

## **REBECCA MCLAUGHLIN'S THE SECULAR CREED**

McLaughlin, Rebecca. *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims*. Kindle ed. Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2021.

Rebecca McLaughlin's *The Secular Creed* (2021) is required reading for this year's Colson Fellows Program. It is a quick read at about 100 pages. McLaughlin's insights are helpful, especially on the topic of women's rights and feminism. Her arguments are well-reasoned and backed up by evidence. My biggest takeaway is that the coming of Jesus and the advance of Christianity totally changed the game for women. This needs to be acknowledged by feminists. Here's ten life lessons from McLaughlin's book.

### **1. Christianity lies, unacknowledged, at the foundation of Western wokeness.**

- a. "To our 21st-century, Western ears, love across racial and cultural difference, the equality of men and women, and the idea that the poor, oppressed, and marginalized can make moral claims on the strong, rich, and powerful sound like basic moral common sense. But they are not. These truths have come to us from Christianity. Rip that foundation out, and you won't uncover a better basis for human equality and rights. You'll uncover an abyss that cannot even tell you what a human being is. Like cartoon characters running off a cliff, we may continue a short way before we realize that the ground has gone from underneath our feet. But it has gone." [2]<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Christianity is, in theory and practice, the most diverse belief system today.**

- a. "Christianity is not only multiethnic. It's also multicultural, and we should expect Christians to speak different languages, sing different songs, eat different foods, wear different clothes, and bring different insights to God's universal, timeless Word. At the same time, we must pursue love and fellowship across racial and cultural difference relentlessly—not because progressives tell us to, but because Jesus calls us to be one body with people of different races and cultures and languages. Worshiping Jesus together is our destiny. But it is also becoming our reality. Today, Christianity is the largest and the most diverse belief system in the world, with roughly equal numbers of Christians in Europe, North America, South America, and Africa, and with a rapidly growing church in China that is expected to outgrow the church in America by 2030, and could include half of China's population by 2060. By that point, 40 percent of the world's Christians could be living in sub-Saharan Africa." [16]<sup>2</sup>

### **3. The Black secular protest against white Christian racism is understandable.**

- a. "Listening will be as uncomfortable for the white Christian conservative as for the secular progressive. A Bible-believing Christian himself, [Esau] McCaulley explains, 'It is difficult for the African American believer to look deeply into the history of Christianity and not be profoundly shaken. Inasmuch as it arises in response to the church's historic mistreatment of African Americans, the Black secular protest against religion is one of the most understandable developments in the history of the West. If

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 16.

they are wrong (and they are) it is a wrongness born out of considerable pain.’ As a white evangelical, I could easily gloss over this pain. The chronic sin of white Christian racism dishonors the name of Christ. The slow-burn holocaust of black lives across the centuries is hard to face. To pause here is uncomfortable. But Jesus doesn’t call us to be comfortable. He calls us to repentance and faith.” [18]<sup>3</sup>

- b. “To show where progressives are wrong, we must also freely acknowledge where they are right.” [106]<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. There is no grounding for objective human rights in atheism.**

- a. “[I]f there is no God who created us in his image, then human equality is a myth. . . .An atheist can believe in human rights if she likes. She can campaign for racial justice, volunteer at a soup kitchen, support NGOs that combat famine, and give to charities opposing sex trafficking. But she has no rational grounds for saying that everyone should believe in human rights, or that racism is unquestionably wrong. In a world without God, I may hate race-based slavery in the same sense that I hate olives. But at the end of the day, it comes down to personal preference.” [20-21]<sup>5</sup>
- b. “Historian Tom Holland explains that our basic moral beliefs about human equality came to us from Christianity, but that they have been deliberately rebranded as secular. In the late 1940s, with the world reeling from the horrors of the Second World War, Eleanor Roosevelt gathered representatives from various nations to establish a universal declaration of rights that would work in different cultures, including those in which Christianity was not dominant. So, Christian thinking had to be repackaged in non-religious terms. ‘A doctrine such as that of human rights,’ Holland observes, ‘was far likelier to be signed up for’ if its Christian origins could be concealed. This rebranding has worked so well that even atheists now hold some Christian beliefs to be self-evident truths.” [21]<sup>6</sup>

#### **5. Black lives matter because Jesus says they matter.**

- a. “Ultimately, black lives matter not because progressive people have told us so, but because the equal value of every human, regardless of race, walks off the pages of Scripture with the sound of a trumpet. Black lives matter enough for the Son of God to shed his blood, so that black men and women might have eternal life with him. Black lives matter because Jesus says so.”
- b. “Given the history of white evangelical failure to recognize black people as their equals before God, I gladly affirm that black lives matter, despite the fact an organization with that name expresses other beliefs I cannot embrace.” [22]<sup>7</sup>

#### **6. Same-sex love is vital in the church.**

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<sup>3</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 106.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 22.

