Weekend Review

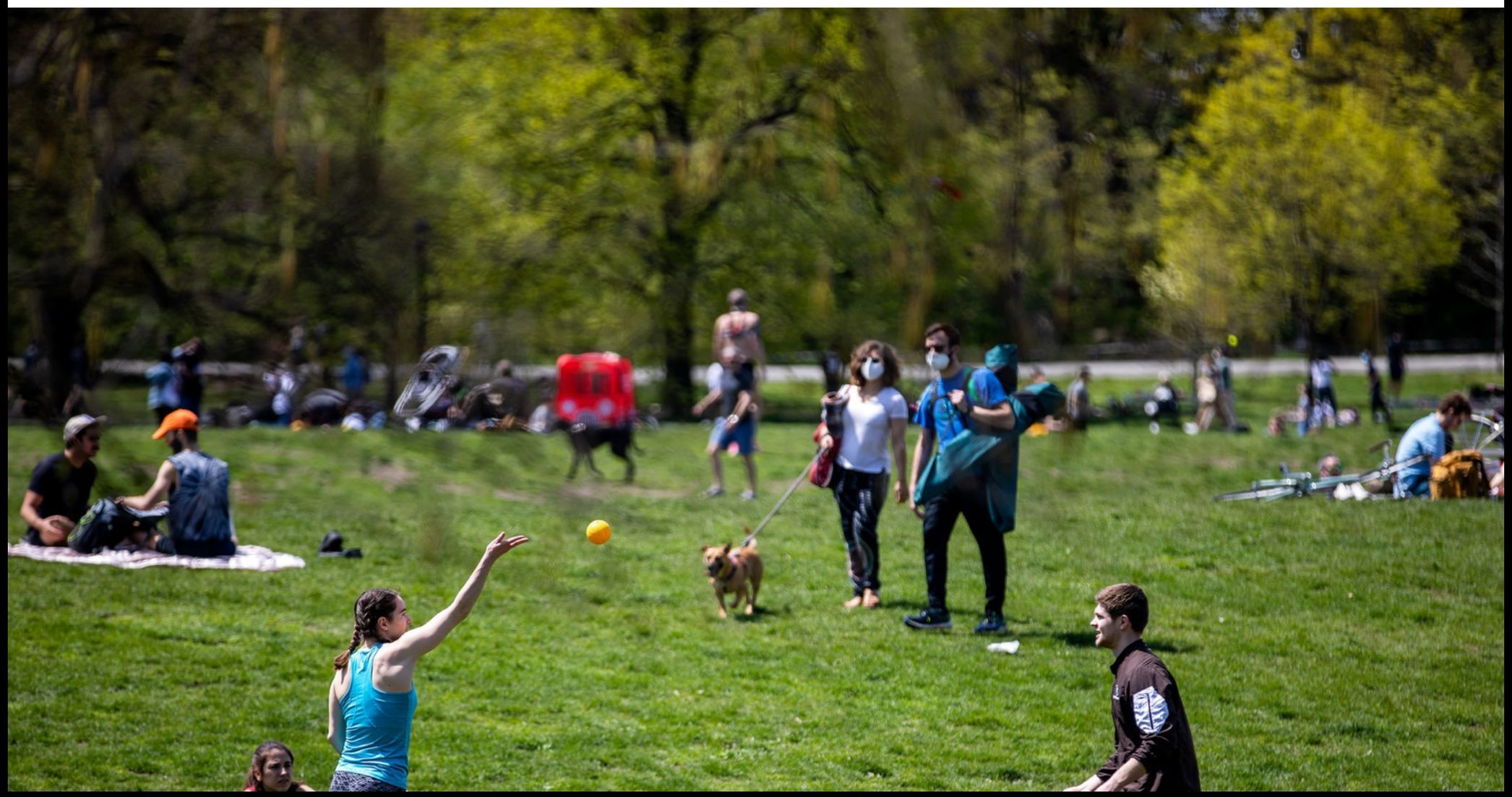
Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

1 PETER 3:15

Masks Become a Flash Point in the Virus Culture Wars

As people resume going out in public in the middle of a pandemic, to wear or not to wear a face mask has become a personal statement and sometimes a political one.



