Auditorium titled “Christian revival’s unique opportunity.”

One can hardly berate national media for initially overlooking the revival; it’s hard to identify a good public interest lead from “chapel service ongoing at small Christian college,” especially without a clear connection to a current controversy or broader societal trend. NBC eventually led with a social media angle, noting how TikTok videos hashtagged Asbury Revival “are racking up millions of views.”

Even those who experienced earlier revivals note that the sheer scope of them wasn’t fully visible until well after they concluded.

‘Not Sure What To Call It’

“Revivals happen when people inside the church repent; awakenings happen when people outside the church repent,” commented Dr. **Kenneth J. Collins**, professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, in an email interview. (Collins is a longtime member of IRD’s Board of Directors.)

“The concern is that the students translate these experiences into long-term spiritual growth,” relayed Dr. **Dale M. Coulter** of Pentecostal Theological Seminary (PTS), located on the Lee University campus.

“As with Asbury, people are not sure what to call it,” Coulter said in an email interview, characterizing PTS as being supportive but not involved in leadership decisions. Coulter noted reports of people rededicating their lives to Christ, deliverance from habits, and some healings. “University officials keep saying that it’s a student led prayer service but, at times, it has clearly become more than that.”

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Generational Hunger

At Baylor, existing ministry services both off and on campus sparked student-led worship, according to **Raylee Foster**, a staff reporter with the *Baylor Lariat* enrolled as a Freshman at the Waco, Texas, school. Foster identified now-familiar practices: late night prayer time, confession, group gathering, and praise extending into the early hours of the morning.

“People say they have been praying for this for years,” Foster shared in a telephone interview. “Everyone on staff who has been praying for this is excited but, for students, a lot saw what was happening at Asbury and that something like this was possible in our generation—and [we are] hungry for it.”

Foster pointed to Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

“I think that stirred into hearts,” Foster said of the local gatherings.

The prospect of movements born out of this moment has precedent in past revivals. Baylor itself has a history of revival: a prayer gathering in the spring of 1945 continued across 90 days and began ministries that continue today.

“Mission flows from moments of encounter,” Coulter of PTS reflects. “To put it in medieval terms, we move out into the world after we have been caught up in the arms of the bridegroom. Ecstatic embrace with God fuels embrace of the other. I thank God today for that embrace.

“Will this continue? I hope so. For how long? Who knows?”

“God is making known His claim on GenZ,” Regent University Director of Campus Ministries Dr. **Jeff Gossmann** wrote in an e-mail interview. “This generation has suffered so much loss due to the

pandemic. This current outpouring is like a Bar/Bat-Mitzvah for GenZ. It is their coming-of-age party, where Jesus says to them, ‘I see you. Welcome to the table.’ It is like the party that the prodigal son’s father threw for him upon his return.”

Gossmann, a Pentecostal Christian, was part of a group from Regent sent to



An image from the revival on the Asbury University campus on Sunday, Feb. 19. (Screenshot credit: SermonIndex.net/YouTube)

visit Asbury University on February 15, describing it as both subdued and characterized by humility and “lack of hype.”

“They spoke without charisma, showmanship, dynamism, or attempt to stir emotions.”

While Gossmann and others from Regent University were at Asbury, students, faculty, and staff at the Virginia Beach school began gathering for unscripted prayer and worship. In response, a series of services has progressively grown in the number of participants. Those services, some extending for five hours, include Regent students sharing “brief exhortations from Scripture that the Holy Spirit highlighted during worship.”

“Many students have reported feeling renewed and encouraged by the presence of the Lord,” Gossmann shared. “The Lord is leading us to create space for repentance and renewal.”

People of varying ages, religious backgrounds and geographic origin

continue to be drawn to several of these campuses. Asbury’s Shelton sees at least one commonality:

“They are looking for a greater source of hope.”

Surprising Silence

Unexpected silence came from one quarter: Messiah University Historian **John Fea** documented how conservative religious leaders who regularly call for national revival seemed unaware.

