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## The Masculinist #14: An Antifragile Church

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To: "Aaron M. Renn" <arenn@urbanophile.com>

Welcome back to the Masculinist, the monthly newsletter on the intersection of Christianity and masculinity.

Is this newsletter resonating with you or stimulating your thinking? Then I need your help. To justify the investment of time in this, and the risk I'm taking on by writing some of this stuff, I need to see my subscriber base growing. So although some of this might be too hot to handle for some, please step out yourself and pass it along to those you think could benefit, especially Christian pastors and lay leaders, because I need your help to make this a success.

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There are some books with profound implications that are widely known, read, and discussed in the church. One of them is Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, which is as good and important as its reputation. But there are other books with similarly profound implications for the church that are all but off the radar. I alternate issues of the Masculinist between hard hitting cultural commentary and practical positive ideas for helping to become a better man. Today one of the latter, with a focus on your reading list. And in particular, an examination of the overlooked works of Nassim Nicholas Taleb.

### Taleb vs. the Nobel Laureate

In 2002, future Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and future Obama OMB chief Peter Orszag wrote a [paper](#) examining the risks facing government sponsored mortgage guarantors Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. They wrote, "The paper concludes that the probability of default by the GSEs [Fannie and Freddie] is extremely small... To be sure, it is difficult to analyze extremely low-probability events, such as the one embodied in the stress test. Even if the analysis is off by an order of magnitude, however, the expected cost to the government is still very modest."

Nassim Taleb, an options trader, took a look at Fannie and Freddie for himself and concluded that not only could they go bankrupt, at some point they almost certainly would go bankrupt. He wrote in his 2007 book *The Black Swan*, "The government-sponsored institution Fanny Mae, when I look at their risks, seems to be sitting on a barrel of dynamite, vulnerable to the slightest hiccup. But not to worry: their large staff of scientists deemed these events 'unlikely.'"

Shortly thereafter, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac went bust and were put into federal receivership in 2008 in the wake of the financial crash that occurred almost immediately after the publication of Taleb's book. This impeccable timing turned the book into a major bestseller, moving around three million copies.

With Taleb successfully predicting things like the Fannie Mae bankruptcy, and earning millions for himself as a trader going back to the 1980s, he has a track record that compels paying attention to what he has to say. So let's do that.

Taleb has written four books to date in a series he now dubs the "Incerto." They are: *Fooled by Randomness*, *The Black Swan*, *Antifragile*, and a book of aphorisms called *The Bed of Procrustes*.

*The Black Swan* is his most famous but least important book to read today. His aphorisms you can take or leave. But everyone should read and wrestle with the ideas contained *Fooled by Randomness* and *Antifragile*. Now Taleb is not perfect. He's of Greek Orthodox background but does not appear to be a serious believer. He's arrogant and proud of it. He's prone to throwing around labels like "idiot" on Twitter without real knowledge of the person he's insulting, and does not appear to apologize or backtrack when he's in the wrong.

Nevertheless, the ideas put forth by Taleb are extremely profound. Their core is also very rigorous. Taleb has a math PhD and published many of the ideas contained in *The Black Swan* in a subsequent series of 14 papers that appeared in peer-reviewed journals. Yes, he's an amateur philosopher, but he's much more than that.

His ideas upend many of our modern conceits, and are extremely favorable to Christianity. So it's surprising that

Christians don't seem to have paid much attention to his work. Here are the results from some Google searches I ran on his name:

- Christianity Today: [5 hits](#)
- The Gospel Coalition: [3 hits](#)
- First Things: [0 hits](#)
- Mere Orthodoxy: [0 hits](#)

The only place I found any significant number of articles mentioning him is on mega massive blogging platform Patheos, with [197 hits](#).

To encourage you to read and think about Taleb for yourself, I will share some of his key concepts and how they apply to the church.