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CBS NEWS

NEWS CORONAVIRUS SHOWS LIVE

Lost your job? Consider becoming a "contact tracer"

BY MEGAN CERULLO
MAY 8, 2020 / 5:38 PM / MONEYWATCH

As U.S. unemployment soars to historic levels, the hottest job of the year could be a lifesaver: contact tracing. Containing the coronavirus as the economy gradually reopens has created an urgent need for hundreds of thousands of people trained to identify infected individuals and track down anyone and everyone they could have exposed to the virus.

In the absence of a federal plan, some city and state health departments are already seeking to fill thousands of these positions. Experts estimate that between 100,000 and 300,000 contact tracers – who can earn up to $65,000 per year – will be needed nationwide based on state populations and projected COVID-19 infection rates.

"I do think that it's a fantastic job for people who have been furloughed, and it's something that people can be trained to do," said Roger Shapiro, a professor of medicine at the Harvard School of Public Health. "It takes some training, but it's not impossible to train almost anybody with reasonable social skills, who can work off a script, begin a conversation with people, convey a few key messages and collect data," he said.

Georgia Killing Puts Spotlight on a Police Force's Troubled History

The shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery has renewed criticism of the police agency that released the two suspects. They were charged by the state months later.

Are we decadent?

The West is highly prosperous—and a sense of futility pervades it all

by Marvin Olasky

Post Date: May 07, 2020 - **Issue Date:** May 23, 202

Thomas Sowell two decades ago wrote about "the vision of the anointed," those who would lead us to becoming free, totally liberated people (maybe today we'd call it "the vision of the woke") versus the "constrained vision," the belief that we must operate within a certain human nature. Are those still in conflict? Absolutely those are in conflict, but back then progressives thought of how government and technology could transform society. "Wokeness" is more inward turning, trying to find your true identity, refashioning yourself endlessly, often across virtual spaces. New frontier liberalism also rejected limits on human nature in certain ways, but it was ambitious and outward looking. Now we have technological innovation in communication and simulation: In certain ways it's narcissistic and inward looking.

And how are Christians doing? You note that religious people tend to have more children, but what of the pull of nonbelief? You note "the tendency towards attrition among the children of the devout." Are you saying religious folks have more children, but liberal atheists are in a position to grab them? That's a crude but somewhat accurate way of putting it, yes.

Well, I'm a journalist so of course it's crude. It's less that the children of the devout all become Richard Dawkins–reading militant God-deniers than that they drift into the realm of Oprah Winfrey and astrology instead of continuing in Christian faith. To me, one of the striking things of watching religious culture among people younger than myself is the nonsecularism of it. When I was a teenager or in college, if people had told me their astrological sign, I would have laughed at them and said, *Are you from the '70s?* Now, my millennial acquaintances and friends say something to me like, *Sorry I'm so disorganized, it's because I'm a Virgo.*

And they're serious in saying that? That's the question. I think it's neither perfectly serious nor perfectly unserious. A middle zone of spiritual quasi-belief is incredibly powerful in American life right now. It's more the main alternative to Christianity than the strict scientific materialism of the Dawkins school.

You criticize our societal tendency to turn inward, but what good aspects does it have? Has electronic entertainment among teens replaced going out and causing trouble? Conservatives expected the crime rate, the teen pregnancy rate, the out of wedlock birth rate to keep going up. This continued disintegration hasn't happened over the last 20 years. That real stabilization is not a return to health but something that points to the possible sustainability of decadence: Things aren't getting better the way we hoped, but they also aren't collapsing. It's a real question of whether it's better to live in a world where teenagers are more likely to have sex, get pregnant, and drive drunk, or a world where they're less likely to do those things but they're more depressed, more likely to commit suicide, and less likely to form healthy relationships down the road.

That's the tradeoff we've made? A lot of people expected that rampant pornography would just lead to rape and sexual violence. Instead, it led inward: People used porn as a substitute for, I guess you could say, good sex and bad sex alike. And that stabilizes society. We don't have a million Jeffrey Dahmers and Ted Bundys running around, but society is stabilized in a way that leaves men especially unable to form healthy relationships with women, and dealing with erectile dysfunction at ridiculously young ages. It's not an ideal tradeoff, let's put it that way, for some of this stuff.