There is no political angle. Participants tell of a deep sense of joy, but the prayer and worship itself was quiet.

Revivals begin with conviction in the hearts of those present: personal repentance is an initial spark that catches fire. But among those who have been calling for “a new Great Awakening” the demand is that others change. It’s

as though everything else is the problem. Is this the Christian Right equivalent of what we see in politically liberal Mainline Protestant circles, where “repentance” always involves apology for another’s transgression?

Repentance demands an acknowledgement that the problem is within me.

“People are coming because they are hungry for God,” Asbury University’s Shelton describes. “COVID, political and social divisions have wearied our nation. They have prayed from home but they are looking for a greater source of hope, and they have traveled to this space in a way that has surprised us all.” ✝



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Methodist Split's Messy Creativity

by Mark Tooley

This year's process for United Methodist congregations to exit their denomination has been predictably messy, but the results are often creative. Some churches fall just short of the two-thirds congregational vote required, ensuring a congregational split.

One recent example is Collierville United Methodist Church outside Memphis. Several weeks ago 64 percent of the church voted for exit, falling 24 votes short of the needed two-thirds, 773–493. The defeated majority could have given up and scattered. Instead the following Sunday 342 met at a nearby funeral home, effectively founding a new traditional Methodist congregation. They outnumbered total worshippers at the old church. Their new name is First Methodist Church Collierville.

So, liberals and institutionalists “won,” but their victory is empty.

The old church is stuck with a large modern church property it can no longer fill plus its old historic downtown sanctuary, and a large debt of several million dollars that's possibly unsustainable. I spoke at this church 11 years ago when it had an evangelical pastor and clear direction. Subsequent pastors have been more liberal, and the current pastor tragically opposed exit, guaranteeing a calamitous division. It's a miracle that traditionalists got 64% despite the pastor's opposition. When I spoke at the church over a decade ago, there were 1,500 worshippers, which subsequently fell by two-thirds. A traditionalist pastor could have avoided this once great church's demise.

Yesterday the new church worshiped together for the second Sunday, and



Collierville United Methodist Church outside Memphis, Tennessee, fell 24 votes short of the needed two-thirds majority to disaffiliate from the denomination. The defeated majority has effectively founded a new traditional Methodist congregation at a nearby funeral home. (Photos: Collierville UMC)

they're attracting refugees from other United Methodist churches.

Avoiding some of this acrimony, a United Methodist church in Arkansas, with an average 1,886 worshippers, voted to divide itself into three congregations. Liberals at Fayetteville's Central United Methodist Church, the largest United Methodist congregation in the state, will keep the main property. Its satellite campus in South Fayetteville, with 300–350 worshippers, will become independent, buying its current property, an old Methodist sanctuary, for one dollar. And the current pastor and church staff will found a new congregation, funded by \$500,000 from the old church. A leader in the new church said they're “excited about launching a new Wesleyan orthodox theological church.”

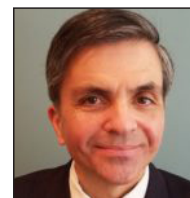
There are other creative examples across Methodism, where traditional believers are founding new congregations that can achieve what churches in the old denomination could not. They are losing old properties but gaining so much more. The old congregations are stuck with unsustainable properties and perhaps will not survive, or at very least face a grim future.

United Methodism in the coming years will be closing and selling thousands of church properties. In some cases, maybe new traditional Methodist congregations will buy some of those properties, returning

them to their original purpose of Wesleyan Gospel proclamation. Most discarded old United Methodist churches will likely sell to nondenominational, or be demolished by developers, or become condominiums, restaurants, or microbreweries.

Historic Methodism began as a renewal movement that evolved into a new church for new times. The cycle continues. At least 3,000 churches so far have voted by the needed two-thirds margin to exit United Methodism, taking their property, and winning their freedom. Perhaps 1,000–2,000 more will do so before this year's fast approaching deadline. But many new congregations also are emerging from old churches that declined to exit.

