Ya Gotta Stand for Something

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(Photos: Flynt/Dreamstime)

Ya gotta stand for something, or you'll fall for anything, the title of an Aaron Tippin song, naturally was quoted in David French's cool and fun piece in National Review, "Post-Christian America: Gullible, Intolerant, and Superstitious," where he argues that the decline of religion is replaced not by reason but by superstition.

 "Post-Christian America: Gullible, Intolerant, and Superstitious" is the kind of piece in which beleaguered doers of good can find solace, the one's whose basic, old time values, and humble and sacrificial ways have them reliably and constantly villified as bigots, and the cause of problems. The piece suffers a smidge from the cheapness and easiness of "us-and-them" writing. Its DNA has a taste of "embattled." But still it is a good and helpful piece. In fact the troops do need a little shoring up now and then, giving the salt of the earth a moment to feel proud for choosing good, honest, faithful ways of life, and for their efforts every day to translate their blessedness into lives that help others.

French assembles sound and important research in the article, introducing for example information from a New York Times piece showing that "America's less religious citizens are far more likely to believe in things such as ghosts and UFOs than people who attend church." Or Clay Routledge's emerging body of research that supports the thesis that "interests in nontraditional supernatural and paranormal phenomena are driven by the same cognitive processes and motives that inspire religion."

French's support for the value and importance of traditional religious belief is not a cipher for simple political conservatism. In fact a primary target of French's critique is the alt-right. He observes that "the

battle between social-justice warriors and their right-wing counterparts — the emerging class of godless, angry populists — [shows that] when you remove from your moral code any obligation to love your enemies, politics hardly improves. " Ross Douthat's [powerful account](#) confirms that the political consequences of post-Christian conservatism is not a space of greater reason. "It turns out that when men and women shed their faith, they don't necessarily get more liberal, but they do get more tribal and vicious."

The article concludes with an eloquent reiteration of a frequent, but always needed post French-Enlightenment report: "Human beings are hard-wired to search for meaning and purpose." And with that French rightly asks "will our nation and culture continue to value and respect the faith that grants hope of redemption, patience through present suffering, and a means to discern between good and evil? Or will it continue to shun the way, the truth, and the life in favor of a grab-bag of ghosts, UFOs, and wishful thoughts? The choice isn't between reason and religion. It's all too often between religion and superstition. Post-Christian America will be a less rational place."

This plaintiff cry, like the many others of its ilk provide a valuable reminder of the vital inherent value established and traditional religion plays for civil society, and for healthy and progressive culture. The problem with this article and the many others like it however, is the absence of strained concern, of a pained quest for solutions, and for self-accountability in the face of religious decline.

The far-reaching and precipitous plummet of religious identification and participation in present Western culture should call strong thinkers to seek answers. How have we come to this? The problem is not, never has been, nor will it ever be in the curious brews invented by superstitious people in their natural and proper quest for meaning in their lives. The problem of religious decline must always be placed at the feet of the institutions and believers entrusted with the clear revelations God provides, the simple but profound metaphysical, ethical, and relational truths that allow the advance of humane and compassionate living and culture.

Religion, for all its goodness, is failing in our time for a good many reasons. Religion is not "bad," evil, or corrupt, anymore than any and all of the core, important and fine institutions around which our lives are organized. It is not (especially) bad, but it is failing, which should make this a time of reflection (for believers), not a time of complaint, defensiveness, nor finger-pointing.

Religions (for all the advance of interfaith sentiments) remains in uncooperative and non-collaborative silos. Nothing fro even the finest religions will speak to the visions and aspirations of young people so long as the major religions remain unrepentantly in such a state. If this cannot be seriously addressed and fixed, we will perpetuate current trends toward great trouble.

Moral, ethical, and metaphysical realties are entering radically new, and entirely unanticipated horizons with the advance of science and technology. I am not finding sophisticated religious responses nor voice that is keeping abreast with the remarkable current tsunami of science and tech advances, and how these impact our very most basic ways of being human. Again without taking up this vital responsibility, there is no use complaining. Religion will just keep failing, and failing in ever greater and more irretrievable ways.