



# The Madness of Reconciliation

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Lutheran Hour Ministries



NURTURING YOUR FAITH:

# *Forgiveness*



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# What to Expect

## **The Lens of Madness**

- a theme for examining the theological/philosophical difficulties related to understanding and practicing reconciliation

## **Four forms of Madness**

- **Modern Guilt**
- **Social Fracture and Emotivism**
- **Self-Forgiveness**
- **The Crooked, Upside-down, Illogical Logic of the Kingdom**



# Reconciliation – the basics

**Q: What is Reconciliation?**

A: Forgiveness

**Q: Why do we need forgiveness?**

A: Because we have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed.

**Q: What does forgiveness have to do with sin?**

A: Sin's wage (cost) is death.

Forgiveness undoes the debt (cost) of sin in the death of Jesus.  
It secures eternal life for those who trust in Jesus.



# **Reconciliation – more complicated**

**Q: What is Reconciliation?**

A: Release from Guilt

**Q: What is the source of guilt?**

A: The violation of standards established by an external authority.

**Q: What are the standards and who is the authority?**

A: Biblically speaking, the authority is God.

The standard is holiness, expressed in the 10 Commandments.



# The First Madness



# The First Madness

## The Eclipse of God and the Rise of Modern Guilt

### A shift in Authority

1. God is forgotten or intentionally ignored
2. The self takes God's place (autonomy = *auto* + *nomos*)

### Moral standards

1. No longer external
  - a. they are harmful (cf. Freud, Jung, Rogers)
  - b. interdictions become permissions (cf. Rieff)
    - i. Don't deny yourself; do what makes you happy
2. Rather, they are internal, an expression of one's authentic self



## THE “Person”

Megan, 19, wants to stand out and be “the person,” but she perceives herself to be falling short. The problem began in high school. She attended an elite academy, where she began “to feel like I was mediocre or below average.” Earlier, at a regular school, she “was the smartest person in the class” and had been on the gifted and talented track since the fifth grade. This heady recognition made her feel special. But then came the academy, where she was surrounded by very bright, high-achieving kids. She began to “feel marginalized” and yearned to “feel special again.” These feelings carried over into college.



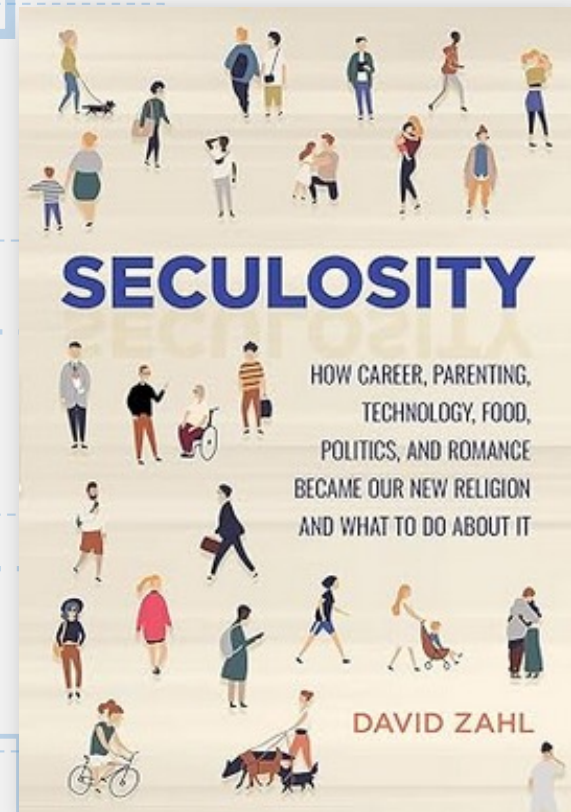


## THE “Person”

Although she is now a scholarship student at a first-rate university, Megan is frustrated and despairing of herself. She explains that she is attending her “safety school” and wants to “show that I should be somewhere better by acing all my classes and being president of 40 organizations.” But, she adds, “that is really not happening. I am, if anything, a mediocre student ... and that just makes me so angry at the world and then me for not being the person.” Although she wants “to impress someone,” she says, “I end up being impressively unimpressive,” and that “crushes me.”