Amid messiness, division, and death there will be new life. United Methodism, founded in 1968 as a large national bureaucracy committed to liberal Protestantism, has declined every year of its existence. That decline will now accelerate. Traditional Methodism will endure and prosper in new contemporary situations, becoming “new” by reaching people in practical ways. ✝



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Grace and Lies: A Mars Hill Story

by Clifford Smith

Pastor **Mark Driscoll**, perhaps most (in)famous now as the unintentional star of the “Rise and Fall of Mars Hill” podcast, recently tweeted against “deconstructionists,” saying that they couldn’t have a relationship with Christ while hating his Church.

It was classic Driscoll. Pugnacious, intentionally divisive, having just enough of a point in the abstract that his defenders insist his foes “just don’t get it,” or deftly suggest his critics aren’t “really” Christians. Meanwhile, Mark, by implication, is the example all should look up to. It’s a uniquely toxic way of attacking spiritual doubt and conflict.

Of course, “deconstructionism,” depending on how you define it, can be destructive to faith. In context, however, Driscoll is subtly suggesting that anyone who is attacking him, or his enterprises, is really attacking Christ and his church writ large. And that is indefensible in virtually any context, let alone concerning Driscoll, who has a well-documented history of narcissism, spiritual and emotional abuse, and constant gaslighting. Perhaps even worse is the idea, slyly yet clearly implied, that there is no desire from God to reach these people before they change to his liking.

There are already an untold number of stories about people who were hurt by Mark’s abuses. But ultimately, I’m not here to damn Mark yet again. I’m here to talk about something good that came of my time spent at Mars Hill.

In the summer of 2005, I’d gone to Mars Hill for about 2½ years, and I was standing in the foyer of the flagship campus in northwest Seattle. It was my last Sunday as a regular attendee; I was moving out of town to attend grad school. I said to a friend, the identity of whom I struggle to remember, “Someday, this is all going to go away. And it’ll be because nobody was around to tell Mark he was too much the center of all this.”

I remember being shocked by my own words. Sure, in the back of my mind,

I’d noticed Mark’s obvious cockiness, and even arrogance, despite his massive talent. I’d noticed friends of mine become cult-like in their devotion to Mars Hill, friends I knew were desperate for a cause to believe in as much as spiritual guidance. I noticed that Mark almost always preached Sunday, and on the rare occasion he didn’t, the congregation seemed disappointed, upset even. I realized that wasn’t healthy.

While I’d noticed Mars Hill’s rapid growth, I’d never given significant thought to its imploding.

I immediately wondered why I’d just said that. I don’t know if it was what some call a prophetic word, or simply me stating ideas in the back of my mind that I hadn’t verbalized. Either way, I knew I was going to remember my words.

It took nine years, but my prediction came true when, on October 31, 2014, Mars Hill dissolved among the crushing weight of scandals that would be too numerous and detailed to discuss here.

There are so many people who attended for so much longer, and who were hurt far worse than I, that it would be petty for me to discuss my wounds. But when I heard of various scandals, I more-or-less believed them because of what I’d seen. I have been surprised, not by the types of problems revealed, but by the depths to which they descended. I remain saddened, disgusted, and angered by it all.

But there is a flipside to even this story.

In 2002, I graduated from Washington State University, and then worked on a local campaign for State Representative. We lost 51–49. A short time later, I was delivering pizza again, much like I’d done through college. It was the most lost I’d ever been in my life. I’d grown up in a Christian home, but I’d never “made my faith my own,” as they say. I struggled mightily in college, saved, really, by a kindly couple in a church I found who invited kids over to their place, without agenda or expected

payback, and exemplified Christ’s love to me. I had trouble forgetting that.

But that didn’t make getting out of the trap I was in any easier. Having escaped college more than conquered, I found myself with no obvious job prospects, no real direction about where I wanted to go, and certainly no idea about what it all had meant. In my own eyes, I was a failure.

