

testing

Chapter 1

Mars Hill Charge: Total Sanctity

I – Things are Bad

Charges are supposed to be upbeat and encouraging, talking about the wonderful world ahead of you, but I won't lie: things are bad. I don't mean that things are bad in a general, since-the-fall-of-Adam way. I mean that right now, in this country, the prospects for your generation look pretty grim. Your nation and your culture are dying. And since I'm persuaded that the illness is beyond recovery I won't be giving a charge entitled "Go Save America Before its Too Late." Your parents' generation needed to hear that speech. For you, the "Too Late" is at your very gates. As I said, things are bad; things are really, really bad.

In many ways, you are born to the nicest generation living in the nicest nation ever. Your parents and their peers have managed to amass more material wealth by several orders of magnitude than any other generation in history. This enables you to enjoy the most comfortable quality of life with the most toys, the most sex, the most doughnuts, and the most computer screens. You live in a time of rapidly increasing technological innovation so that—within seconds—you can look up 9,263,552,890 pic-

tures of cats from anywhere in the world, right here on your phone, while I'm talking. You also live in the most powerful country—both in the world today and throughout all of history. We are so powerful that we can turn the entire surface of every nation that opposes us into a uniform slag simultaneously. So don't get me wrong: there are many things to look forward to.

In many other ways, however, you are entering a time of barbarism. Year by year, religious liberty in this country slips. And more ominous than that we are less and less aware that religious liberty is slipping but shouldn't be. You will live not only in a generation that radically disagrees with you but also in a generation that cannot disagree rationally without resorting to emotion, violence, and legislation. *And it will see nothing wrong with this.*

In 1948, Richard Weaver published *Ideas Have Consequences* which begins with the wonderful line: "This is another book about the dissolution of the west."¹ In that book he predicts the way that mindless media will deafen our ability to think. What would he say about the conversations in YouTube comment threads? In 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre published *After Virtue*, in which he documents the total collapse of moral philosophy in the twentieth century.² What would he say about the banality of today's New Atheists? In 1985, Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, in which he warns that omnipresent television will silence all rational discourse.³ What would he say about omnipresent pornography? And these problems are not limited to the non-Christian world. In 1994, Mark Noll (himself an evangelical) published *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, which begins with another wonderful line: "The scandal of the

1. Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1.

2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), <http://books.google.com/books?id=7bLuAAAAMAAJ>.

3. ???

evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”⁴ What would he say about the jejune emotionalism of the last twenty years.

I will give you one example from my own experience, an excerpt from a student’s final paper at UK, chosen almost at random:

Piety or piousness is complex ideal....Another thing that makes piety too complicated is a person ability or lack of to properly define what is good, what is right, or what the gods love. Piety conflicts with itself in most situations. Piety can’t be held to a single religion. An example of this is what is good or right to Christianity is not the same as what is good or right to Judaism. In ancient times to do what one god love would probably conflict with what another god loves....Any circumstance you can try and put together to understand piety can be disproven by taking the same circumstance and change one or two things like the people in it.

Did you catch that? Never mind the inability to construct grammatical English sentences. There is no truth about what is good and right because people disagree. As a teacher at the University, I would estimate that this inference undergirds the practical worldview of half my students. As I said, things are bad. Things are really, really bad.

II – Stars in the Blackness

So what kind of charge am I giving anyway? As bad as things are today, they are not quite so bad as when Our Lord first invited a few fishermen to follow him. As St. John puts it in the beginning of his gospel:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There is hope even in the blackest night, not that the night would all just go away, or that the darkness itself would inch a little closer to gray, but that the Light Himself still shines in the midst of it, drawing all men to himself.

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The disciples of the Light are likewise called to shine in the midst of the blackness.

As St. Paul says in the second chapter of Philippians:

Be blameless and innocent, children of God without spot in the midst of a twisted and perverse generation, among whom you shine like stars in the cosmos.

It sounds wonderful but it requires being “blameless and innocent,” not having even a spot of sin—it requires complete holiness, total sanctity, absolute surrender. Going on a missions trip isn’t going to cut it. Writing a check to a charity isn’t going to cut it. Even chipping in your two cents to those YouTube conversations isn’t going to cut it. You can participate in the shining, transfigured face of Jesus Christ only by a total life transformation.

Peter Kreeft puts it this way in his essay, “How to Win the Culture War”:

Can you imagine what twelve more Mother Teresas would do for the world? Can you imagine what would happen if just twelve readers of this article offered Christ 100% of their hearts and held back nothing, absolutely nothing? No, you can’t imagine it, any more than anyone could imagine how twelve nice Jewish boys could conquer the Roman Empire. You can’t imagine it, but you can do it.⁵

Any of you can do it. God’s divine power has given us “all things necessary for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). The only thing that stands in your way is a certain hedginess in your will, a vague, wavering indecision that keeps you from going all in, a yielding to the many distractions that dilute your love of Jesus.

So here is the really, really bad situation: You will wake up tomorrow morning and your pillow will say, “come follow me.” You will turn on your phone and those cats will say, “come follow me.” You will go out with your friends and that pretty girl will say, “come follow me.” You will go to college and a profitable career will say, “come

5. [<http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/how-to-win.htm>][]

follow me." Your conscience will bother you and volunteer work will say, "come follow me." The meaningless of all this will gnaw at your bones and some deeper spiritual calling will say, "come follow me." But behind and before all these, my beloved Jesus stands right now looking at you silently with those brown eyes that burn like a flame of fire. He is here in the room right now and those eyes say with their thick silence, "come follow me."

Will you?