



OPPORTUNITY IN DISTRESSING ATTIRE

JAMES KEARNEY

I love football, American football, especially professional football. This year, as a Seattleite, I was particularly excited because my home team, the Seattle Seahawks, made it all the way to the Super Bowl. Not only that, but they won in a game that, for non-Seahawks fans, was described as dull. Dull only because the Hawks dominated the game. As a fan, I love that kind of dull. My wife and I had friends over to watch and celebrate, friends who had young children. Then came the halftime show. My friends, who had more sense than I, took their children to outside to play and missed the halftime show altogether.



The lyrics to the songs were in Spanish (keeping most from understanding what was being said). Yet, the following morning, I was shocked after reading the lyrics in English, which were not only raunchy but also pornographic. The Super Bowl is one of America's most popular family nights of television. Last week's game attracted more than 100 million viewers worldwide. Why would the NFL give this platform to such an evil performance? Or, more to the point, why would I mention this example of the United States' steep decline in public morality for the readers of Tikkun and the Messianic community?

The decline of this American icon is a part of the larger decline of morality in American public institutions. This decline, in large part, comes from the breakup of Christendom in the West. In other words, the Ecclesia's faith is no longer in alignment with our public institutions. I define Christendom as the partnership between the Church and the State that began officially under the Roman emperor Constantine with the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, legalizing Christianity in the Roman Empire, with Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire under Theodosius in 380 CE. With the fall of Rome in Western Europe, the Roman Church shaped the ensuing political, cultural, and social order. This arrangement, Christendom, which was formal in much of Europe, conflated citizenship with the state and with citizenship in the kingdom of God. Churches were built, and members of the clergy were public institutions supported by public taxes.

Immigrants from Europe set up this partnership informally, but intentionally set up in the New World, especially in the United States. America's founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, were shaped by the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments. Christian prayer and Bible study were a part of our public schools. Our elected leaders would refer to Scripture in public proclamations, such as George Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation in 1789 or Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address. The Ten Commandments (Ten Utterances) were inscribed in most judicial buildings.

Halftime acts like Bad Bunny's would have been canceled as inappropriate for American television because of TV rating boards, which included rules for no excessive violence, no sexual content, respect for religion, and family structure. Americans accepted these codes of conduct as protecting our national values and identity. I'm old enough to remember church and synagogue membership as a normal part of being a respected citizen.

So what happened? One way to diagnose our decline is to observe that our modern worldview was born in the Age of Enlightenment, freed the West from the domination of the late-medieval Roman Catholic Church, and contained the forces that eventually broke up ancient Christendom. These forces, such as the rights of the individual, or that truth is discovered by reason, not received by tradition,

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YOU SHALL
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KEEP THE
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HOLY