The last sentence of *The Decadent Society* is, "It shouldn't surprise anyone if decadence ends with people looking heavenward, toward God, toward the stars, or both. So down on your knees—and start working on that warp drive." We have fulfilled some portion of our destiny, whatever it may be as human beings, in so far as we have built a world-spanning civilization, the first one that there's ever been. I think of three broad scenarios going forward. One is a cyclical view: This is as far as we're meant to go, and we're destined to blow ourselves up, or just decline and start things over again. Another possibility is that this is just the beginning of some greater expansion into the vast universe that is out there. The third possibility is that having reached this moment there is—I'm not going to say the second coming, but some unexpected religious development. I find the cyclical view depressing. The optimistic view requires hope in either exploration or divine intervention, so I ended with both.

For lots of folks it's easier to work on a warp drive than to get down on our knees. That is true, but to the extent that many of my readers are secular and scientific-minded, I try in the book to say those two things may go together more fully than people tend to think right now.

THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

TED DANSON KRISTEN BELL

The Good Place

Everything is fine.

nytimes.com

The New York Times

PLAY T

NONFICTION

Ross Douthat Has a Vision of America. It's Grim.

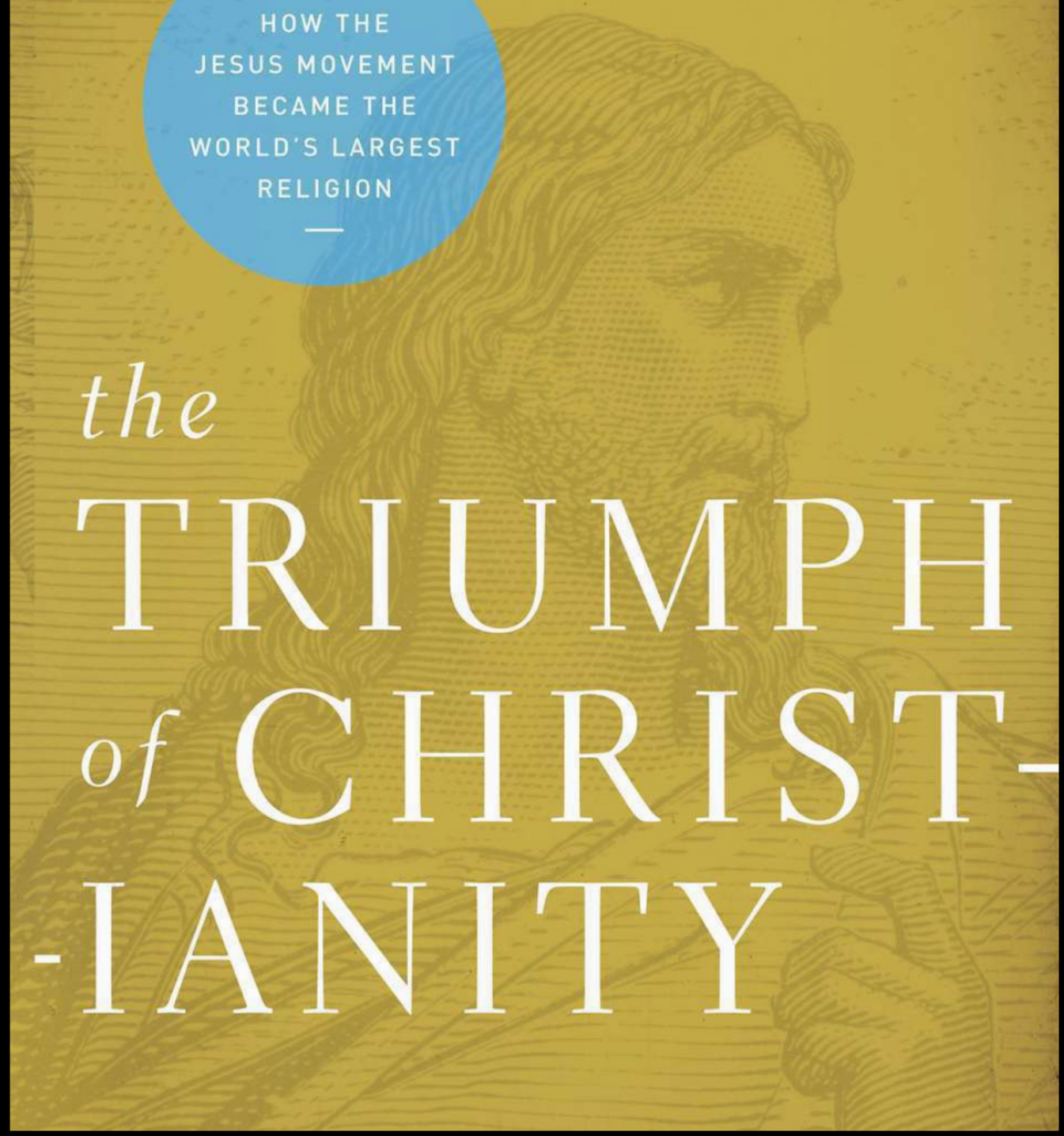
By this point even the most patient reader will have questions — and Douthat anticipates many of them. How can he say that ours is a static culture in the age of connectivity, which has accelerated change and turned ours into ever more "liquid societies"? An illusion. It has simply accelerated the circulation of the same tired cultural tropes, leaving us with wheels that turn ever faster in a ditch. What about the political radicalism and rage exacerbated by social media? Probably just "a kind of digital-age playacting in which young people dissatisfied with decadence pretend to be fascists and Marxists on the internet, re-enacting the 1930s and 1960s with fewer street fights and more memes." One chapter concludes: "It's possible that Western society is really leaning back in an easy chair, hooked up to a drip of something soothing, playing and replaying an ideological greatest-hits tape from its wild and crazy youth, all riled up in its own imagination and yet, in reality, comfortably numb."