Saying I was in my early 20s and had plenty of time was beside the point. More was expected of me, and I knew it. Years later, I learned that my mother expressed worries about my direction to my grandfather, saying, “He’s delivering pizza, and doesn’t seem to have any direction. I just don’t know,” to which my grandfather replied, “Don’t worry, he’s a good kid. He’ll figure it out.” It’s something that I wished I’d heard then. I didn’t see myself that way at the time. Perhaps, it wasn’t yet true.

My friends at the time were mostly frequenters of Seattle’s large and influential independent music scene, which, it might shock out-of-towners, had a large Christian component. Many of my friends I’d known since high school. It was the demographic that originally built Mars Hill. Mars Hill not only hosted our concerts, but Mark spoke our language. He understood our lack of direction, the need for a cause, and the gnawing feeling that our society was mistaken, and that Christ had something to offer. But he also understood that we didn’t feel comfortable in the churches we’d grown up in. Mark never, as **Dorothy Sayers** once said, “pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him ‘meek and mild’ and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.” He knew well we’d never accept something so obviously phony as that. We started attending Mars Hill en masse.

For an entire year when I attended Mars Hill, the sermons were on nothing but the book of Genesis.

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Pastor Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, preaches in 2013 (Photo: Evangelical Outreach)

Few stories in the Bible are as well-known as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, and so on. Yet Mark made it seem alive. The claws were out, not pared.

Nonetheless, for the better part of that year, I still felt lost and angry. At God, at the world, but mostly, at myself. I knew God had given me all kinds of advantages: a nice home, loving parents, better than average intelligence (if perhaps less-than-desirable discipline), and I never fell into any of the obvious self-destructive behaviors. But in my view, I'd simply squandered it all. Not just because of my lack of a career path, but more fundamentally for my lack of any depth of commitment to God.

Then we got to the story of Joseph. His coat of many colors. Being sold into slavery by his brothers. Interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. Becoming the second most powerful and wealthy man in Egypt, etc. The famine that led Joseph's brothers to go to Egypt for food was quite a story. The reconnection of Joseph to his brothers. The ultimate salvation of his people from famine because of this reconciliation. It seemed more alive than before, but it did not seem different.

Then, at the end of one sermon, Mark hit me with something different. I'm

paraphrasing from memory, but it amounted to this:

"So, Joseph did all this great stuff. Where is he in the rest of the Bible?"

Following an awkward silence, he continued.

"He barely shows up. Joseph is basically a non-entity for the rest of the story."

People were shocked. Or, at least, I was shocked.

"But Joseph's brother, Judah, is a different story. Why? As we've been reading, Judah helped sell his brother into slavery. Judah's first two sons were so evil God struck them dead. Judah then impregnated his former daughter-in-law, Tamar, believing she was a prostitute, and then tried to get her killed for sexual sins, ignoring his own. By the time he reached middle age, he'd done essentially nothing good. If we're keeping score, this guy is a disaster."

I remember being stunned.

"But it was *Judah* who guided his family to Egypt. It was *Judah* who took responsibility to bring Benjamin into Egypt despite his father's fear, to please Joseph. It was because of *Judah* that they were ultimately able to make peace with the brother he sold into slavery. And we, as Christians, worship the Lion of Judah. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah. That's Judah's legacy."

To this day, I have difficulty saying this, or even thinking about this, without tears coming to my eyes. The message that God was sending, to me, was clear: *It doesn't matter how much you've failed. I can still use you for good. You have not squandered your life if you are still with me. If I can still use someone like Judah, I can still use you. If I still love someone like Judah, I still love you.*

I suddenly realized the truth of something I had been told 1,000 times,

but never fully accepted: God can use *anybody*, and *nobody* is beyond his love.

Really understanding this truth changed my life.

