

CHARLIE'S ANGELS

I have been fascinated with the person and ministry of Charlie Kirk who was assassinated about a month or so ago. I had never heard of him before his death and have wanted to find out more about him now. First of all, his murder is to be condemned. It is a spread of the violence that has pervaded our country and its institutions. Violence has always been part of America but it is now a common part of how people think, how they speak and react to one another, and eventually in actions of violence. This murder and all forms of violence cannot be condoned.

Secondly, I admire Kirk for a number of reasons. He was obviously a very capable young man. He organized a network of Turning Point USA cells that got people involved throughout the country. And he spoke to and attracted young adults, particularly young males. This was indeed quite an accomplishment. The reasons for this attraction need our attention and analysis. And he was a devoted husband and father.

Recently the New York Times engaged four debate coaches and university professors to analyze Kirk's style and message. Two full pages gave samples of their reactions. The headline to it all was "Kirk's Debate Style: Provoke, Engage, Twist Facts, Repeat". Kirk was skillful at all of these. He was clever enough to appear tolerant and open to other opinions but became a master in evolving his own message. Now I do not want to question his politics, his economic and political views. I am interested and perturbed by what passes as "Christian". He is in tune with many evangelical Christians that spread a literal, narrow and selective use of scripture. First of all, they call it a conservative Christian view. I ask how could they be conservative if they have no regard for truth or facts? How are they conservative if they do not respect others but constantly ridicule anyone who disagrees with them? I would like to hear more real conservatives who could bring our awareness back to basic values.

The hopes to establish (or supposedly re-establish) a Christian nationalism are ill-advised. We Catholics made big mistakes in pushing "Christendom" and practices such as the inquisition in the Middle Ages. It took us all the way to the Second Vatican Council in 1965 to accept the worth of other religious traditions and to both live with and cooperate with them. Christ's example was not to use power but love.

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White supremacy has been part of our republic going back to our English forebears. Now there is some fear in followers of Kirk that white men in particular are being downtrodden. Racism is still alive and Kirk has made some very racist remarks about Black people. Jews may be respected in Israel but not in our own country where anti-Semitism grows again. Women are told to get back in their place as servants. Fear of those who are other is a constant strain in this way of life. Immigrants have built our nation. My own four grandparents were all immigrants. Borders should be protected and legislators should finally produce good legislation to protect them. But that is not what has been happening. Anti-immigrant tactics aim at terrorizing people, including children. Is this Christian? Every human person needs to be respected.

What is amiss? Politics has itself become a new religion substituting for real faith and trust in God which has become suspect in America. We have always had a common civil religion in the USA which accepted some common values but now some would choose a political religion. Democracy and respect for a rule of law have become weakened. Corporations can freely conduct a soulless economy that provides that which we really value.

I have been wandering around Evangelical Christianity. Let me return specifically to Charlie Kirk. He avowed such stances that include opposition to abortion, gun control, DEI programs and LGBTQ rights. He has criticized the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Martin Luther King. He has embraced conspiracy theories, promoted false claims about George Floyd, promoted false election frauds, argued for abolition of Bureau of Indian Affairs, argued for stopping all immigration, promoted climate change denial. And so on it goes.

Kirk went at times to Sunday Mass at a Catholic Church. He was attracted to Catholicism, but did not like some of its teachings. The latter may well have included the Social Justice teaching of the Church! What was his own prayer life like? Did he aim at becoming another Christ? How serious did he take Christ's teachings? What about the judgment of the deceased in the gospel of Matthew (chapter 25)? There God tells all of us to feed the hungry and thirsty, welcome strangers, cloth the naked, care for the sick, visit prisoners. The Lord answers their questioning by saying that whenever we do any of these actions to the least of people, we do to him. How different from this teaching is the quote from some MAGA figure that looking after the poor is pure Woke.

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Christ taught by word and action for three years and was rejected. His focus was to help us be authentic humans, “made in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis). He preached the idealism of the “kingdom of God” which was not just the next life but here and now (“Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”). His preaching was about love, compassion, forgiveness, care of the lowly and rejected, seeking out sinners and downtrodden, holding up children, widows and orphans, avoiding greed. Love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself.

Charlie is now embraced by Jesus and all the angels. The saints who embrace him are Black, White, Red, Yellow, Gay, Trans, human in any and all forms. Let us pray for him and with him. Let us pray for his children and his wife, Erica, who followed Jesus in forgiving Charlie’s murderer. Let us pray for our country, so divided and polarized. If you want to drop me a line I welcome it, but please be respectful and civil. I am your brother and can be found at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.