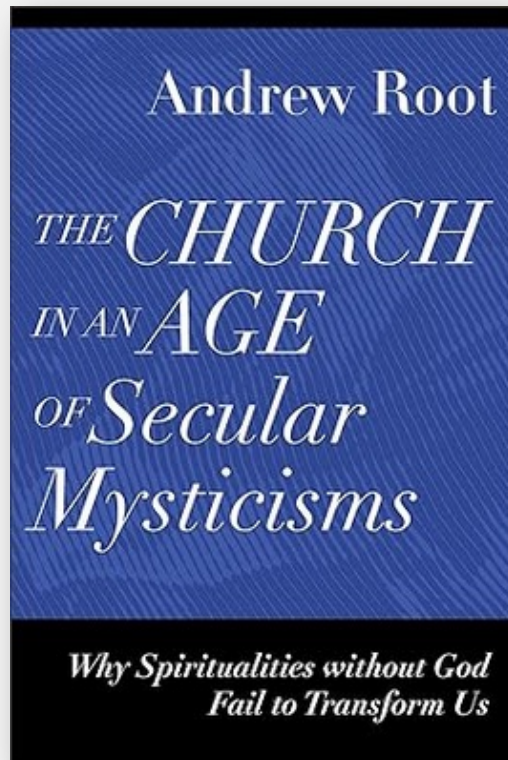
# The Achievement Society

“You hear about people scrambling to be successful enough, happy enough, thin enough, wealthy enough, influential enough, desired enough, charitable enough, woke enough, *good* enough. We believe instinctively that, were we to reach some benchmark in our minds, the value, vindication and love would be ours—that if we got enough, we would *be* enough.”





# Modern Guilt



“[T]he source of this [modern] guilt is not God or the *Dei Verbum* (Word of God). *It is the performing self.* We feel guilty to our selves. We feel like we’ve failed to use our time well, to become the magnificent self we should be. We’ve let ourselves down. We are guilty of not curating our self magnificently enough to win us constant happiness. We blew it! Our inner genius and heroic actions are not recognized as they could or should be. All because we didn’t perform them well enough.”



# The Second Madness



## Social Fracture

93%

I hate how divided we've become,  
but they don't know what to do about it

Arthur Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 2019



# The Second Madness

## Social Fracture

The 93% - we're divided; this frustrates and exhausts us

**Emotivism** – the expression of morals *as* preferences

e.g., “murder is bad/wrong” = “murder, yuck!” or “I don’t like murder”  
“abortion is a human right” = “abortion, yay!” or “I like abortion”

Feelings are sacrosanct and unassailable – “you can’t tell me how to feel”

How to adjudicate between competing “goods” -> social fracture



*“Your mother and I are separating because  
I want what’s best for the country and your mother doesn’t.”*