## Randomness

According to Taleb, in effect the greatest single factor driving success or failure is random chance. People who are very successful may be smart, hard working, etc., but the distinguishing characteristic of their outsized success is luck. He uses the book *The Millionaire Next Door* as an example of the genre of false explanations for how rich people got rich. When you look at successful people and try to extrapolate lessons from them, you fall prey to survivorship bias. The author of that book was only looking at millionaires. He didn't see all the people who did the same things as those millionaires but who ended up much less rich or even dead broke. By definition the failures were excluded from his sample. The larger your population size, the bigger the risk falling prey to survivorship bias. In a huge country like the US, even random chance will produce many millionaires. As Taleb puts it:

That all millionaires were persistent, hardworking people does not make persistent hard workers become millionaires: Plenty of unsuccessful entrepreneurs were persistent, hardworking people. In a textbook case of naive empiricism, the author also looked for traits these millionaires had in common and figured out that they shared a taste for risk taking. Clearly risk taking is necessary for large success—but it is also necessary for failure. Had the author done the same study on bankrupt citizens he would certainly have found a predilection for risk taking.

It's easy for me to see that my own success, for example, is a primarily a product of random chance. I'm very intelligent, but that intelligence is innate. I didn't do anything to produce it. I just won the genetic lottery. Similarly, while my upbringing could have been better, on the whole it was pretty good. But I did nothing to select the home, community, or church environment I was raised in. That was also random from my perspective.

Just consider my job at a Senior Fellow in a national think tank. Here's how I got it. Many years ago I wrote an article that mentioned Joel Kotkin. He found it and sent me a note asking me if I'd like to contribute to his site New Geography. I said yes and wrote a few dozen articles for him, for free. Some years after that, he sent an email introduction to Brian Anderson, editor of City Journal magazine (published by my think tank). I wrote freelance articles for City Journal on Chicago, Washington, and Rhode Island that did very well for them. The latter article especially impressed the president of the institute, who decided to hire me full time. But I wouldn't have written about Rhode Island at all if I hadn't lived there briefly, the result of again basically random chance. But for a whole slew of random coincidences, I would never have gotten this job. Imagine if a Google Alert to Joel about my article ended up in his spam folder. I could have just as easily have been ignominiously flushed out of the urban commentator business entirely with little to show for it.

Similarly, I met my wife in a church service at a church I ultimately decided not to attend. A mutual friend introduced us during one of the 3-4 times I visited there. I decided to be interested in her, but the fact that she came into my field of vision was random.

Over time, randomness tends to even things out. This is particularly true of people who achieved their success by taking on hidden risks. Many traders hit on strategies that make them millions for a while. But eventually the roulette wheel hits on those risks, and they blow up completely. (But see below on "skin in the game").

## Black Swan Events

Black swans are rare events that have a dominant impact on the average expected outcome. Black swans are impossible to predict in advance, but seem obvious and inevitable in retrospect. An example of a black swan event is the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York City.

Most of our statistical analysis is predicted on results following a normal bell curve distribution. But as it happens, normal distributions only apply to a limited subset of things.

Taleb labels things that follow a normal distribution “mediocristan.” An example is human height. Take 100 random people and measure their heights. The results will follow a normal distribution. Even if it happens that someone who is nine feet tall gets selected as one of the 100, he won’t alter the average height all that much.

Things that do not follow a normal distribution, but instead have “fat tails” he labels “extremistan.” This is the land of the black swan. For example, think about net worth. Take 100 random people and measure their net worth. The results might look like a bell curve. But now imagine that one of your 100 people is Jeff Bezos of Amazon.com. Unlike the nine foot tall guy, he alone will radically change the average wealth of the group.

In places where extremistan rules apply, you can’t measure risk with tools like standard deviation. Black swans like Bezos are in effect the only things that matter. And by definition they can’t be predicted. Because of this, if you are exposed to black swan risks, you are in danger of being wiped out at any time by random events.

Add randomness and black swans together and we get a world governed by chance, where the outcomes are heavily driven by a few extreme outlier events that we can’t predict.

The dominance of randomness in determining outcomes is something completely at odds with our own high view of human agency, and control over our own lives. It is very difficult for humans to understand and apply because it is so difficult to accept. It is contrary to our psychological natures. As Taleb puts it:

The human mind suffers from three ailments as it comes into contact with history, what I call the triplet of opacity. They are: the illusion of understanding, or how everyone thinks he knows what is going on in a world that is more complicated (or random) than they realize; the retrospective distortion, or how we can assess matters only after the fact, as if they were in a rearview mirror (history seems clearer and more organized in history books than in empirical reality); and the overvaluation of factual information and the handicap of authoritative and learned people, particularly when they create categories—when they “Platonify.”