- a. “Like sibling love and friend love, the love between same-sex believers is precious, deep, and intimate. But it’s not sexual, and it’s not exclusive.” [38]<sup>8</sup>

## 7. Jesus was the greatest thing that ever happened for the dignity of women.

- a. “In Greco-Roman thinking, men were superior to women and sex was a way to prove it. ‘As captured cities were to the swords of the legions,’ [Tom] Holland explains, ‘so the bodies of those used sexually were to the Roman man. To be penetrated, male or female, was to be branded as inferior.’ In Rome, ‘men no more hesitated to use slaves and prostitutes to relieve themselves of their sexual needs than they did to use the side of a road as a toilet.’ The idea that every woman had the right to choose what happened to her body would’ve been laughable. Christianity threw out this model. Rather than being seen as inferior to men, women were equally made in God’s image. Rather than being free to use slaves and prostitutes (of either sex), men were expected to be faithful to one wife, or to live in celibate singleness. Ironically, the scenario described in *The Handmaid’s Tale*—a man sleeping with an enslaved woman—is one of the exact things Christianity outlawed. ...No wonder Christianity was so attractive to women. Jesus had changed everything.” [66-67]<sup>9</sup>
- b. “[T]here were roughly twice as many women in the early church as men, many of them slaves. ...That the early church was as much as two-thirds female is especially surprising given that the Greco-Roman empire was disproportionately male.” [69]<sup>10</sup>

## 8. Christian marriage results in female happiness.

- a. “The sexual revolution of the 1960s was sold to us as the liberation of women. For centuries, men had been finding ways to sneak around marriage and have commitment-free sex. Thanks to the pill, now women could as well. But in the last 60 years, despite gains in freedom and opportunities, women’s self-reported happiness in America has declined. Why? Part of the reason is that commitment-free sex is a poisoned chalice. Stable marriage correlates with mental and physical health benefits for both men and women. But being married seems to be a particularly significant factor in happiness for women. ...Christian marriage has long been seen by secular liberals as a repressive institution designed to hold women down. ...Ironically, the demographic most pitied by secular progressives—women in religious marriages—are happier than those who pity them.” [72-74]<sup>11</sup>

## 9. Historically, the abandoning of baby girls stops with Christianity.

- a. “[T]he practice of leaving newborn girls to die led to a gender imbalance in the Greco-Roman empire. We gain a sobering insight into this from a letter by a Roman soldier to his wife in 1 BC. The otherwise affectionate letter includes this instruction: ‘Above all, if you bear a child and it is male, let it be; if it is female, cast it out.’ Babies with disabilities were also discarded. In fact, the Greek philosopher Aristotle

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<sup>8</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 66-67.

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 72-74.

had pitched for eugenics legislation: ‘Let there be a law that no deformed child shall live.’ The idea of abandoning baby girls is alien to us. But even today, we see this practice continuing in the two largest countries that haven’t yet been significantly shaped by Christianity. The Chinese church is growing so fast that it could reshape Chinese culture in the next generation. But selective abortion and infanticide in past generations have led to a gender gap of 35 million. Likewise in India, where Hinduism is the dominant religion, the gender gap from selective abortion and infanticide is 25 million. So what has changed our ideas about the abandonment of newborns in general and of newborn girls in particular? Jesus.” [75-76]<sup>12</sup>

**10. The sex slavery of *The Handmaid’s Tale* is totally at odds with Christianity.**

- a. “One powerful claim of the pro-choice movement is that women should have the right to decide what they do with their bodies. In most situations, I strongly agree. As we saw earlier, one of the stark contrasts between Christianity and the Greco-Roman world was the idea that women’s bodies weren’t just objects to be used by men. The sex slavery of *The Handmaid’s Tale* is utterly at odds with Christianity. Christians absolutely believe that a woman should have the right to choose not to have sex.” [81]<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 75-76.

<sup>13</sup> Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 81.