<https://www.newyorker.com/cartoon/a15905>



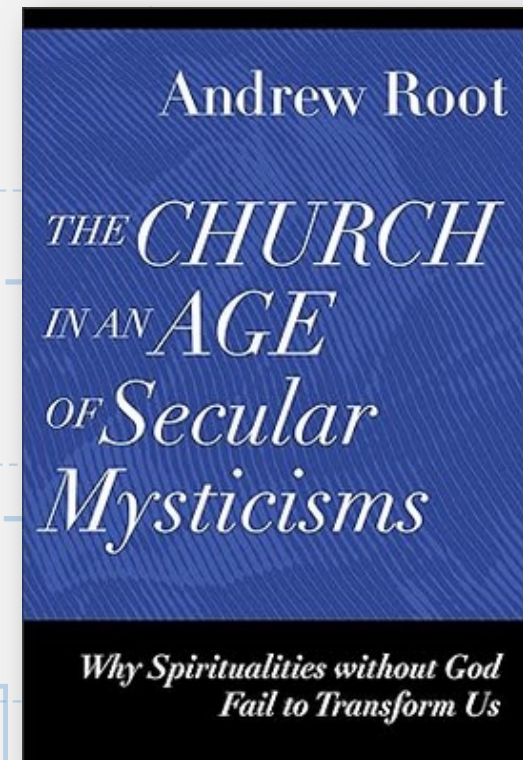
# The Third Madness



# The Third Madness

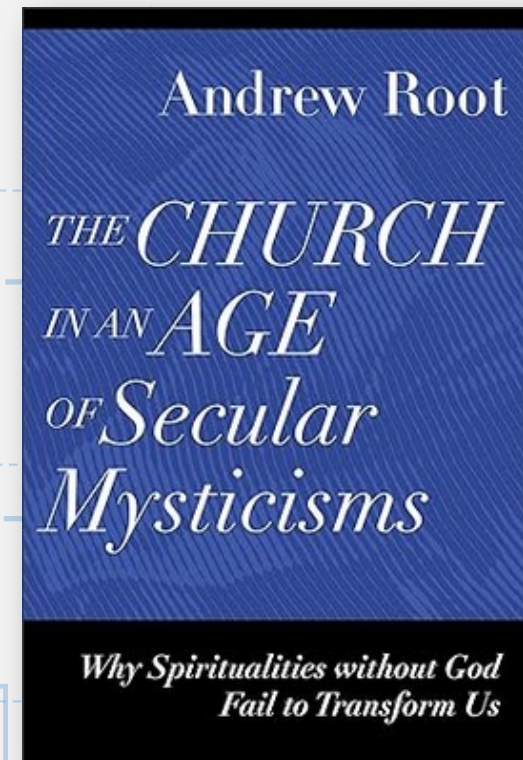
## The Illogic of Self-Forgiveness

“[W]e need life coaches, blog gurus, thought leaders, social media pastors, and pop psychologists to tell us to love and forgive the self because it just so happens that the self is a tyrannical judge...”



## The Third Madness

“It is so difficult to forgive yourself because forgiving yourself is an empty restoration that keeps you locked within yourself. After all, the self is what put you under this heavy guilt. Forgiving yourself is to assume the tyrant of punishment can also be the balm of peace and forgiveness.”

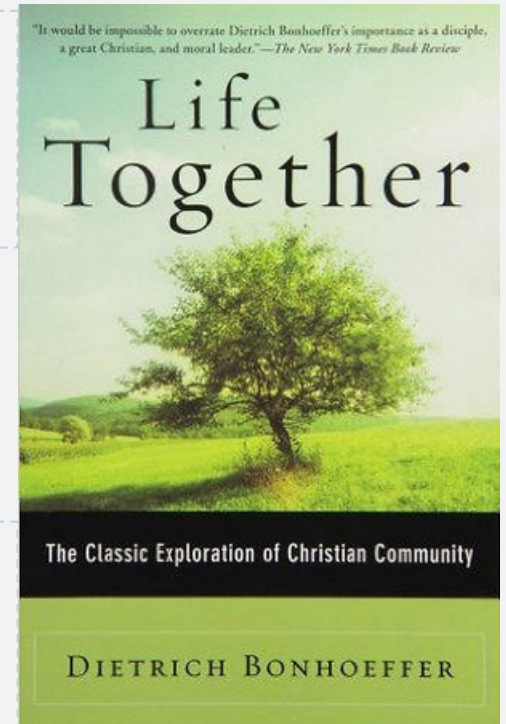




# The Illogic of Self-Forgiveness



“[S]elf forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin.”