How could this possibly be favorable to Christianity, you might ask? It’s very simple. Let’s just do two simple vocabulary substitutions:

- Randomness = the sovereignty of God
- Black Swans = room for God to show up, in ways we can’t even imagine

The skeptic, of course, is free to reject God in this formulation. But his reality is then that of randomness and black swans, not the illusion of human sovereignty and agency in most cases. Given a choice between sovereign self-control over our life outcomes or trusting in God, it’s easy to see why many people will choose the former. But if the real alternative is between random chance and trusting in God, the latter looks much more appealing. Taleb de facto argues that the second choice is the one that actually faces us. The first is an illusion when taken too far.

## The Lindy Effect

How then do we live in a world governed far more by chance and black swans than we ever thought possible? One heuristic is what Taleb dubs “[The Lindy Effect](#).” The Lindy is a diner on Broadway in New York. It used to be a hangout for people in the theater industry, who observed that if a play had been running for 100 days, it was likely to run at least 100 more, but if it had been running for 200 days, it was likely to keep running for at least 200 more. In other words, the longer something has been around, the more likely it is to stay around.

This is an example of where Taleb updated his thinking over time. He originally thought long-term survival was simply an artifact of chance, which it in part is. But when things have been around a long time, sometimes there’s a reason. To some extent those long-lived things must be black swan resistant. They’ve survived through multiple black swan events to still be around after hundreds or even thousands of years.

The Lindy Effect rule suggests that we should give long-lived practices the benefit of the doubt while being skeptical of the new. New things can give great results, but like many trading strategies that seem to print money, they can have hidden risks that will cause huge pain or even total loss when the right event hits.

Taleb uses the Lindy Effect to validate the worth of folk wisdom, noting:

If you hear advice from a grandmother or elders, odds are that it works at ninety percent. On the other hand, in part because of scientism and academic prostitution, in part because the world is hard, if you read anything by psychologists and behavioral scientists, odds are it works at less than ten percent, unless it is also what has been covered by the grandmother and the classics, in which case why would you need a nerd-psychologist?

The Lindy Effect is great news for Christianity, which has been around for a long time. (To be fair, this would also apply to the other older religions of the world). Taleb himself follows many Orthodox practices such as its fasting schedule, even though he doesn't seem to be an actual believer, for this very reason. Taleb falls a bit into the trap of the fundamentalists here in my view. The fundamentalists try to rationalize things like ancient Israelite kosher laws as somehow the best way to eat in an era with poor sanitation and no refrigeration. (The idea seems to be rationalizing God's apparently arbitrary commands in Leviticus as a form of advanced scientific knowledge transmission. I don't buy it. [Jacob Milgrom](#) and [Mary Douglas](#) have better explanations). Taleb similarly talks about how fasting is good for your health. I'm not sure that's the main reason for fasting even though I do practice Intermittent Fasting myself, but clearly there are reasons for these ancient Christian practices. Just because those reasons are opaque to us doesn't mean they aren't there and aren't important.

Modern Christians also need to heed an important lesson here. We are often very eager to drop any historic Christian belief or practice that we think we can justify without compromising "essential" beliefs in order to accommodate contemporary culture. Vatican II is a good example. As Taleb notes:

Four decades ago, the Catholic church translated the services and liturgies from Latin to the local vernaculars; one may wonder if this caused a drop in religious beliefs. Suddenly religion subjected itself to being judged by intellectual and scientific, without the aesthetic, standards. The Greek Orthodox church made the lucky mistake, upon translating some of its prayers from Church Greek into the Semitic-based vernacular spoken by the Grecosyrians of the Antioch region (southern Turkey and northern Syria), of choosing classical Arabic, an entirely dead language.

The odds that changing the very longstanding Western liturgy at Vatican II would be a net gain were extremely long.

The church needs to give very heavy consideration to historic practices and teachings, far more than Protestants are prone to do. This is what I call the "Catholicity Principle," using the word catholic in the origin Greek sense of "according to the whole." The two parts of the Catholicity Principle:

- a) What does the whole of scripture say on a topic?
- b) How has the church as a whole interpreted or taught on the matter over the whole of church history?

