

Chapter 23

Modern American Christianity—Part 1

I would only recommend that you read this chapter and the next if you are a Christian or are curious about Christianity. I only include these chapters in *The Offer* because I want to improve my faith-based community, Christianity. Christianity's relevance in modern American culture is in severe decline. Consequently, Christianity in the United States needs reformation. Following the suggestions included in these two chapters could help make the church more relevant as it reflects to a greater degree the unconditional love of Jesus. It is only through that love that Jesus and the Gospel will be relevant to anybody in the 21st Century.

First, there exists an ugly strain of American Christianity that proposes that Jesus will make you wealthy if you ask him. The prosperity gospel can lead people to believe that if you are not rich and a Christian, there is something wrong with your life. Somehow you are sinful if you are poor.

I suppose you could say sin is unprocessed trauma, and maybe this association between unrighteousness and poverty would be correct in a way.

It would be heartless in the extreme, however, to think this because people suffering from trauma almost always are victims. Further, the problem is that the prosperity gospel usually is interpreted as a belief that the rich are blessed, but the poor are cursed sinners. This ignores some underlying egalitarian principles of my faith that assert that there was only ever one perfect man, and we all are equally imperfect in the sense that God looks on us all the same. Maybe you are richer than me (your bank account is bigger) but we will all face a shared trauma. Our mortality is the equalizing fact of humanity.

I want to be very clear that I am not promoting the real Gospel in *The Offer* as a means to acquire wealth, defined strictly as dollars in your bank account. What I am saying here is that the Gospel (that incorporates both Christianity and Judaism) agrees with *The Bible Study*. *The Bible Study* is directly from the Bible, from the Book of Ecclesiastes. I know there are fine details where we may disagree, but please let me know if you can find fault in *The Bible Study* that prevents your acceptance or understanding of *The Offer*. I believe that we can all use *The Offer* as a model for creating real heart-centered wealth. This is regardless of

your specific belief system. This is the case because true wealth equals enjoyment, and that is something with which all of humanity can identify. Also, it is hard to argue that wealth can be enjoyed apart from community.

American Christianity seems to lack sensitivity about how the world perceives the church as a representative and enforcer of the patriarchy. People perceive Christianity and the church as a force that only strengthens systemic abuses of power and shaming power structures that are used to subjugate people of color, women, children, and people from the LGBT community. The example of the Catholic church cannot be ignored, particularly by people traumatized by their crimes. The rape of children is one of the most horrific crimes only exceeded by murder. I hate to say it, but the church has enabled child rape. That is an ugly thing to say about my religion.

It is somewhat ironic that the church exercises so much discrimination against marginalized groups because I believe that the increased egalitarianism that we see in our culture generally (despite the continuing systemic racism, sexism, and hate) is a direct result of the permeation of the Gospel through our world during the last two millennia. I say this despite all the evils that

have been done in the name of Jesus by his followers.
This is an idea I should fully flesh out in another book.

My point is to admonish my fellow Christians that we live in a postmodern American society where we should be extraordinarily sensitive to how we are perceived as Christians. To be true evangelists, we should follow some of Jesus' instructions about binding up wounds, healing the sick, and providing for the poor before we tell people that they are going to hell because they are gay.

Jesus gave his gift of love to the world unconditionally and the church will only connect with the world if it reflects that same unconditional love. Who are we to put ourselves in a place of authority over Jesus? How can we as mere humans ever seek to qualify his divine love? While I am very skeptical of how my religion is practiced, I continue to engage in my faith. Jesus embodies an essential message of love and forgiveness that transcends the evils done by the church. Despite the evils done in Jesus name, I still believe in him and want to engage in the practice of my religion.

I encourage you to engage in your religion and engage in your faith. Engaging in your faith is an important component of wellness and health. Your faith

tradition probably includes a branch that emphasizes meditation. Almost all faiths have engaged with meditation. It is a thing with all religions, at least in one of their various iterations, denominations, or sects, including Christianity. Ironically, this is untrue with modern Christianity in the United States. While the church in the United States certainly advocates prayer (petitioning the deity) and worship, they look askance at meditation and yoga as Eastern Occultic practices and evidence that you are invoking foreign gods.

There are reasons to protect Christian brothers from harm. I may have the liberty (freedom) to do certain things, like eat meat sacrificed to idols (as referred to in 1 Corinthians 8) that other weaker brothers' consciences do not allow. So, to love them and shield them like children, I should make sure that they always fully understand the intentions behind my actions. That is why I give such explicit instructions about yoga and meditation because this book is a book that is written to Christians. It also is written to everyone because the principles described here can help everyone regardless of their beliefs.

The best response to Christian skeptics of yoga and meditation is to ask them what they think

Christianity is? Is it not in fact an Eastern occultic religion itself, and if it is not, please tell me what you think it is? If it disturbs you to think of Christianity as occultic, while the essential faith is available to anyone who believes, are not certain practices (like baptism and communion) available only to the initiates?

Remember what I said that many people willfully persist in ignorance. This is cognitive bias. At some point along the way, a person sets up a persistent unconscious thought process as a protection against a threat to their identity. At 17, I told myself that I could never be a creative writer, and that was self-trauma to my identity. Sometimes people act out of their trauma. Their safety is threatened so they adopt a cognitive bias against practices that may be beneficial to them but threaten their identity. Consequently, they set up a little lie about how yoga and meditation are not Christ-like and will cause weaker brothers to stumble. This is a lie based on cognitive bias and willful ignorance.

Because I grew up in conservative sects of Christianity, I never considered yoga and meditation until my forties. I heard the admonitions against these occultic practices and dismissed them out of hand. Nevertheless, I was so desperate to not go back to the

place where I was in 2012, I told God that I was going to try yoga and meditation in an attempt to draw closer to him. I also said this to him: AS ABOVE, SO BELOW.

I prayed to God that *maybe* the blue-haired ladies at church were wrong when they told me that meditation and yoga would lead to drawing pentagrams on the floor and summoning demons. I told God that if demon-summoning or anything like it ever happened in any instruction I received in yoga or meditation, I would flee. After five years of yoga and three of meditation, these things have never happened. Yoga and meditation have only drawn me closer to my source. My Christian God has blessed me by meeting me in yoga and meditation. While these practices will not help me get to heaven, these practices are specific and focused ways, like prayer, for me to let Jesus shine through me because he lives inside my heart.