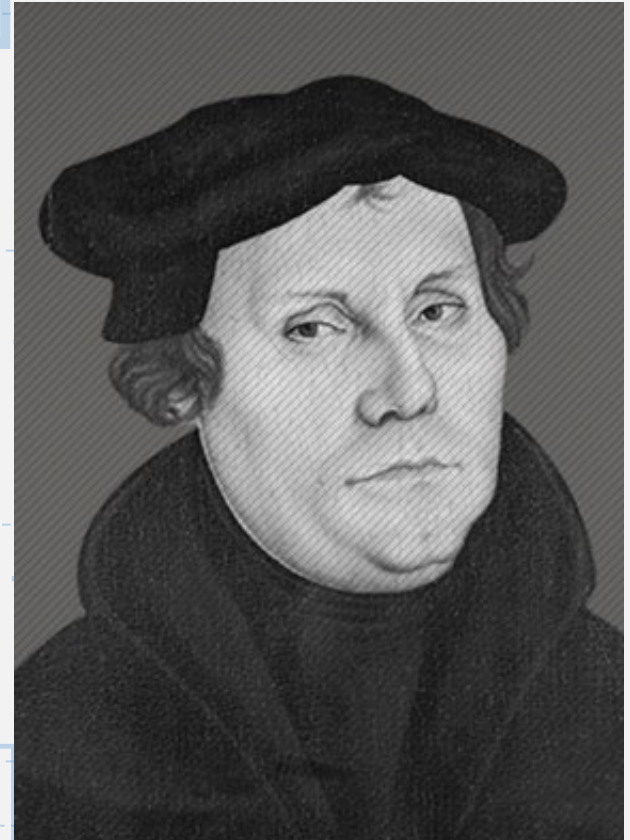


# The Fourth Madness

## The Fourth Madness

“Thus by divine ordinance Christ himself has placed absolution in the mouths of his Christian community and commanded us to absolve one another from sins. So if there is a heart that feels its sin and desires comfort, it has here a sure refuge where it finds and hears God’s Word because through a human being God looses and absolves of sin.”

*Large Catechism,  
Exhortation to Confession*





## The Crooked, Upside-down, Illogical Logic of the Kingdom

**[the Kingdom] “has reasons that reason knows  
nothing of.” (Paschal)**

So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

*Matthew 20.16*

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but  
whoever loses their life for me will find it.

*Matthew 16.25 (see also Matt. 10.39)*



## The Crooked, Upside-down, Illogical Logic of the Kingdom

### *Power in Powerlessness*

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

*Isaiah 53.9*



## The Crooked, Upside-down, Illogical Logic of the Kingdom

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*Matthew 5.11*



## The Crooked, Upside-down, Illogical Logic of the Kingdom

God made him who had no sin to  
be sin for us, so that in him we  
might become the righteousness  
of God.

*2 Corinthians 5.21*



## God's Pure Gift

God's forgiveness requires nothing in return. There is no exchange. Only grace.

The gift of forgiveness, the release from guilt, has no strings attached. God freely gives for us to receive.



# The Madness of the Gift

It is unaccountable, uneconomic.

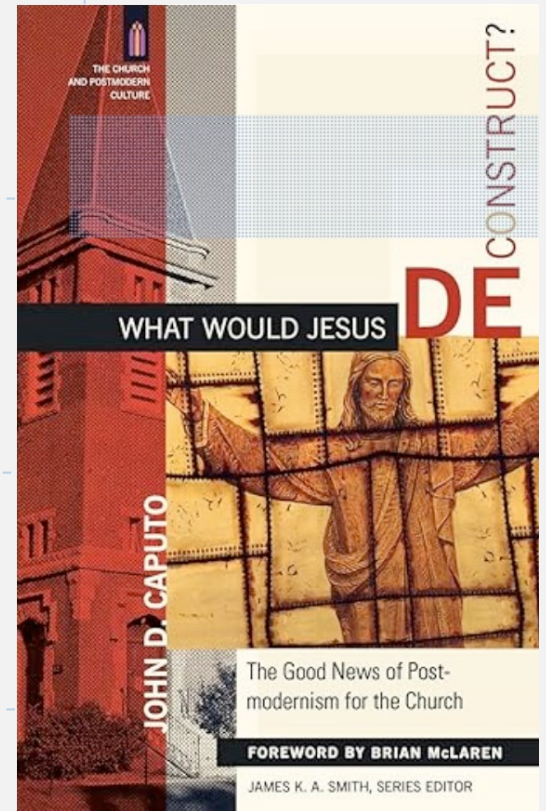
There is no cost counting, no expectation of a return. It defies logic—who would do such a thing? And yet it is done. The pure gift is also pure madness.