Obviously if you are Catholic or Orthodox, this is done for you. But Protestants never seem to apply it. We've abandoned so many doctrines we don't even remember abandoning most of them. It seems likely we will abandon many more in the future. October 31st is the 500th anniversary of Luther posting his 95 Theses. It doesn't seem very likely to me that folks like Luther and Calvin would be very impressed with the Protestant church today, to say nothing of what folks like Aquinas, Augustine or Chrysostom would say.

## Antifragility

If life is randomness and unpredictable extreme events, how else do we respond to that? You want to be robust as possible to black swan events. That is, you want to be able to survive extreme events. The goal is not to try to predict them, which you can't do, but to reduce your risk exposures.

One way to do this is through redundancy. Taleb points out that redundancy is a common feature of designs in nature. We have two of many critical organs such as kidneys, for example. In today's world we tend to over-optimize for efficiency to juice gains, but at the cost of making us fragile to random events and black swans. As he puts it:

An economist would find it inefficient to maintain two lungs and two kidneys: consider the costs involved in transporting these heavy items across the savannah. Such optimization would, eventually, kill you, after the first accident, the first "outlier." Also, consider that if we gave Mother Nature to economists, it would dispense with individual kidneys: since we do not need them all the time, it would be more "efficient" if we sold ours and used a central kidney on a time-share basis. You could also lend your eyes at night since you do not need them to dream.

Because of the hyper-optimized and interconnected nature of contemporary global world, it is highly fragile to things going wrong.

You also don't want to be too big, because larger entities are more fragile than smaller ones (cf: the dinosaurs). And because of randomness and black swans, you are better off with many small bets than a few large ones.

Taleb's book *Antifragile* goes beyond this notion of robustness. He talks about things that are not just not fragile, but antifragile. Antifragile things actually gain from randomness, disorder, and stress. The early church is a good example of an antifragile entity. It grew, and grew stronger, from persecution. Another example is physical strength. When we stress our bodies by lifting weights, we get stronger. By contrast, when we fail to stress ourselves we become weaker and less healthy.

Things become antifragile when there is limited downside but very high or unlimited upside to random events. Taleb traded options, which have this characteristic. Your maximum loss on an option is what you pay for it, but the upside is unlimited. The higher the volatility of the markets, the more you can make. (This asymmetry is theoretically priced into what you pay for the option, but Taleb seems to have realized that the prices often underestimated the probability and effect of black swans).

An example of someone who, intentionally or not, took advantage of these principles is Tim Keller of NYC's Redeemer Presbyterian Church. He built Redeemer into a multi-site megachurch, but on his retirement split his locations into independent churches. This is reducing size and increasing redundancy. He's also focused on launching lots of new, independent churches, many of them in denominations other than his own. With randomness (sovereignty of God) determining a great deal of success in these endeavors, the more times you swing the bat the more chances you have to succeed.

## Skin in the Game

*Skin in the Game* is the title of Taleb's forthcoming book and it is sure to be a must read based on advance excerpts he's published. He traces many of the ills of our society to a lack of skin in the game by our leadership class. Banks get into trouble? Bailouts. CEO of Wells Fargo presides over the creation of 2.5 million bogus accounts? Golden parachute. Etc. Consider America's political journalists, who thoroughly botched last year's presidential election. Not one of those clowns lost his job over this epic fiasco. Many of these screw ups actually got promoted or hired at more prestigious entities.

One of the analyses of our income inequality problem is that it's not as much caused by a lack of upward mobility from the bottom as by a lack of downward mobility at the top. As Gary Solon put it, "[Rather than] a poverty trap, there seems instead to be more stickiness at the other end: a 'wealth trap' if you will. There are probably more rags to riches cases than the other way around . . . there seems to be better safety nets for the offspring of the wealthy."

This is because the upper middle class and higher in America today have managed to insulate themselves from having skin in the game. Historically people in America didn't just rise upwards from the bottom, they fell downward from the top. That seems to be less true today for the elite.

Never take advice from someone who doesn't have skin the game. For those of you who've been subscribers since the early days of this newsletter, you know one of my guiding principles is skin the game. I only recommend things that I personally do or have done. (To get meta, the only reason I'm touting Taleb, for example, is because I'm personally working to apply Taleb, such as by embracing the skin in the game principle). If I'm going to tell people they should be willing to say things that will get them into trouble, I need to be saying things that could get me into trouble.