HONOR YOUR
FATHER &
MOTHER

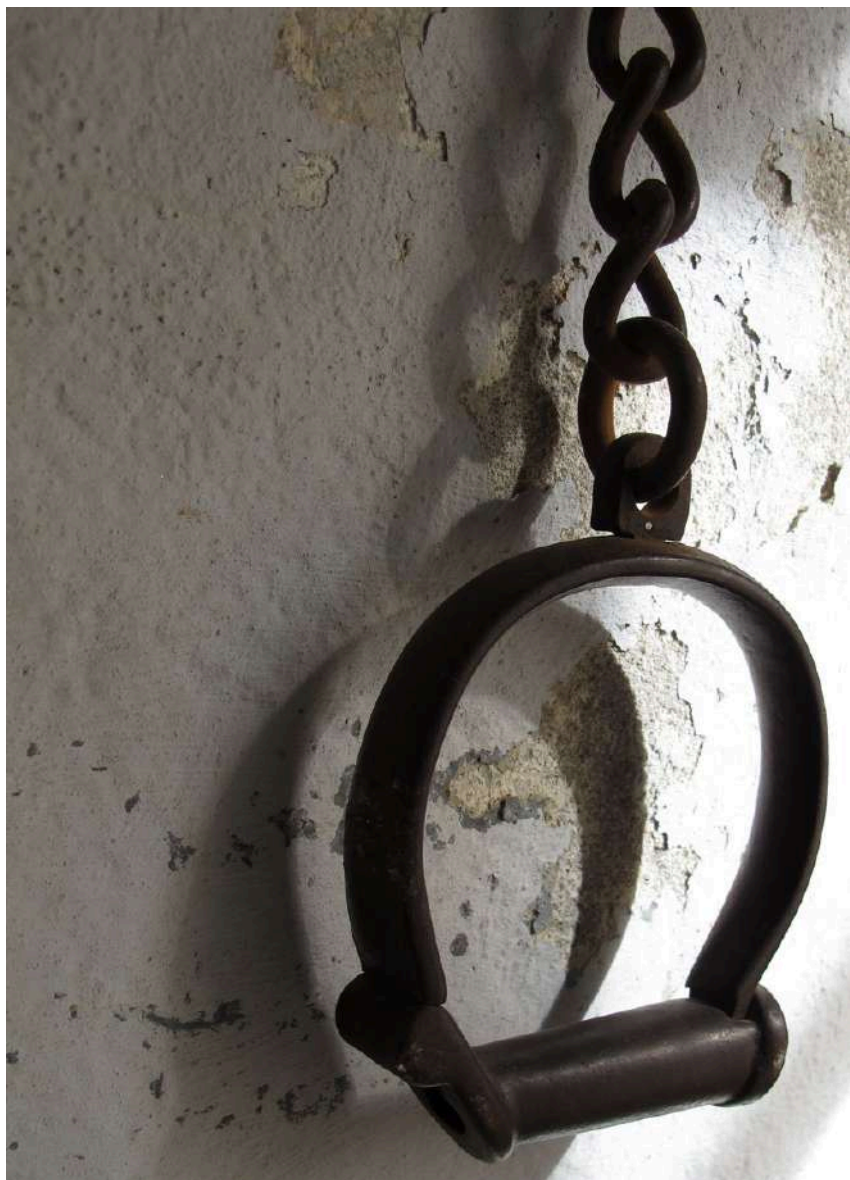
gave rise to the post-modern culture that toppled the biblical culture of Christendom. The rise and triumph of the LGBTQ+ “values” clearly illustrate this revolution, where their lifestyle celebrates the freedom and rights of the individual over faithfulness to God. Its supporters believe that the self determines truth, not the Ecclesia’s foundations of the Bible, congregational life, or the family.

How has the Church (Ecclesia) reacted? Many in the Western church, both liberal and conservative, have been working hard to continue the form of Christian faith and institutions that reigned through the long centuries of the alliance of the Ecclesia (Church) and State. Conservative groups like Focus on the Family and Turning Point USA are laboring to shore up or re-establish Christian and Messianic values in public spaces, the halls of schools, and within government. Liberals like the Episcopal Church and Presbyterian Church (USA) simply extend the boundaries of orthodoxy to include these new lifestyles, family structures, and gender identities while maintaining their denominational structures that anyone under 50, by and large ignore.

How do I believe the Ecclesia (Church) should respond? First, consider. What if the breakup of Christendom, the decoupling of public institutions and morality from biblical values, has been the work of God? What if God is working to free the Ecclesia from the shackles it accepted under Rome, shackles that, while christening the

culture, also paganized the church? What if the seismic shifts in the culture and the Ecclesia that are resulting in the paganization of popular culture and the marginalization of the Church (Ecclesia) are actually good news?

Let’s face it: does the modern church, whether the one meeting in the traditional stone structures on Main Street or the black-box movie theaters at the mall, resemble what Yeshua originally set up with his apostles? Regarding the Ecclesia’s leadership priorities, did Yeshua base the growth of his church on the three Bs? Buildings, bucks, and butts?





The good news dressed up in distressing attire is that this end of Christendom presents Messiah's Ecclesia with a profound opportunity. With the split of church and culture, with the demise of the Christendom church, the Messiah's body has the opportunity to rebuild itself in the model begun in the Gospels and developed in the Epistles.

What if the local congregation, the body of Messiah, is led not just by congregational leaders, but by the full complement of leaders Messiah gave to the Ecclesia: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers?

What if, instead of depending upon the three Bs, human strength and abilities, the post-Christendom church rediscovers the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit? The Ruach HaKodesh. Imagine a pastoral search committee asking a potential candidate not about his preaching or his programs, but about stories of miracles, healings, and demonic deliverances? Imagine a congregation leaving the old building and going out into the neighborhood to share not sandwiches but the bread of life? This is not a time for despair. This is a time to return to Scripture and rediscover the church that Yeshua began. The Ecclesia was founded upon the rock that the Gates of Hades will not overcome it.



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