In the years that followed, we learned more about the importance Mark put on the idea that the men of the church needed to, as I've heard it paraphrased, "Pull your pants up and get a job." This idea, while a defensible cultural critique of young men in Seattle, quickly became, in my view, a toxic demand for cultural conformity, of "up by your bootstraps, masculinity, having little or nothing to do with Christ and his message of grace. It was, in essence, a cultural version of the prosperity gospel: Follow Jesus and become a "real man." Was that the message Mark intended? That Judah "pulled his pants up and got a job," and thus was successful?

I don't know. But the message God gave me was different: God could use anybody for good. Including Judah. Including me. What I heard, if imperfect and incomplete, is far closer to the truth.

That, to me, was a miracle.

I told this story to a friend recently, and she pointed out something I'd missed. Namely, that my story *in* Mars Hill was ultimately the same as a story *about* Mars Hill. In other words: even the complete train wreck of a church it was, even as much damage as Mark caused (and is still causing, frankly), God used even something *this* flawed for good.

God is ever-present, looking to use anyone who is willing for good. As he did Judah, as he did even Mars Hill and Mark Driscoll. And even someone like me. ✝



Clifford Smith is an attorney and former Congressional staffer currently residing in Washington, D.C.

Fifty Years Post-Roe, Anglicans and Episcopalians Diverge on Abortion

by Jeffrey Walton

The Episcopal Church and Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) continue to diverge in social policy and theological belief surrounding bodily autonomy and the sanctity of human life.

and **Glenn Northern** of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).

The Episcopal Church General Convention reasserted denominational support for legal abortion at any stage of pregnancy in July as lay and clergy deputies reacted against the Supreme Court ruling *Dobbs v Jackson* that returned abortion policy to states.

The perspective of the Anglican prayer service was diametrically opposed.

“Abortion grieves the heart of God,” preached Diocese of San Joaquin Bishop **Eric Menees** before a service sponsored by Anglicans for Life and the ACNA Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic held at The Falls Church Anglican outside of Washington, D.C. The service followed a “ySummit” on January 19 in which ACNA Archbishop **Foley Beach** addressed teenage participants engaged in Pro-Life ministry, and proceeded the annual Anglican Life Summit on January 21.

“We believed the lie and ate the forbidden fruit,” Menees declared about abortion, tracing the termination of pregnancy to a “false idea that I have no duty to God.”

Menees argued that American society has forgotten that all people are made in the image of God, but that God is sovereign and will have the last word.

Christians, Menees insisted, were not called to passivity on the issue of abortion but should “live out your Christian life” through an apostolic mission “sent out not only to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ but to embody the good news of Jesus Christ. Not simply to serve others, especially the least and the lost, but to love them. To love them means going

beyond service: to love them means that you are willing to stand with them, to suffer with them, and desire more for them than you desire for yourself.”

Prayer service participants heard testimony from **Ashley Lawton** as part of the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, a ministry “whereby Christians make the public aware of the devastation abortion brings to women and men. The campaign seeks to expose and heal the secrecy and silence surrounding the emotional and physical pain of abortion.”

Lawton shared of the disclosure from her adopted mother that she had been conceived in an act of rape.

“It was a horrible and evil act—but I was innocent and did not deserve to die,” Lawton told the congregation. “Every life deserves to be protected: we can love them both [mother and child].”

To those who argue for exceptions in abortion bans, Lawton declared, “I am that exception.”

The Episcopal Church discussion centered upon reproductive rights, with Glenn Northern of the NCJW arguing that “Freedom is just a mirage if one doesn’t have bodily autonomy.”

Northern insisted that abortion helps women to be economically empowered and that there is “no bad impact from having an abortion.” He also sought to designate abortion not as an undesirable last resort or necessary evil, but as an unalloyed social good.

“We didn’t do ourselves any favors when we bought into their [Pro-Life] framing of abortion as bad or immoral or something that someone would only do as a last resort,” Northern argued. “Each time we name abortion and we don’t use euphemisms, we help de-stigmatize it.”