Skin in the game is another reason to favor small churches. Rightly or wrongly, virtually every big name pastor in America is seen as being rich or very financially secure. Once you have written books and gotten out on the speaking circuit, people are going to assume you've got a nice nest egg socked away. The problem is that rich people's bank account gives them a safety margin for action that ordinary people don't have, reducing their credibility. So it's easy for them to say X, Y, or Z. The pastor of a smaller church – the guy with four kids and a mortgage to pay who depends entirely on the tithes of his 100 person congregation for income – when that guy says to do something risky, and does it himself, he's got credibility.

One reason the Apostles (anti-fragile) had so much credibility is that they had literal skin in the game. Paul was a Jewish blueblood, a Roman citizen from birth, had the equivalent of a law degree from Harvard, and was clerking for "Supreme Court" justice Gamaliel. He threw all that away to endure beatings, shipwreck, imprisonment, etc. When

he's writing letters like Philippians or 2 Timothy from prison, you can believe the messages contained in them carried a lot of weight to those who received them. Paul was putting his money where his mouth was. And he had personal relationships with people that let them see that, as when he appealed to the Thessalonians by saying, "You know what kind of men we proved to be among you." (1 Thess 1:5, 2:1-12). I might even use this as a heuristic. If the members of a church can't personally vouch for the character of the lead pastor from first hand knowledge, that church is too big. This is another reason for smaller churches.

I extend the skin in the game concept to what I call "congruence," which Taleb discusses but doesn't name separately. Your life has to be congruent with the message you're sending. So I'm writing this newsletter on masculinity, I need to be living it out or I'm not credible. Paul was congruent.

Lack of congruence is one of the reasons Rod Dreher's "Benedict Option" can be rightly rejected. Why? Rod himself is not living a Benedict Option life, or he certainly doesn't give the impression he does. He did move to Louisiana, but this appeared to originally be prompted by family considerations. He routinely posts pictures from his trips to locations like France and Italy, along with the fabulous meals he and others eat. That's an odd image to give off for an alarmist who in effect claims the sky is falling. He talks about strategic partial retreat from the public square, but there's no evidence that he's retreated even an inch from any form of politics and the public square. In fact his entire livelihood is based on advocacy in the public square. Other than living in Louisiana, it's hard to think of what's he's doing to live a Benedict Option lifestyle himself, judging by his blog posts I regularly scan. Resulting credibility: low.

People who are congruent are folks like the New Monastics. Take Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Like Rod he's all-in on politics, but I've never heard him claim one should withdraw even partially from the public square. (Like many neo-anabaptist types, JWH has rabid left-wing politics. When I met him he mentioned the Koch Bros and ALEC almost every time he opened his mouth). He lives in historically black neighborhood in Durham where he lives in a commune called Rutba House, where they commit to having half of their residents be homeless, ex-offenders being released from prison, or similar folks. He attends a majority black church where he does not appear to play a leadership role. He continues to attend there and support them even though he admits he doesn't agree with their conservative stance on sexual morality. Whether you agree with him or not, when I visited him 3-5 years ago and looked at what they were doing, he appeared to be living a life very congruent with what he was teaching and had skin in the game. That commands respect.

In a "negative world" (Masc #13), I believe skin in the game and congruence are two essential features every Christian, and certainly every leader, will need to exhibit.

## The Intellectual Yet Idiot

One of the most important things that Taleb does, even if in ways I wouldn't always approve of, is to ruthlessly attack the "brand" of the Western elite. In a post of the same name, he famously labeled them "[Intellectual Yet Idiot](#)."

The IYI subscribes to The New Yorker. He never curses on twitter. He speaks of "equality of races" and "economic equality" but never went out drinking with a minority cab driver (again, no real skin in the game as the concept is foreign to the IYI). Those in the U.K. have been taken for a ride by Tony Blair. The modern IYI has attended more than one TEDx talks in person or watched more than two TED talks on Youtube. Not only did he vote for Hillary Monsanto-Malmaison because she seems electable and some such circular reasoning, but holds that anyone who doesn't do so is mentally ill.

The IYI has a copy of the first hardback edition of *The Black Swan* on his shelves, but mistakes absence of evidence for evidence of absence. He believes that GMOs are "science", that the "technology" is not different from conventional breeding as a result of his readiness to confuse science with scientism.