Instead he prefers to contemplate the possibility of a Western renaissance, brought about by … Africa. (*Surprise!*) Just as conservative Catholics fought nobly against the French Revolution, so sub-Saharan Africa has resisted the cultural imperialism of the now decadent West. Which means that, given Africa's high birthrates, continued emigration and increasing rates of conversion to conservative Christianity, it may be poised to rejuvenate the countries that once colonized it, both religiously and demographically. Douthat invites us to "imagine a Eurafrica in which black Christians fill the Gothic churches of the Old Continent — something that happens already if you look in the right Parisian neighborhood — and then gain enough power and influence to build new ones, in new-old styles, in both Nantes and Nairobi."

With this intriguing theological-political idea the book draws to a more predictable close. In the final chapter there is a lot about the need for hope and building a "ladder to the stars," both figuratively and literally. But also the thought that it may take a nudge from divine providence to restore our confidence and ability to reach infinity and beyond. In which case, Ross Douthat playfully concludes, "down on your knees — and start working on that warp drive." *Houston, the Eagle has landed.*

RODNEY STARK

HOW THE JESUS MOVEMENT BECAME THE WORLD'S LARGEST RELIGION



the TRIUMPH *of* CHRIST-IANITY

Chapter Five

Christianity and Privilege

TRADITION HAS IT THAT CHRISTIANITY recruited most of its initial supporters from among the very poorest and most miserable groups in the ancient world. Since early times, many ascetic Christians have claimed that poverty was one of the chief virtues of the "primitive" church, and by the nineteenth century this view was ratified by the radical Left as well. Karl Marx's collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) put it thus: "The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome."[1] Working from this assumption, Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), the German editor of Marx's works, built the case that Jesus may have been one of the first socialists and that the early Christians briefly achieved true communism.[2]

Conclusion

KARL MARX WAS MERELY reflecting the conventional wisdom of the day when he wrote that "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature… the opium of the people."[84] But he might better have said that "religion often is the opium of the dissatisfied upper classes, the sigh of wealthy creatures depressed by materialism." Of course, given his relentless intellectual as well as personal materialism, Marx couldn't conceive of such a thing. Neither can far too many social scientists. Fortunately, most New Testament historians no longer believe that the early Christians were a motley crew of slaves and the downtrodden. Had that really been the case, the rise of Christianity would most certainly have required miracles.

IMAGO

MADE IN THE
IMAGE OF GOD

DEI

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1:16