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Anglicans for Life President Georgette Forney and Brandon LeTourneau present a sanctity of life icon to Archbishop Foley Beach for blessing and placement in the Anglican Church in North American provincial cathedral. (Photo: Jeff Walton / IRD)

Those viewpoints were on display January 20 as the ACNA hosted a service of morning prayer preceding the National March for Life. Two hours later, the Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations hosted a conference call titled “Roe 50 Years Later: Faith Communities’ Response to a Post-Roe America.” The latter discussion was framed to “explore where the pro-choice faith community goes from here.”

“We at the Office of Government Relations are committed to restoring access to abortion for all in line with our mandate from the General Convention,” explained Episcopal Church Policy Advisor **Rushad Thomas**, who moderated a panel featuring United Methodist Pastor **Carolyn Davis**

Ordained United Methodist minister Carolyn Davis encouraged the call participants to think of abortion as part of a larger slate of human rights.

“Roe was always the floor, and there are a variety of mitigating factors that restrict access to abortion,” Davis asserted, bemoaning the significant geographic distance some must travel in order to obtain abortions.

Episcopalians and other Anglicans could, perhaps, find agreement in one point.

“Abortion doesn’t live just outside of your church walls,” Davis told the Episcopal conference call, reporting that about one in three churchgoing women will have an abortion. “People who have had abortion are in your pews.”

The Anglican service concluded with Archbishop Beach blessing a sanctity of life icon crafted by a Ukrainian Orthodox artist. Portraying St. John the Baptist leading children to Jesus Christ, the icon will be featured at Christ Church Cathedral in Plano, Texas, the denomination’s provincial cathedral. ✚

Value and True Femininity

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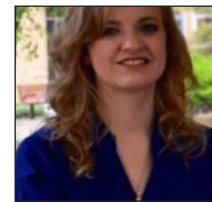
kingdom of God that the other cannot, and both are equally valuable.

One unique function given to women is bearing children, new image bearers. Motherhood is neither a secondary aspect of life nor a lesser option for women. It is a privilege and a gift.

Modern society focuses very little on the eternal, instead glamorizing accomplishments that are fleeting. **Alice von Hildebrand** wrote in *The Privilege of Being a Woman*, “When the time has come, nothing which is manmade will subsist. One day, all human accomplishments will be reduced to a pile of ashes. But every single child to whom a woman has given birth will live forever, for he has been given an immortal soul made to God’s image and likeness. In this light, the assertion of [French social theorist Simone] de Beauvoir that ‘women

produce nothing’ becomes particularly ludicrous.”

From its beginning, the church has been a place of refuge for women from a world that often is hostile to them. It alone puts femininity in its proper perspective. As von Hildebrand wrote, “By living up to their calling, women will succeed in guaranteeing a proper recognition of the unique value of femininity and its crucial mission in the world.” ✚



Sarah Diane Stewart is a Methodist laywoman from Parkersburg, WV, who now resides in the Washington, D.C., region. Stewart is a member of

IRD’s New Whiggery Fellowship, a seminar retrieving the best of the Anglo-American tradition of ordered liberty.

The ‘Evil Empire’ Speech, 40 Years Later

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We now blithely assume that the USSR’s demise was inevitable. But nothing seemed inevitable in 1983. The Soviets seemed resurgent. They had invaded Afghanistan in 1979. In 1981, their Polish proxies declared martial law and banned the new Solidarity trade union. A pro-Soviet regime seized Nicaragua in 1979 and was backing Marxist rebels in El Salvador. The Soviets armed and funded tyrannical regimes globally, including Cuba, Libya, Iraq, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, among others.

In 1983, the United States was in recession, with unemployment, inflation, and high interest rates. Could rearmament be afforded? Could Reagan even be reelected? Wasn’t he a warmonger? He was undeterred:

I ask you to resist the attempts of those who would have you withhold your support for our efforts, this administration’s efforts, to keep America strong and free, while we negotiate real and verifiable reductions in the world’s nuclear arsenals and one day, with God’s help, their total elimination.