Typically, the IYI get the first order logic right, but not second-order (or higher) effects making him totally incompetent in complex domains. In the comfort of his suburban home with 2-car garage, he advocated the "removal" of Gadhafi because he was "a dictator", not realizing that removals have consequences (recall that he has no skin in the game and doesn't pay for results).

The IYI has been wrong, historically, on Stalinism, Maoism, GMOs, Iraq, Libya, Syria, lobotomies, urban planning, low carbohydrate diets, gym machines, behaviorism, transfats, freudianism, portfolio theory, linear regression, Gaussianism, Salafism, dynamic stochastic equilibrium modeling, housing projects, selfish gene, election forecasting models, Bernie Madoff (pre-blowup) and p-values. But he is convinced that his current position is right.

Keep in mind that as a think tank researcher, Taleb would probably classify me as an IYI. Believe me, I've been challenged by some of the things he's said on the topic and have tried to respond to them, such as by adopting a skin in the game principle for this newsletter.

When we think about the decline of Christianity in the face of modernism, and especially its abandonment by the elite, a big part of it is because of the prestige attached to the modern project. Charles Taylor pretty much makes this point. To be a modern is to be an adult who's outgrown the petty religious superstitions of our childish past and who can now walk on his own two feet facing the world as it is without illusions.

But the truth is, modernism and its elites aren't all that deserving of prestige except in limited areas, namely those deriving from hard sciences. If all of philosophy is footnotes to Plato, all of the prestige of modernism is derived from applied physics (engineering, chemistry, biology, astronomy, geology). But outside of these areas, we are not nearly as smart as we think we are and our track record is often poor. Just because we can build an iPhone (applied physics) doesn't mean we are right about anything else.

Taleb didn't just call a Nobel Prize winning economist an idiot – he proved it. We see similar evidences around us every day. As he says:

With psychology papers replicating less than 40%, dietary advice reversing after 30 years of fatphobia, macroeconomic analysis working worse than astrology, the appointment of Bernanke who was less than clueless of the risks, and pharmaceutical trials replicating at best only 1/3 of the time, people are perfectly entitled to rely on their own ancestral instinct and listen to their grandmothers (or Montaigne and such filtered classical knowledge) with a better track record than these policymaking goons.

Taleb is right about our elite, of which many people on this list including myself could be plausibly considered at least junior varsity members. Collectively, they just aren't that smart and are morally bankrupt. Their track record in the last couple decades has been atrocious as they've unleashed on disaster after another while failing to predict nearly every consequential event that happened (ISIS, Trump, etc), yet continuing to reap immense rewards. If not for tech advances (applied physics) bailing them out, image how bad things might have been. Taleb is smart to train fire on these guys, including on us at times.

The church could learn some things from Taleb on this. As long as the church's "neutral world" (Masc #13) leadership continues to accept the basic premise that the high prestige of modern elite culture is deserved, their product will never be attractive. Why buy déclassé Christianity when you can have high prestige modernism that the neutral world church itself makes clear is of very high value? The truth is that high prestige is not deserved, and they are heading for a major comeuppance. There's no reason to genuflect to its shibboleths.

This is just a sample of Talebian ideas. His books are entertaining to read if a tad long. They are filled with many thought-provoking observations and claims (at least some of which are backed up with rigorous mathematics). While the applications of his ideas aren't always clear, the implications are profound and should be considered by every Christian.

At a minimum, I strongly recommend *Fooled by Randomness* and *Antifragile*. And put *Skin in the Game* on your list of future books to read as well. In the meantime, I am attaching a document containing my bulletized notes I took from his books, which will give you a flavor of what's in store. As we transition from the neutral to the negative world, creating an "antifragile" faith is critical. Nassim Taleb is highly recommended reading, even if he himself is not yet Lindy approved.

## Other Critiques of Contemporary Culture

Continuing on with the theme that our elite is not worthy of its high prestige, I want to highlight some of the most penetrating and devastating cultural commentary done in recent years. As is often the case, this is coming from novels. I will give three novels that are again must reads in this regard. All three of them are by mainstream novelists, not Christian writers, are projected near-future histories, and are excellent to boot. They are:

- Michel Houellebecq's [Submission](#)
- Lionel Shriver's [The Mandibles](#)
- P.D. James' [The Children of Men](#)

Houellebecq is regarded as France's best working novelist, and his books are devastating indictments of the

bankruptcy of our culture. He's not a Christian, and as a result his works can be somewhat nihilistic. But they help with the important task of deprogramming our current-self-regard.