# God is Not in the Banking Business

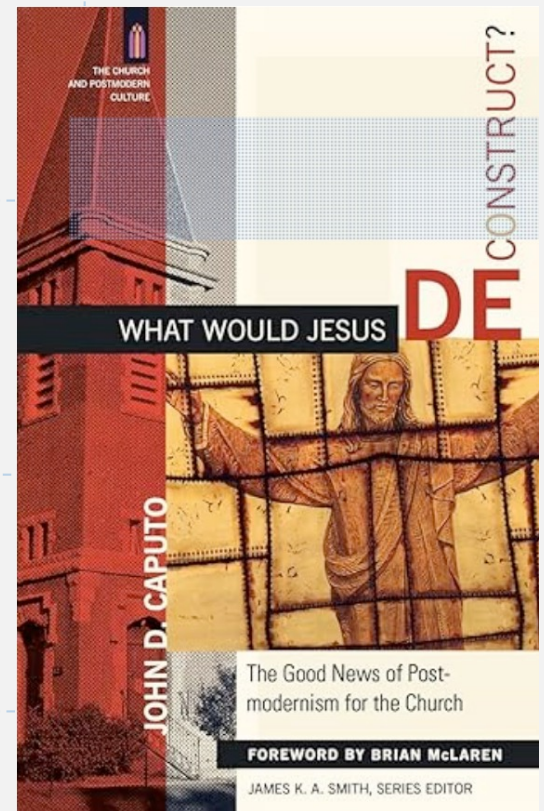
“The theological traditions, both Jewish and Christian, have tended to behave like bankers when it comes to forgiveness. That is, they spell out the conditions under which forgiveness is possible, typically four in number...





# God is Not in the Banking Business

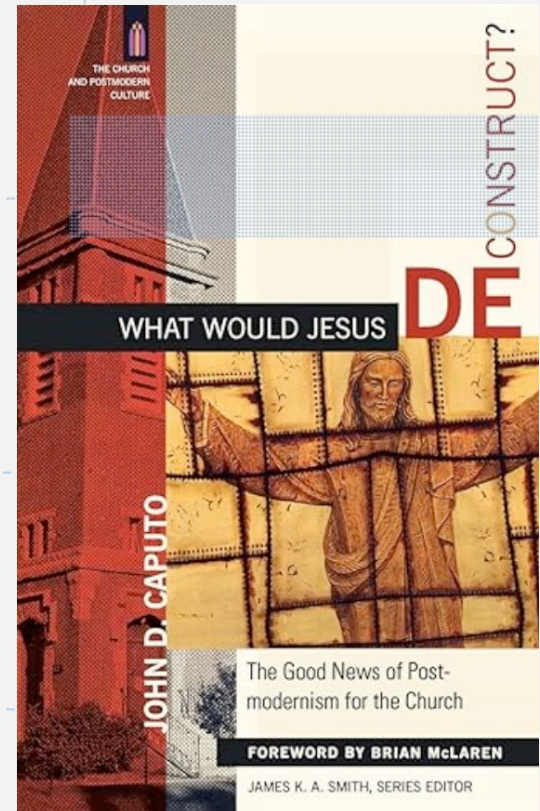
“Forgiveness requires an expression of sorrow; the intention to make amends, a promise not to repeat the offense, and a willingness to do penance. If someone meets all four conditions then they have *earned* forgiveness. We owe it to them the way a bank owes us the deed once the mortgage is paid off...





# God is Not in the Banking Business

“A deal is a deal. But a deal is not a gift, and a gift is not a deal. Then what would it mean to forgive someone? It would have to mean something uneconomic—like a gift—something unconditional, something unaccountable, something mad.”



## The Ministry of Reconciliation

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

*2 Corinthians 5.16-20*



# The Ministry of Reconciliation

God is getting his family back. He lost them in the Fall. In the redemptive work of Jesus, carried out as the ministry of reconciliation (“we are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” – 2 Cor, 5.20),  
- God’s family is restored.





# The Ministry of Reconciliation

In Christ, we are clothed with immortality (we're new creatures) and we can do things immortals do—set aside the consequences of temporal relationships and approach our relationships with others according to the long view of eternity. (“from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” 2 Cor, 5.16)



# God's Memorial to Forgetting

For as high as the heavens are  
above the earth,  
so great is his love for those  
who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our  
transgressions from us.

*Psalm 103.11-12*





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