Reagan of course wanted peace and disarmament. But he knew a weak America could not pursue either. And he knew a strong America needed much more than weapons:

While America’s military strength is important, let me add here that I’ve always maintained that the struggle now going on for the world will never be decided by bombs or rockets, by

armies or military might. The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith.

Quoting **Whittaker Chambers**, Reagan said America and the West could prevail but “only provided that its faith in God and the freedom He enjoins is as great as communism’s faith in Man.”

Reagan’s faith and leadership were vindicated. The nuclear freeze failed. U.S. missiles were deployed. The economy surged. He was reelected. The Soviets negotiated. The Cold War ended. The Berlin Wall fell. The USSR collapsed. But also vindicated were evangelicals who applauded the American president 40 years ago this week. ✚

This article was originally published in the March 8 issue of WORLD Magazine.

Value and True Femininity

by Sarah Stewart

There has been a new addition to the New York City courthouse. In a place normally reserved for historic lawgivers is a semi-human figure meant to represent female empowerment and the “need” for abortion.

Created by **Shahzia Sikander**, the statue entitled “Now” represents something significant and tragic in contemporary culture.

Whether people realize it or not, a prevailing belief in modern culture is that being a woman is something to be overcome. In order to be empowered, women must become less feminine, culminating in the most unfeminine act possible, destroying one’s own child.

It is imperative to distinguish true femininity from today’s misunderstanding of femininity, which manifests as a superficial depiction of women’s hobbies and clothing choices or as a caricature of an overly submissive, diminished woman. True femininity is robust and beautiful; it is living out the virtues as women for the glory of God and, as a result, being a blessing to others, and yes, particularly one’s family.

The statues surrounding “Now” are depictions of historical lawgivers who impacted the development of western civilization. Not only is the “Now” statue not fully human, it is not an attempt to depict a real woman, except for a collar as a faint nod to the late Supreme Court Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsberg**. Apparently not one historical woman was judged worthy of being honored by Sikander.

The statue has some resemblance to women in its figure, but it is then changed and warped into something nonhuman and nonfemale. Its

hair forms horns and the arms become tentacles. The face is void and harsh. The statue clearly plays on Early Renaissance painter **Sandro Botticelli’s** *The Birth of Venus* in which the deity rises from a clamshell, but whereas *Venus* is the epitome of the feminine form, this one is deliberately smoothed over. It is a depiction of a neutered woman, a woman who must lose and transcend her femininity in order to be empowered.

Unfortunately, this reflects the way many women feel. Their femininity is a handicap to the achievements they view as most significant. Motherhood, in particular, is seen as a setback that must be delayed as long as possible. The hands of the statue are notably tentacles as well. They are unable to serve, to reach out to help others, or to lovingly hold a child. The face is intentionally untender. Sikander titled the statue “Now” in response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

The statue represents two great deceptions foisted upon women in modern society. To be empowered, women must intentionally diminish their femininity and to succeed in life necessitates delaying motherhood and, if necessary, sacrificing one’s own child. Far from empowering, this message treats femininity as inherently lesser than masculinity; it is a worldview that can never affirm women as women.

Fortunately for women, while this view prevails in modern society, it is not the only way to see femininity. The Christian faith offers a far better alternative for women. Women have value not by being



New York's golden-horned female statue titled “NOW” by Pakistani-born artist Shahzia Sikander. (Photo: Ben Shapiro/YouTube)

less feminine; rather, womanhood is essential to the way they function in the world, and it is good to be a woman.

Genesis 1:27 states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Women are not made in the image of God despite being female, rather both sexes uniquely live out the gift of being God’s image bearers as gendered persons, and it is part of the creation that God affirmed as “very good.” Both genders fulfill necessary functions for the

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