Unfortunately for the Christian reader, his books feature explicit sex. *Submission* is fortunately one where this is only a factor in a handful scenes, ones that are absolutely critical to the book and so not gratuitous. So I would not let that scare you off. *Submission* was controversial, being described as an anti-Islamic troll. But in fact Islam is not the focus of the book at all. We are.

*Submission* is an extremely powerful work and the most important of those I'm recommending. I could write an extensive treatment of it, but neo-reactionary reviewer Social Pathologist already has [an excellent writeup](#). He notes, "For the literate moron, this book is about the Islamic take over of France. For the Puritan, it's about the puerile expression of Sex. For the feminist it is about misogyny. But for the Christian reactionary, this book is deep. Really deep."

Shriver's *The Mandibles* is also a future history with the unfolding of the trends in our society continuing in a dissolving direction. The United States suffers a catastrophic collapse when the Chinese, Russians, and others spring a financial coup by replacing the dollar as the reserve currency with a new gold and commodities backed currency called the bancor. The Mexican-born president of the United States promptly repudiates the national debt, causing as a cascading spiral of craziness, which we witness through the lens of four generations of the Mandible family. This book skewers anyone and everyone – no sacred cows spared – with the exception of Christianity, which is curiously absent from the book. ("In God We Trusted" as it says on the cover).

James' *Children of Men* is the story of the world in the aftermath of the "Omega event", in which the entire human species becomes infertile, the world winding its way down towards humanity's extinction. This book was made into a Hollywood film, but the plot of that film is significantly different from the book.

In their own way all of these books make the same point: Christianity is dead in the West. And because Christianity is dead, the West soon will be too. Because these are all secular writers, that point is made much more powerfully than it would be coming from a preacher, even if only Houellebecq makes it explicit.

You might find these novels ludicrous. And maybe they are. But consider:





## Noteworthy

Cate Blanchett: [My moral compass is my vagina](#) – “The comment garnered a massive round of applause from the audience”

NYT: [Faux male feminists draw ire in Hollywood](#). The lede is about director Joss Wheldon. You may have noted that many “male feminists” in a variety of fields have been exposed as creeps and abusers. This is a straightforward application of the Law of Projection. If they are blathering on in public about feminism, there’s a good chance they’re compensating for something.

The Atlantic: [Why happy people cheat](#)

“Most descriptions of troubled marriages don’t seem to fit my situation,” Priya insists. “Colin and I have a wonderful relationship. Great kids, no financial stresses, careers we love, great friends. He is a phenom at work, f---ing handsome, attentive lover, fit, and generous to everyone, including my parents. My life is good.” Yet Priya is having an affair. “Not someone I would ever date—ever, ever, ever. He drives a truck and has tattoos. It’s so clichéd, it pains me to say it out loud. It could ruin everything I’ve built.”

Mona Chalabi: [I want my 2.3 bonus years](#)

If I could prolong my time as a young adult by, say, 2.3 years, here is a list of things I would like to do:

- Go to more parties. Preferably wild parties that I can think about, years later, at mild parties.
- Get fit (i.e., get at least one ab before I die). This, I’m told, is easier to achieve when you’re young.
- Have more romantic partners. Preferably ones with abs.
- Get a bit higher up the career ladder a bit earlier on. That would probably boost my earnings, giving me more financial security. I could use that money to go to more parties, get a membership to a fancy gym and maybe even meet a romantic partner on the ab machines.

Most men who date women don’t fantasize about what they would do if they had these bonus years, they simply get them. In two-thirds of heterosexual couples, the man is at least a year older than his partner. The average age difference is 2.3 years according to the Census Bureau.

NYT: [At any given time there are 110 million STD infections in the US](#).

NYT: [The Silicon Valley backlash against the women in tech movement](#).

## Coda

“I am most often irritated by those who attack the bishop but somehow fall for the securities analyst—those who exercise their skepticism against religion but not against economists, social scientists, and phony statisticians.” – Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan*

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